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BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

SUMMONS TO ATTEND THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

TO: THE LORD MAYOR, ALDERMEN AND THE COUNCILLORS OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Notice is hereby given that the monthly meeting of the Council will be held in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Belfast on Monday, 4th November, 2024 at 6.00 pm, for the transaction of the following business:

1. Summons
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of the Council (Pages 1 - 8)
5. Official Announcements
6. Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (Pages 9 - 70)
 - a) Extract from minutes of: Strategic Policy and Resources Committee 20th September - Dual Language Signage at Olympia Leisure Centre (Pages 71 - 88)

To consider further the minute of the meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th September, under the heading "Dual Language Signage at Olympia Leisure Centre", which was previously called in and for which a legal opinion has now been received (minute and legal opinion attached).
7. Minutes of People and Communities Committee (Pages 89 - 96)
8. Minutes of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee (Pages 97 - 134)
9. Minutes of Licensing Committee (Pages 135 - 140)
10. Minutes of the Planning Committee (Pages 141 - 148)
11. Minutes of Standards and Business Committee (Pages 149 - 152)
12. Motions
 - a) Special Educational Needs - Legal Protection for Young People in NI (Pages 153 - 154)

The Members of Belfast City Council are hereby summoned to attend.

John Walsh
Chief Executive

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall
on Tuesday, 1st October, 2024 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Lord Mayor, Councillor Murray (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan);
The High Sheriff of Belfast, Councillor S. Douglas; and
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCoubrey,
McCullough and Rodgers; and
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black,
Bower, Bradley, Brennan, R. Brooks, T. Brooks,
Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Collins,
de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly,
R. M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey,
Kelly, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey,
McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCusker,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay,
McKeown, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin,
Murphy, Nelson, Nic Bhranair, O'Neill, Smyth,
Verner and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillor Walsh.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in agenda item 'Consultation on Policy Proposals underpinning a Public Health Bill for Northern Ireland' within the People and Communities minutes as he was employee of the Health Service and left the room whilst the item was being considered.

Councillor Nic Bhranair declared an interest in the aforementioned item and also in the agenda item 'Night-time Economy Notice of Motion Update' within the City Growth and Regeneration minutes as she was employed as a Special Advisor to a Minister in the Executive and she left the room whilst the items were under consideration.

**Meeting of Council,
Tuesday, 1st October, 2024**

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murray),
Seconded by Alderman McCullough,

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the Council of 2nd and the special meeting of the 18th September, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

Retirements

The Deputy Lord Mayor informed the Council that Mr. Hugh Dickson, City and Neighbourhood Services Department, would be leaving the Council shortly having completed 25 years' service, and wished him well in his retirement.

Councillor Collins paid tribute to Mr. Gareth Graham, Democratic Services Assistant, who would be retiring at the end of October having completed 46 years' service and wished him a long and healthy retirement.

Councillor Black recorded her thanks to Mr. S. Caldwell, West Area Manager, who had retired last week. She also thanked Mr. G. Fusco, a Youth Worker within the Falls community who had also retired. She stated that the knowledge and commitment of both men would be greatly missed in their respective communities.

Congratulations and Thanks

Councillor Black congratulated the relevant Council officers on the recent unveiling, as part of the Council's Belfast 2024 celebration of culture, of the new mural to celebrate the Oscar-winning short movie an Irish Goodbye.

Councillor McAteer commended the work of the Youth Workers in East Belfast following a period of unrest in the lower Newtownards Road area.

Councillor Bell congratulated the Community Together Belfast Residents Association on the success of its recent Diversity Carnival Event.

The High Sheriff of Belfast, Councillor S. Douglas, referred to the recent Euro Cities Culture Forum Conference and paid tribute to the Council officers for the organisation of this successful networking event which had promoted the city in a positive light.

Change of Position of Responsibility

The Chief Executive reported that notification had been received from the Alliance Party that it wished to replace The Lord Mayor, Councillor Murray, with Councillor T. Brooks as its representative on the South Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership (DPCSP).

The Council noted the change.

**Meeting of Council,
Tuesday, 1st October, 2024**

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th September, 2024, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee and subject to the omission of the minute under the heading “Dual Language Signage at Olympia Leisure Centre” which has been ‘called-in’, be approved and adopted.

Sunday Trading – Pilot Scheme

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Smyth,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

“That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th September, under the heading “Sunday Trading – Pilot Scheme”, be rejected in so far as it relates to a Sunday Trading Pilot Scheme and that the Council instead examine how it can emulate projects like Open Botanic in other parts of the city through the Car Free Sunday model and other similar projects.”

On a recorded vote, twenty-six Members voted for the amendment and thirty-one against and it was declared lost.

For (26)	Against (31)
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCormick); The High Sheriff (Councillor S. Douglas); Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; and Councillors R. Brooks, Bunting, Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, Doran, D. Douglas, Ferguson, Flynn, Groogan, Kelly, Lyons, McCusker, McDowell, McKeown, I. McLaughlin, Smyth, Verner and Whyte.	The Lord Mayor (Councillor Murray); and Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, Brennan, T. Brooks, Canavan, Carson, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Garrett, Hanvey, Long, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McDonough-Brown, McKay, R. McLaughlin, Murphy, Nelson, Nic Bhranair and O’Neill.

At the request of Councillor Nelson, it was agreed that the Council would write to the Minister seeking changes to the legislation in relation to Sunday Trading laws, as had been agreed at the Committee.

**Meeting of Council,
Tuesday, 1st October, 2024**

Good Jobs Bill Consultation Committee Report

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Lyons,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite and

Resolved – “That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th September, under the heading “Good Jobs Bill Consultation Committee Report”, be amended to reflect that consultation should be undertaken with USDAW on issues relating to Sunday trading, including but not limited to the Sunday Working (Scotland) Act 2003.”

Planning Update

At the request of Councillor R. McLaughlin, it was agreed that updates on major applications and applications that had been determined by the Planning Committee would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on a monthly basis rather than quarterly as had been agreed previously.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th September 2024 were thereupon approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor M. Donnelly,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 3rd and 10th September, be approved and adopted.

