



Subject:	Sustain Exchange Climate Leadership Event - Funding Agreement
Date:	24 April 2026
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform Committee of a proposal by the non-profit Management and Leadership Network (MLN) to host a prominent climate leadership event ‘Sustain Exchange’ with up to 300 decision-makers attending. • Request approval for a funding agreement to be put in place between Belfast City Council and the event organiser to the value of £10,140. The event will put the challenges, opportunities and absolute need for positive action associated with climate change on the agenda for local organisations and leaders.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to consider support for this climate leadership conference by approving a funding agreement to the value of £10,140 be entered into with the event organiser.
3.0	Main Report
	Background
3.1	It is now beyond doubt that organisations of all shapes, sizes and sectors need to radically reduce their environmental impact both directly and indirectly through their supply chains. The extreme weather experienced across the globe over the past twelve months has further evidenced the reality that the effects of climate change are being felt and the need for decisive action from organisations, championed by their leaders, is now. We are fast approaching the point of no return.
3.2	It is a truly transformative time for organisations as they address climate risks and identify new opportunities in the green economy. The transition is not straightforward. Organisations need help in developing planet positive practices, securing cleaner power, heat and transport solutions. They need help in navigating new markets to find more environmentally sustainable solutions in their supply chain, and they need to do it fast. There has never been a more important time to find specialist help to navigate the transition, and to educate, inform and engage by sharing the existing knowledge and exemplar experience of those at the forefront of the transition.
	Purpose and format of event
3.3	The Sustain Exchange Summit will deliver on the objectives above and will connect local decision-makers with international thought leaders as well as those at the forefront of the transition locally.

3.4	<p>The event is expected to attract some 300 local leaders (primarily business leaders but also those from the public, NDPB and third sectors) to a Belfast city centre venue with strong public transport links to ensure the carbon footprint of the event is kept to a minimum. The Sustain Exchange Summit will ensure the messages around the need and importance of positive climate action are heard and that the Council's proactivity in this area will be strongly profiled before and during the event.</p>
3.5	<p>Content</p> <p>Previous speakers at this event have included the eminent writer, broadcaster and commentator Sir Jonathan Porritt CBE, Norman Crowley (global entrepreneur and founder of CoolPlanet), Sir Tim Smit KBE (Founder of The Eden Project and world-renowned thought leader in sustainability) and John Elkington (the global godfather of sustainability and creator of the triple bottom line concept). The 2026 Sustain Exchange Summit will again be delivered to a world-class standard and will feature globally-renowned speakers (Mary Robinson is the first in-person speaker to be confirmed). The speakers will encourage and empower attending organisations to consider their own climate impact and take the first (or next) steps in their quest to become 'planet positive'. Previous local speakers at this event have demonstrated how leaders from humble beginnings in Belfast have become game-changers in their respective fields. These include the likes of Dr Andrew Woods from Catagen (Sustain Exchange 2022), Eddie McGoldrick from The Electric Storage Company (Sustain Exchange 2021), Philip Rainey from Weev (Sustain Exchange 2023), Dr Katrina Thompson from Artemis Technologies (Sustain Exchange 2024) and Stephen Dunn from CarbonFit (Sustain Exchange 2025). The 2026 event will once again showcase how leaders from Belfast are leading the charge when it comes to the quest to avoid what is now a 'code red for humanity'. In doing this, MLN plans to galvanise existing businesses to act and to inspire the next cohort of planet positive pioneers to emerge from our city.</p> <p>The event will also provide the opportunity to make the broader leadership community in NI aware of the proactive work of Belfast City Council when it comes to the climate emergency.</p>
3.6	<p>Management and Leadership Network Experience</p> <p>The Management and Leadership Network (MLN) is a non-profit which exists to connect decision-makers in NI with the insights of thought-leaders and world-class performers. The rationale is that by enhancing our leadership competence, we will empower local organisations, strengthen our economy, enrich our society and ultimately improve lives.</p>
3.7	<p>MLN has worked with some of the most respected leaders on the planet and is vastly experienced in creating and delivering truly world-class events that engage, enrich and</p>

	<p>elevate attendees. As host, MLN will facilitate the event and invite all speakers to provide their slides in advance so that the idea-sharing session is delivered in a concise, visually impactful and professional manner. Belfast City Council would once again be invited to participate and profile its extensive climate work i.e. the Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast, Belfast Resilience Strategy, Belfast Climate Commission, One Million Trees Programme etc.</p>
3.8	<p>The Sustain Exchange Summit will take place on 23rd October 2026. The total cost of the project will be in excess of £75k. Belfast City Council has been a key partner in the Sustain Exchange Summit since its inception in 2021 and its support has been crucial in the growth of the initiative and its impact. In order to reduce the financial cost to Belfast City Council and increase collaboration, MLN will seek financial support from additional sources to include the private sector. MLN will give previous sponsors the opportunity to remain as partners. These have included Belfast-based organisations such as Danske Bank, AAB, CarbonFit, International Synergies (circular economy specialists), Belfast Harbour and Mills Selig Solicitors. As well as demonstrating real collaboration, these partnerships have allowed MLN to reduce Belfast City Council’s financial contribution from £10,000+vat in 2021 to £10,140 in 2026.</p>
	<p>Partner Contribution & Profile Benefits</p>
3.9	<p>Should Belfast City Council choose to support the Summit, it would be profiled as an ‘Event Partner’ alongside several other lead event partners (examples given in 3.5). The Council brand would be prominent on all event marketing collateral as well as ‘at-event’. A Council representative would be invited to participate in the event press launch and MLN would be delighted for the Lord Mayor of Belfast to speak at the event. Council would also promote the conference through its social media and other relevant communication channels.</p>
	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>
3.10	<p>Should Members approve sponsorship of the Sustain Exchange Climate Leadership event, £10,140 will be allocated from within the existing Climate Programme budget.</p>
	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.11	<p>There are no direct equality or good relations/rural needs implications.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None