**Consultation on Policy Proposals underpinning
a Public Health Bill for Northern Ireland**

Amendment

Moved by Alderman McCullough,
Seconded by Councillor Brooks,

“That the decision of the People and Communities Committee of 10th September, under the heading “Consultation on Policy Proposals underpinning a Public Health Bill for Northern Ireland”, to endorse the consultation response and agree its submission to the Department of Health by the 14th October deadline, be rejected and that each Political Party would, if it so wished, submit its own response to the consultation.

**Meeting of Council,
Tuesday, 1st October, 2024**

On a vote, fifteen Members voted for the amendment and fifteen against, with twenty-four 'no votes'. There being an equality of votes, the Chairman exercised his second and casting vote against the proposal and it was subsequently declared lost.

Following debate regarding whether an individual Members vote had been recorded, the Lord Mayor agreed to permit the vote to be retaken. On a further vote, seventeen Members voted for the amendment and nineteen against, with twenty-one 'no votes' the amendment was declared lost.

**Council's 2024 Updating and Screening
Assessment for Ambient Air Quality**

Following a request from Councillor T. Brooks seeking for the decision making in regard to the Air Quality Management Areas to be moved to the remit of the Climate and City Resilience Committee, the Chief Executive advised that a report was currently being compiled in regard to the governance arrangements of the Council's Standing Committees and he undertook to discuss the suggestion initially at a Party Group Leaders meeting.

In response to a query from Councillor Collins regarding the volume of complaints regarding air pollution in the Collin area emanating from a composting site, the Chief Executive advised that the relevant Council officer would speak to Councillor Collins directly to discuss the matter further.

**Request for the use of Botanic Gardens
For a Christmas Ice Experience**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor McKay, and

Resolved – "That the decision of the People and Communities Committee of 10th September, under the heading "Request for the use of Botanic Gardens for a Christmas Ice Experience" be taken back to the Committee for further consideration."

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 3rd and 10th September were thereupon approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Nelson,
Seconded by Councillor Maskey,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 11th September, be approved and adopted.

**Meeting of Council,
Tuesday, 1st October, 2024**

Belfast City and Region Place Partnership Update

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

“That the decision of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 11th September, under the heading “Belfast City and Region Place Partnership Update”, to approve the attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2025 be rejected.”

On a vote, eight Members voted for the amendment and twenty-seven against, with twenty-one ‘no votes’, the amendment was declared lost.

City Centre Animation

Amendment

Moved by Councillor R. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

“That the decision of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 11th September, under the heading “City Centre Animation”, be amended to provide that the allocation of the £60,000 of available funding be used to establish a fund to which organisations could apply to for funding to provide animation projects, with all applications for funding to be scored and assessed using an appropriate scoring matrix”.

On a vote, twenty-two Members voted for the amendment and thirty-three against and it was declared lost.

Night-time Economy Notice of Motion Update

At the request of Councillor Harvey, the Council agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure, John O’Dowd, seeking him to review the decision to put on hold the consideration of the pedestrianisation of Hill Street.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing correspondence, the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 11th September were thereupon approved and adopted.

Minutes of Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Carson,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin, and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 17th September, omitting matters in respect of which the

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Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor R-M Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor M. Donnelly, and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 12th September, be approved and adopted.

**Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.
Shareholders' Committee**

Moved by Councillor Ferguson,
Seconded by Councillor Maghie, and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee of 11th September, be approved and adopted.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson

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Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 25th October, 2024

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson); and
Alderman McCoubrey;
Councillors Beattie, Black, Brennan, Bunting, Cobain,
de Faoite, R-M. Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett,
Groogan, Long, Maghie, McDonough-Brown, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin and Nelson.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. D Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr J. Girvan, Director of neighbourhood Services;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 1st October, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in items 2g – Ending Violence against Women and Girls; and 3a – Council response to the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government in that his partner was a Minister in The Executive Office and he left the meeting whilst these items were under discussion.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
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Councillor Groogan declared an interest in item 2e – Update on Hardship Programme 2024/25 in that she was employed by the Forward South Partnership, and she left the meeting during discussion of the matter.

Councillor McDonough-Brown declared an interest in item 2e – Update on Hardship Programme 2024/25 in that his partner was employed by Save the Children, and he left the meeting during discussion of the matter.

Councillor Long declared an interest in item 3a – Council response to the NI Executive’s draft Programme for Government in that his wife was the Justice Minister and he left the meeting whilst the item was under discussion.

Councillor Ferguson declared an interest in item 2f Asset Management, and he left the meeting while the item was being discussed.

Councillor Black declared an interest in item 6a Physical Programme in that she was employed at the Grosvenor Recreation Centre, and she left the meeting during consideration of the item.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following seven items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Revenue Estimates 2025-26
Medium-Term Financial Planning

The Director of Finance submitted for the Committee’s consideration a report which provided an update on the key issues which influenced the rate setting process for 2025/26 and the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan for 2025/26 till 2028/29. He advised that there were six key elements to the annual setting of the district rate which, under the requirements of the Local Government Finance act, must be struck by 15th February, 2025. He then reviewed each of the areas which were Business as usual Revenue Estimates, the Efficiency Programme, Growth Proposals/Priority Areas, the Capital Finance Budget, the Estimated Penny Product and General Reserves.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 25th October, 2024**

The Committee agreed:

- to note the challenges since the last update to be taken into consideration as part of the annual and medium-term rate setting;
- to receive monthly rate update reports to enable the striking of the district rate by February 2025; and
- that £1million of VAT receipts be ringfenced towards the Hardship Fund.

**Housing Led Regeneration Programme –
Appointment of a Private Sector Partner**

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report to enable Party Group briefings to be held.

Update on Temporary Contracts and Agency Workers

The Director of Human Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration a report providing an update on the number of employees on temporary contracts and agency assignees engaged by the Council and outlining the steps being taken to reduce the Council's reliance on those two categories.

She reported that, as at 30th September, 2024, 237 staff had been filling posts on a temporary basis, 138 of whom had substantive Council posts to return to when no longer required. The other 99 were fixed term contract employees who did not have a substantive post to return to. Between 1st July and 30th September, 34 staff had joined the Council on a temporary contract, with 19 having a substantive post and 15 being on fixed term contracts.

She reported further that 239 agency assignees had been engaged by the Council as at 30th September, 33 of whom were seasonal workers. She outlined the cost of employing agency assignees for the three-month period ending on 30th September.

From 1st July 2024 to 30th September 2024 there were 105 appointments made. As of 30th September 2024, there were an additional 67 posts in transition (at public advertisement / internal trawl stage; shortlisting and/or interview stage; pre-employment checking stage, etc.

The Director then stated that the Corporate Contract Manage held monthly compliance and challenge meetings across Departments, with a view to driving down long-term agency usage and that data was being reviewed to assess the potential for creating some permanent flexible roles.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Organisational Reviews and Change Programme

The Committee:

- noted the progress on the work programme for the Organisational Reviews and Change portfolio and timescales going forward; and
- approved an Increase in the establishment within Place and Economy by one Grade 8 (P03) post to enable initial support for the Fleadh Cheoil.

Update on Hardship Programme 2024/25

The Committee considered a report which provide an update on the current position in regard to the development and implementation of a 2024-25 Hardship Programme to support those vulnerable people impacted by the cost-of-living crisis across the city.

The Committee:

- i. noted the current budget position available (£100,773) in relation to the development and delivery of a hardship programme in 2024/25;
- ii. noted the request from full Council, at its meeting in September, for the Committee to provide further consideration of a Hardship Programme for 2024/25.
- iii. agreed that the current budget available be allocated on the basis as set out at section 3.5 of the report;
- iv. agreed that the current Funding Agreement in place with National Energy Action (NEA) be extended to 31 March 2025 to enable the delivery of £30,000 support through the Belfast Warm and Well initiative;
- v. agreed that the allocation of any future funding that might become available in-year be subject to the allocation model as set out at section 3.9 of the report and subject to discussion and consensus of the Members' Cost-of-Living Working Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee; and
- vi. noted the new 'Cost-of-Living Support Guide' and that a digital and hard copies would be made available to the Members.

Assets Management

The Committee is asked to:

- i) Access to the Hills Ballygomartin Road South – Acquisition of Land**
 - Approved the acquisition of approx. 0.12 acres of land at Ballygomartin Road South to facilitate one of the agreed Access to the Hills projects.
- ii) Ladas Drive – Disposal of Land**
 - Approved the disposal of land at Ladas Drive to the Henderson Group.

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iii) Duncrue Estate – Deed of Variation

- Approved the lease extension of Plot 20 Duncrue Estate to an unexpired term of 125 years from 2024 and approve a variation to the rent review clause to facilitate 5 yearly rent reviews.

iv) Clonduff Community Centre – Licence Agreement

- Approved the grant of a licence to Clonduff Football Club for the siting of a container at Clonduff Community Centre.

v) Carnamore Park – Wayleave Agreement

- Approved a wayleave agreement to the Education Authority for the installation of a foul water drainpipe at Carnamore Park.

vi) Dromara Street – Licence Agreement

- Approved a retrospective licence agreement with Phoenix Natural Gas.

Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG)

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted a report which provided details on the emerging proposals being brought forward by The Executive Office (TEO) in terms of the role of the Council in supporting the implementation of the recently published Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and associated two-year delivery plan.

The Committee noted:

- i. the intention of The Executive Office to bring forward proposals to provide funding to councils to support the implementation of the recently published Strategic Framework to end Violence Against Women and Girls;
- ii. the related council resource requirements in terms of putting in place the necessary grant funding processes;
- iii. agreed to TEO proposal that the Council adopt a lead role for the allocation of Strand 1 funding to support Belfast wide programme activities in-year and over 25/26 year; and
- iv. agreed to TEO proposal that the Council adopt a lead role for the allocation of Strand 2 funding to support a regionally wide programme of activities in-year.

Living With Water Programme Update

The Committee:

- noted the correspondence which had been received from Living with Water (LWW) on the outcome of the affordability review of the LWW in Belfast Plan; and
- noted that officers were arranging a meeting with the LWW Team and that further information would be brought back to Members.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
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**Update on programme of support for the
business owners impacted by the August attacks**

(Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy, attended in connection with this item.)

The Strategic Director, Place and Economy, submitted a report which provided the Members of the Committee with an update on the support which had been provided to date for businesses by the riots on 3rd August and requesting the Committee to consider the next steps.

The Committee:

- noted the update on the businesses affected by the 3rd August riots;
- agreed that officers should continue to engage with the individuals to help them re-establish or develop their business, including accessing all appropriate support mechanisms;
- agreed that consideration be given to introducing additional security measures, such as CCTV, for those businesses; and
- that a report be submitted to a future meeting regarding the possibility of providing bridging funding to support the businesses which had been affected.

Requests to Present

**Request to address the Committee –
Cathedral Quarter Trust**

The Members were advised that a request had been received by Mr. B. Mulgrew, on behalf of the Cathedral Quarter Trust, to address the Committee in respect of the wider regeneration of the Cathedral Quarter area.

The Cathedral Quarter Trust represented a range of businesses, sectors and groups which had expressed concerns regarding dereliction and the current condition of buildings in the area. The correspondence indicated that the Trust had held two recent public meetings, together with a summer school, to examine a range of alternative regeneration plans for the wider Cathedral Quarter, given the delays encountered with the Tribeca development. The purpose of the presentation would be to outline such plans and to encourage dialogue amongst key stakeholders in the future development of the area.

Move by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Groogan,

That the Committees to accede to the request from the Cathedral Quarter Trust to make a presentation to the Committee.

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On a vote, two Members voted for the proposal and seventeen against and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that the presentation be made to the City Regeneration Members' Working Group, given that that group had been established for that purpose.

**Request to address the Committee –
Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) –
Belfast Housing Investment Plan 2024-25**

The Committee was asked to consider a request to receive a presentation from Grania Long, Chief Executive of the NIHE, in respect of the Belfast Housing Investment Plan 2023/26.

The members were advised that the NIHE published Housing Investment Plans (HIPs) for each Council area, which sets out the organisation's targets and ambitions over a three-year period. In addition, the HIPs inform Councils on the various programmes and initiatives that the Housing Executive and Housing Associations were developing to meet local housing needs.

The Committee was reminded that the People and Communities Committee received representatives of NIHE on a yearly basis for a presentation in this regard, the last meeting took place on 3rd September. Ms. Long had indicated in her request that a presentation to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee would provide an opportunity to provide further detail on NIHE's new build programme for the Belfast area as part of its programme.

The Committee agreed not to receive the presentation but that it instead be received by the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum.

**Request to address the Committee – NILGA re Leadership
Programme for Elected Member Development**

The Committee was informed that correspondence had been received from the Chief Executive of NILGA requesting that the Committee agree to receive a presentation in respect of its Leadership Programme for Elected Member Development.

The correspondence explained that the Leadership Programme had been designed to provide Elected Members with a 'co-ordinated toolkit of learning' in accordance with the NILGA Political Skills Framework. It aimed also to develop the practical skills which were necessary to enable Members to improve their civic leadership skills in a local political environment. The latest programme would commence in January 2025.

The Committee agreed not to receive the presentation and noted that it had previously been made to the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Quarterly Update on Motions

The Committee noted that this item had been withdrawn from the agenda.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

**Belfast City Council response to NI Executive's
draft Programme for Government**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a proposed draft Belfast City Council response (Appendix 1) to the NI Executive - Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most - Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027, which is provided at (Appendix 2) for your consideration.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The committee is requested to note and agree:

- i. the draft Belfast City Council response to the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Programme for Government and agree to submit this response subject to any amendments of additional comments that the committee wish to provide.**
- ii. to share this corporate response with the Northern Ireland Local Government Association, to inform their response which is being submitted on behalf of the wider local government sector.**
- iii. to note that alongside providing this response to the Programme for Government unit in the Executive Office, officers are continuing to develop approaches to maximise the strategic positioning of the city within the context of the emerging Programme for Government and other strategies.**
- iv. that a letter is sent to the TEO to accompany the response from Council to the PFG.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 On 5 September 2024, the Executive agreed a draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. Subsequently the Executive launched an 8-week public consultation on this draft Programme for Government, with the deadline for submissions 4 November 2024.

3.2 The content of the draft Programme for Government 2024 – 2027 is set out below for the committee’s information. The programme’s priorities and commitments are divided into three core sections:

- **Doing What Matters Most** - Focuses on the Executive’s immediate priorities aimed at taking care of you, supporting our businesses, and improving the lives of our workers, families and communities.
- **Building New Foundations** - Commits to upgrading infrastructure and improving services to better connect our communities, meeting your needs today and supporting your ambitions for tomorrow with the high-quality public services you deserve.
- **Shaping a Better Tomorrow** - Focuses on three main missions: People, Planet, and Prosperity, all rooted in a commitment to Peace. These missions are dedicated to improving life for you, your families, and our communities.

3.3

1. **Doing What Matters Most Today**

This part of the draft Programme for Government sets out the NI Executive’s immediate priorities, which include:

- Immediate priorities for this year and throughout our mandate will be achieved by providing better support for our children and young people, enabling affordable childcare, growing our economy, increasing housing supply and tackling homelessness, taking care of everyone by improving Health and Social Care services, protecting our environment and cleaning up our water, and making our communities safer, including a particular focus on women and girls.
- Continue to grow a globally competitive, sustainable, and inclusive economy which benefits everyone.
- Focus on high-potential sectors, where there are established strengths, and the potential to be globally competitive. In areas such as outstanding sectors like cyber security, net zero, screen, financial technology, regulatory technology and health and life sciences already thriving, the NI Executive aim to build on this success, upgrade our infrastructure, grow our economy, and protect our environment.
- £150 million will be invested in the new *Enhanced Investment Zone* and we will continue to progress UK Shared Prosperity projects.

- Make sure everyone has the best possible opportunities regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, disability, who they are, or where they live, and to enable people to live with dignity in safe communities.
- Opening doors through proposed initiatives to deliver more affordable childcare, new skills funds, and apprenticeship programmes.
- Support the delivery of high-quality education for all children and champions better support for children and young people, especially those with special educational needs, so that all children are happy, learning and succeeding.
- Public services need urgent reform. Rapid growth in both the cost and demand for public services is placing a huge pressure on public finances and is undermining service provision. Reform and Transformation programme underpinned by new structures, external expertise, and a £235 million Transformation Fund to make our public services better, more easily accessed, and more efficient.

3.4

2. Building New Foundations

In this draft Programme for Government the NI Executive also recognised that to achieve their outcomes they need to build the right foundations and have the right infrastructure in place; therefore, they plan to:

- Upgrade our public sector infrastructure to strengthen our communities and create opportunities for businesses, entrepreneurs, communities, and innovators.
- Deliver upgrades to our sports stadia and increase opportunities for local sports.
- Improve our transport infrastructure for safer, more active and sustainable travel, connected communities and inclusive economic growth.
- Deliver an ambitious programme decarbonising all housing stock in NI.
- Reducing carbon emissions in existing and new homes, engaging with consumers throughout the transition, while supporting various initiatives for energy efficiency and affordability.
- Fresh thinking and new ideas that deliver the high-quality public services you deserve and pursue opportunities to improve and grow our public infrastructure, such as water services and planning.

3.5 Shaping a Better Tomorrow

The Northern Ireland Executive also recognise the importance of shaping a better tomorrow by building a foundation for the longer-term. This will be focused on three main missions: People, Planet, and Prosperity, all rooted in a commitment to Peace.

3.6 Programme for Government Missions

1. **People: Working to support everyone at all stages of their life to ensure they have the chance to succeed by improving life opportunities.**
2. **Planet: Harnessing the potential of a green growth economy while ensuring we provide an equitable transition to a sustainable and affordable society as we take responsibility for decarbonising our economy and society.**
3. **Prosperity: Improving our economic productivity while making sure that we have an economy that works for everyone, and our story continues to be an inspiration to others.**

3.7 In addition to these three Missions, the NI Executive also have a cross-cutting commitment to a fourth underpinning mission of Peace which is intended to make sure that everyone feels the benefit of a growing economy, improved environment, and a fairer society.

3.8 Doing What Matters Most Today

The NI Executive have also set out nine immediate priorities which they will work to this year and throughout the duration of this mandate, these are:

1. **Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy**
2. **Deliver More Affordable Childcare**
3. **Cut Health Waiting Times**
4. **Ending Violence Against Women and Girls**
5. **Better Support for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs**
6. **Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing**
7. **Safer Communities**
8. **Protecting Lough Neagh and the Environment**
9. **Reform and Transformation of Public Services**

3.9 Strategic Positioning

The Committee is invited to note that as officers considered the corporate response to the NI Executive's draft Programme for Government and other emerging strategies such as the recently published Sub-Regional Economic Plan, they recognised the need to maximise opportunities so that both the regional priorities and the ambitions of the Belfast Agenda can be realised. A further report on this work will be presented to the Committee in due course.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.10** There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.11** There are no equality or rural needs implications arising directly from this report. However, the Committee is invited to note that alongside the public consultation on the draft Programme for Government.

- 3.12** The NI Executive are also undertaking associated consultations in relation to the Equality, Childs Rights and Rural needs. These are open for twelve weeks and officers are currently considering these and will bring a further report to this Committee on the impact assessments next month."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Community Recovery Fund

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1** To report to committee on the recently launched Community Recovery Fund (CRF), which the Deputy Prime Minister is making available to support communities impacted by the public disorder that took place between July and August 2024, including Belfast. In England this will be issued under section 31 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003, and in Northern Ireland funds will be released to the Department of Finance, to support those communities most affected.

2.0 Recommendation

The Committee is asked to agree that Officers Develop and Submit an Action Plan on 28th October under the following 4 Themes: -

- Theme 1 Good Relations Inclusion and Integration
- Theme 2 Wider University and Lower Ormeau
- Theme 3 Area Based Initiatives and Programmes
- Theme 4 Resource Recoupment

Main Report

3.1 The CRF is allocative and offers a flat rate of £600,000 to each eligible local authority, to be spent before the end of the Financial Year 2024-25.

Expenditure is eligible under this scheme if it is in response to the violent disorder that took place between July and August 2024 and is on, or in connection with:

- a. Immediate action to safeguard life or property.
- b. To prevent suffering or severe inconvenience.
- c. To reduce the risk of further disorder in the future.
- d. To rebuild social trust and promote cohesion between communities.

3.2 The Fund has deliberately sought to provide local areas with flexibility to design a package that responds to their circumstances. The following are examples of expenditure which may be covered by the grant, though this list is not exhaustive.

3.3 Community and voluntary activity:

- Projects which build connections between communities. For example, by bringing people together from different groups, including those of different faiths, around a shared goal/objective, such as through volunteering, befriending or mentoring schemes.
- Events, workshops, or campaign activities to educate on what constitutes a hate crime and supporting victims of hate crime.
- Projects in schools and universities which help address tensions/unrests, linked to hatred and intolerance, for example guidance for teachers on how to de-escalate tensions and respond neutrally to concerns.
- Initiatives which help counter or strengthen resilience to mis/disinformation and prevent false and harmful

narratives spreading. For example, social media focused 'critical thinking' lessons in school.

- Temporarily increasing safety patrols.
- Measures to prevent anti-social behavior, crime and reduce reoffending including youth diversionary activities.
- Destination marketing and funding for the development and promotion of campaigns which encourage people to visit the local area.
- Campaigns to encourage local pride and to bring people back into the high streets.
- Campaigns to promote community cohesion and educate on hate crime.

3.4 Immediate clean-up and repair:

- Repairs to highways, public buildings, street lighting, bus shelters and other street furniture, including fences and railings or removal where repair is insufficient.
- The costs of works to clear debris which are or may be the cause of danger to the public and the cost of clean-up affected areas, including removal of graffiti.
- Hire of additional vehicles, plant and machinery that are not those already in use by the authority, and incidental expenses.

3.5 Associated costs with the above activity:

- Legal, clerical and other charges incurred on any of the above work.
- Additional temporary employees or contractors, to work on the emergency or replace permanent employees diverted from normal work.
- Special overtime for employees, either during the emergency for overtime worked on the emergency itself, or afterwards to catch up on work from which they were diverted by the incident.

3.6 The above programmes will be additional to the departments core work, and an Action Plan for the said has to be submitted to the department by 28th October 2024, with delivery by the 31st March 2025, that said this is a considerable investment for Belfast City. Officers have been in discussions with the relevant department in Westminster and providing programmes are committed Council will have the ability to deliver into the Financial Year 25/26.

3.7 Officers have initially reviewed the fund criteria above and have concluded that there are four main themes an action plan for delivery could be developed: -

- Theme 1 Good Relations Inclusion and Integration
- Theme 2 Wider University and Lower Ormeau
- Theme 3 Area Based Initiatives and Programmes
- Theme 4 Resource Recoupment

3.8 Officers will submit the draft action plan for 28th October and inform the funder the plan is subject to Belfast Full Council meeting ratification.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.9 All the budget detailed within the report is at 100%, the biggest implication is that of resource to design, implement, manage and monitor the programmes, however Council will be able to recoup this under Theme 4.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.10 All the above aligns with Council's Good Relations Strategic Framework, which seeks to improve Good Relations between people from different political, religious, and racial backgrounds."

The Committee agreed that officers develop and submit an Action Plan on 28th October under the following 4 Themes:

- Theme 1 Good Relations Inclusion and Integration;
- Theme 2 Wider University and Lower Ormeau;
- Theme 3 Area Based Initiatives and Programmes; and
- Theme 4 Resource Recoupment.

NI 30U30 Change Makers Programme

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report

To update members about an approach to Belfast City Council for funding (£8,750 plus VAT) to support the 30U30 (30 under 30) Northern Ireland Climate Change-Maker's programme. The programme is coordinated by the leading charity, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and their partner Podiem. This programme is an exemplary example of cross sectoral partnership with support from DAERA, Belfast City Council,

Invest NI, Queens University Belfast with broad ranging corporate support including Pinsent Masons, Coca Cola, Danske Bank, Northstone and ARUP. This is a request for continued local authority involvement and support for the programme from Belfast City Council.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- **Agree the contribution of £8,750 plus VAT to the overall programme costs.**

2.2 Whilst Belfast City Council's support represents a modest proportion of the overall budget (circa £100,000 in total) it will be crucial in making the initiative (the themes of which complement and supplement the Council's climate programme) a reality.

2.3 The Council's support will resource the launch along with 6 modules/events featuring world-class speakers/experts taking place from December 2024-May 2025.

2.4 In supporting this initiative Council will:

- **Empower the next generation of climate change makers, equipping young leaders with the tools to enact meaningful climate action and developing a talent pool for Belfast and the wider region;**
- **Foster innovation and leadership: In supporting this programme, Belfast City Council will go beyond its own carbon footprint; proactively inspiring and equipping those who have the ambition to transform industries. This programme will help build an ecosystem that promotes the collaboration between government, companies and individuals that is needed to address the magnitude of the crises facing us and it is an opportunity to align with Belfast City Council's Resilience Strategy.**

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 The programme supports a network of young people from a diverse range of backgrounds, cultures, industries & specialisms with the common goal of becoming planet positive Climate Change Makers. This growing network of aspiring young leaders is equipped to drive meaningful change within

their spheres of influence across Northern Ireland, influencing governments, institutions, networks, employers, colleagues and peers to drive carbon reduction and spearhead the transition to a more sustainable, just future. Similar to the pilot year in 2023, the second 30U30 programme which concluded in June 2024, was again oversubscribed with a wider range of sectors involved including environmental conservation, government & policy, construction, energy, academia, transport, agriculture & food production, technology & research and culture & communications.

- 3.2 Under this cycle of this initiative, 30 young people are competitively selected annually to embark on an impact leadership and capacity building programme that builds literacy across a range of themes to underpin future behaviours, decision-making and help foster collaboration and innovation in leadership. Common knowledge gaps including Finance/Economy/Business, Policy/Politics, Communications/Media & The Art of Persuasion, Purpose and Social Impact, Sustainability Literacy, Leadership/Resilience and Health, Wellbeing & Performance are addressed underpinned by the strategic themes of Inspiring & Informing Action; Cultivating Change-Makers; Sharing Stories & Alternatives and Enabling the Future. Most of the 30U30 modules are being delivered in Belfast City Centre and the vast majority of the participants will either reside or work within the Belfast City Council footprint. The cohort will be diverse with a broad range of backgrounds, sectors and interest/expertise areas represented. Within the current alumni of 60 emerging young leaders, 78% are female and thus the programme is making a tangible contribution to championing the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda in Belfast.
- 3.3 Within the modular programme participants will learn from globally renowned thought leaders and exemplars across a range of relevant topics. These topics have been carefully crafted to create a cohort of leaders who will return to their fields of expertise with the tools to become planet positive change-makers in the short/long term. Speakers and facilitators from the previous cohorts included globally-renowned individuals such as:
- Alice Thompson, an international speaker and social business leader who co-founded Social Bite in Edinburgh and helped to establish 'The Worlds Big Sleepout' which took place in 52 cities around the world.
 - Gerry Hussey, Ireland's leading health, wellbeing and performance coach, who has worked with many leading

sports people and teams, and author of 'Awaken Your Power Within'.

- Philip Hesketh, an international authority on influence and persuasion, who has worked with clients such as the BBC, Nestle, Walt Disney, Nike, Microsoft and Bank of America among others.
- René Carayol MBE who has worked with leaders such as Mikael Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela, Sir Richard Branson, Bill Clinton, and Kofi Annan, and authored the book 'SPIKE'. He has been Chairman, CEO and MD of businesses and served on the boards of Marks and Spencer's and Pepsi. He is an authority on inclusivity and leadership.
- Participants in the 3rd cycle of the programme (November 2024 - May 2025) will also have the opportunity to have an audience with Mary Robinson. The first female president of Ireland and formerly the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mary is a lawyer, politician and diplomat and is the President of the Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice.

- 3.4 The programme also includes an international element which will encourage and enable the NI climate change-makers to build relationships and collaborations with climate change - makers from other parts of the world through the 30 under 30 programme currently run by the North American Association for Environmental Education. The Northern Irish programme is the only programme operating in the UK presently.

Potential benefits to Belfast City Council

- 3.5 The programme coordinators will ensure that Belfast City Council will be positioned as championing (along with the other partners) the creation and development of the next generation of local leaders who will lead work to address climate change in Northern Ireland. This will support the cities ambition, articulated in the Belfast Resilience Strategy, to 'transition to an inclusive, net zero emissions economy in a generation.' It provides a tangible programmatic offering to engage young people, one of the areas of focus in the plan, ensuring they are active participants in co-designing a future proofed city and have every opportunity to participate in delivery. With 35% of Belfast's population under the age of 25, engagement of young people is considered so important in the strategy, it is one of three areas of focus, or multiple problem solvers to restructure the economy and society as climate change advances. This programme also nurtures wider

collaborative efforts to create a circular economy and contributes to the green skills/green growth agenda here with scope to connect to wider BCC initiatives including Belfast's Line Quarter 'Sustainable District' and other work underway with the Council's Climate Unit. In supporting this programme, Belfast City Council will be going well beyond its own carbon footprint and direct activity, it is proactively inspiring and equipping those who have the ambition to transform industries (similar to Artemis and Responsible, both from Belfast) and create global solutions (for example Catagen, also from Belfast) to our most pressing climate and environmental challenges.

- 3.6 Connections with Belfast City Council are already strong following the Council's previous support of the programme. In September 2024, we took the opportunity to connect the 30Under30 alumni with the Lord Mayor of Belfast to hear how they are planning to create meaningful impact as a direct consequence of the programme.
- 3.7 In terms of profile, the Belfast City Council brand will be prominent on all of the initiative marketing material which will be launched to ensure mass awareness. The Council brand will also be highly visible at all of the modules (including the finale event) and a Council representative will be invited to participate in the press photos launching the event and at the finale event.
- 3.8 There is also an opportunity for a member of the Belfast City Council Climate team to present on how a city is playing its part in helping to avert a climate crisis. The cohort will feature some of NI's finest future leadership talent (including those from the local government sector), so this content will be very useful and relevant to the participants together with an opportunity to host one of the modules at Belfast City Hall and secure the press coverage associated with that. This would be the ideal follow up event for the Lord Mayor to greet and listen to the incoming group of 30U30 climate change makers and the positive planet impact they plan to create.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.9 £8,750 plus VAT which will be allocated from existing City and Organisational Strategy budgets.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications

- 3.10 None."

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The Committee agreed to a contribution of £8,750 plus VAT to the overall programme costs.

Modern Slavery Act 2015: updated Modern Slavery Statement and update on corporate action plan

The City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services submitted the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with the updated annual Modern Slavery Transparency in Supply Chains Statement to meet the obligations of the Modern Slavery Act, 2015 and an update on the related corporate action plan.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- **Note the updated annual Modern Slavery Transparency in Supply Chains Statement (the ‘Transparency Statement’).**
- **Approve the addition of the Transparency Statement to the UK Government’s online registry.**
- **Note the progress made on the action plan.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

The Modern Slavery Act 2015 (the ‘Act’) aims to address slavery and trafficking by enhancing support and protection for victims, giving law enforcement the tools needed to target today’s slave drivers and ensuring perpetrators can be severely punished. It also includes a provision in Section 54 to encourage organisations to ensure their supply chains are slavery-free, known as the Transparency in Supply Chains arrangements (‘TISC’).

3.2 Key Issues

The Council has voluntarily published an annual Transparency Statement on its website since 2015. This sets out what the Council has done to ensure there is no modern slavery in its supply chains or any part of its business.

This year, the annual Transparency Statement has been reviewed by Commercial and Procurement Services, the Council's Safeguarding Officer, the Council's Registrar for Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships and the Equality and Diversity Officer and has been refreshed to reflect current guidance on its content. An updated version for 2023-24 is set out in Appendix 1 which following Council ratification will be published on the Council's website.

3.3 Recent changes to the Transparency Statement requirements

The TISC provisions currently apply to commercial organisations, however, in recent years both the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Department of Justice have reviewed and consulted on these provisions and their potential application to the public sector:

- In July 2018, the Home Secretary undertook an independent review of the Act and made recommendations, one of which was to strengthen Section 54 by extending the requirement to publish Modern Slavery Statements to government and the public sector.
- In July 2019 the UK Government launched a consultation on measures to strengthen the TISC arrangements and published its proposals on how it planned to take this work forward. Many of the proposed changes will require legislative change which has not happened to date. The proposed changes would see a strengthening of the TISC arrangements for commercial businesses, and would, for the first time, extend them so they apply to the public sector.
- In January 2022, the Northern Ireland Department of Justice ('DOJ') published its report, summary of responses and next steps in response to its consultation on TISC. It found that overall, there is widespread support for the strengthening of TISC arrangements.

3.4 Approach to Modern Slavery in Northern Ireland

In October 2022, the DOJ launched a public consultation on a new three-year draft Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy. The public consultation closed in January 2023. On 10 July 2024, the Department of Justice launched a three-year Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy 2024 – 2027. The strategy was developed under Section 12 of the Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The Strategy groups actions and commitments under the strands of:

- Pursue - enhance operational responses to pursue and disrupt offenders;
- Protect - providing victims with necessary levels of protection and support and
- Prevent - engagement, awareness raising and training.

The Strategy includes a measure under the 'Protect' strand to deliver training and awareness sessions to key sectors and professional disciplines, including district councils. Members will be aware that an initial awareness session for relevant Belfast City Council managers on recognising Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking was held by the Department of Justice on 17 November 2022.

The Strategy notes that the UK Government plan to make additional changes to the TISC provisions in the Act when Parliamentary time allows. The additional changes include:

1. Reporting on specific topics;
2. Publishing the MS statement on a public registry;
3. Setting a deadline for submitting a statement annually;
4. Extending the requirement to publish a statement to public sector organisations with a turnover of over £36million; and
5. The introduction of financial penalties for those that do not publish a slavery statement.

In October 2022 the DOJ published a progress report on the commitments laid out in the 2021-22 Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Progress Report states in part that the DOJ 'will engage further with public sector procurement leads once the additional measures to strengthen TISC are progressed in legislation and will become mandatory for all businesses with an annual turnover of over £36million.'

3.5 It should be noted that the Legislative Consent of the Northern Ireland Assembly will be required to extend any UK Government changes to Northern Ireland.

3.6 Online TISC Registry

In March 2021, the UK Government launched an online modern slavery statement registry. Since its launch, over 7,000

statements have been submitted covering over 23,350 organisations on a voluntary basis.

Members asked to approve the addition of the Belfast City Council Transparency Statement to this registry.

3.7 Action Plan

In October 2021, Council approved an action plan to tackle modern slavery to be taken forward by various departments. This was based on guidance from NILGA. An updated version is set forth in Appendix 2.

3.8 Reporting

The Policy, Research & Compliance Officer co-ordinates an annual report on progress to be brought to CMT and the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.

3.9 Financial and Resource Implications

The implementation of the action plan will involve staff from City and Neighbourhood Services, Legal Services, Governance & Compliance Services, Commercial and Procurement Services, Corporate HR and Marketing and Corporate Communications.

3.10 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Any equality, good relations or rural needs implications will be identified using the council's usual screening process."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Planning Update

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update on major planning applications and applications which had been determined by the Planning Committee.

Public Consultation on Validation Checklist

The Director of Planning and Building Control submitted the undernoted report in relation to public consultation on a Validation Checklist:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 On 1st October 2024, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) made legislation which enables a council to publish a Validation Checklist. The purpose of a Validation Checklist is to extend the minimum level of information for an application to be legally valid so as to improve the quality of applications on submission. This should contribute to the Planning Service being able to process applications in a more efficient and effective manner, and in turn help to improve performance against statutory KPIs.
- 1.2 The legislation comes into operation from 1st April 2025, which gives councils time to prepare and consult on their proposed Validation Checklist ahead of the operation date.
- 1.3 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is asked to agree the preparation and consultation on the Council’s Validation Checklist.
- 1.4 This matter was also considered by the Planning Committee at its meeting on 15th October 2024. The Planning Committee noted the proposal and agreed that a Planning Committee Workshop should be arranged on the Validation Checklist.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:
- Agree to the preparation and consultation on the draft Validation Checklist.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 At its meeting on [19 December 2022](#) (item 25), the Planning Committee considered public consultation undertaken by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) on ‘Improving the Quality of Planning Applications’. DfI’s proposal was to enable councils to publish a ‘Validation Checklist’ that stipulates the minimum level of information needed with applications on submission above the basic requirements set out in legislation.
- 3.2 The report to the 19 December 2022 Committee set out the background to the consultation, why Validation Checklists are considered to be of fundamental importance to improving the quality of planning applications on submission and how this

would have a significant impact on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the NI planning system, and in turn performance against statutory Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

- 3.3 The Planning Committee resolved to *‘fully support the introduction of Planning Application Validation Checklists and granted delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the consultation response.’* The Council provided its formal response to the consultation on 21 December 2022.
- 3.4 DfI subsequently confirmed to councils its intention to legislate for Validation Checklists, as referenced in the report to the [23 August 2024](#) Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (item 5h) on Planning Performance.

Current information requirements

- 3.5 The bar for submission of a planning application in NI is currently especially low and this is the root cause of many of the system’s problems from a Development Management perspective.
- 3.6 Article 3 of the [Planning \(General Permitted Development\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#) sets out the minimum level of information needed with an application for it to be ‘valid’ and processed. The information that is required only includes:
- Written description of the proposal
 - Address of the application site
 - Name and address of the applicant (and agent where applicable)
 - A plan identifying the application site showing its relationship with other land (‘red line’)
 - A plan identifying neighbouring land owned by the applicant (‘blue line’)
 - Such other plans that describe the proposal
 - Ownership certificate
 - Planning fee

There is also a requirement for Major applications to be accompanied by a Pre-Application Community Consultation

Report and certain applications to be supported by a Design and Access Statement¹.

3.7 There are specific additional requirements for applications for outline planning permission, approval of reserved matters and renewal of planning permission.

3.8 However, there is currently no legal requirement for applicants to provide other essential information, despite many of them being a planning policy requirement. For example, there is currently no legal requirement for an application to be accompanied by the following:

- Contextual design information such as streetscapes, 3D modelling or CGIs
- Heritage statement
- Archaeological investigation report
- Demolition justification statement
- Transport Assessment
- Parking survey
- Contaminated land report
- Noise and odour assessments
- Air quality assessment
- Lighting assessment
- Drainage Assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Ecological report
- Viability appraisal
- Planning Statement

3.9 Belfast City Council contacted the Department as far back as 2016, raising the importance of statutory Planning Application Validation Checklists. Both the Public Accounts Committee and NI Audit Office reports on the NI planning system² include recommendations on improving the quality of applications on submission.

3.10 The inability for councils to mandate the minimum level of information supplied with applications has a seriously detrimental impact on the whole process. It significantly adds to processing times, places additional burdens on staff and

¹ Required for applications for Major development, Listed Building Consent and for one or more dwellinghouses, and proposals that are equal a greater than 1,000sqm and are in a Conservation Area, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, World Heritage Site or Area of Townscape Character.

² See Planning Committee reports of [15 February](#) and [14 April](#) 2022 on the NIAO and Public Accounts Committee reports respectively.

consultees, wastes time assessing proposals without the key information, sets up conflict with customers, frustrates communities, residents and third parties and creates system failure.

Belfast City Council Application Checklist:

- 3.11 Recognising the crucial importance of this issue, the Council first published its [Application Checklist](#) in November 2018. This provides non-mandatory guidance to customers on the information they need to provide with their application at the start of the process, depending on the nature of the proposal, its scale and whether the site is subject to any particular constraints.
- 3.12 The *Application Checklist* has had a positive impact on the quality of planning applications on submission and has now been culturally embedded in the process, particularly for larger scale and more complex applications. However, the *Application Checklist* has limitations because it is advisory and does not have statutory weight. In effect, it has been a ‘work-around’ of the previous legislation. Ultimately, the Council is unable to compel applicants to provide the information. Whereas in England and Wales, Planning Authorities have been able to publish Validation Checklists for many years, mandating the information that must be provided with applications for them to be processed.
- 3.13 Councils are measured on the average time for processing Major and Local applications with ‘Day 1’ being the date when the bare minimum level of information is provided. The clock does not stop to allow for the submission of the necessary additional information to properly assess and process the application. This significantly lengthens application processing times and makes it difficult for Planning Authorities to achieve statutory targets.

New Legislation

- 3.14 On 03 October 2024, DfI wrote to councils to announce the publication of legislation which empowers councils to publish a Validation Checklist that expands on the level of information required with planning applications on submission. A copy of this letter is provided at Appendix 1.
- 3.15 The Planning (General Development Procedure) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 was made on 1st October 2024. A copy of the legislation is provided at Appendix 2.

- 3.16 The legislation comes into operation from 1st April 2025, which gives councils time to prepare and consult on their proposed Validation Checklist ahead of the operation date.
- 3.17 The legislation enables a council to specify additional information requirements for applications for full planning permission, outline planning permission and approval of reserved matters, according to the 'nature, scale and location' of the proposed development. The information requirements must be 'reasonable' and proportionate and be 'material' to the consideration of the application.
- 3.18 The Validation Checklist must be reviewed and re-published by the council at no more than 3-year intervals.
- 3.19 Where an application is submitted not in compliance with the Validation Checklist, councils will normally request the additional information from the applicant on an informal basis. However, councils may ultimately issue a formal 'notice' of non-compliance with the Validation Checklist. The applicant will have the ability to lodge an appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) within 14 days from the date of the notice. The PAC will then preside over the appeal and determine whether the additional information in question is necessary. Where the appeal is allowed, the applicant may resubmit the application to the council without the originally requested information.
- 3.20 The statutory average processing time will be measured from the date of the last information required to make the application valid in accordance with the published Validation Checklist.
- 3.21 DfI has been preparing best practice guidance on the publication and implementation of Validation Checklists with support from councils. The best practice guidance has not been published at this time but is expected to be in due course.

Public consultation

- 3.22 Whilst there is no legislative requirement for councils to publicly consult on their proposed Validation Checklist, it is good practice to do so. The Planning Service therefore intends to carry out a public consultation exercise over the coming months to align with the legislative timetable set out by the Department. Officers are exploring options for consultation with the aim of adoption and publication of the final Validation Checklist by April (when the legislation comes into operation).

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- 3.23 Feedback from the consultation will inform the proposed final version Validation Checklist before it is brought to Members for adoption.
- 3.24 The Planning Service proposes to base the draft Validation Checklist for consultation on its current Application Checklist, which it will review and update.
- 3.25 The Council intends to target the following stakeholders as part of the consultation:
- Planning agents and architects
 - RSUA
 - Developers
 - Statutory and non-statutory consultees
 - Relevant community groups
 - Public – residents and businesses
- 3.26 Consultation will include an online questionnaire and targeted engagement with key stakeholders. The Planning Committee has agreed that a committee workshop should be arranged on the Validation Checklist.
- 3.27 The outcome of the consultation and proposed final Validation Checklist will be reported to the Planning Committee for feedback before referral to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for agreement and adoption, subject to ratification by Full Council.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.28 The Council's ability to specify information requirements for particular types of application will have an impact on efficiency and timely processing of planning applications.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.29 The draft Validation Checklist will be subject to a Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment. This information will be made available as part of the consultation and any feedback received will be used to inform the development of the draft Validation Checklist."

The Committee agreed to the preparation of and consultation on the draft Validation Checklist.

NICVA Future Thinking Summit 2024

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To bring forward for Members consideration a recent request received seeking financial support for the NICVA Future Thinking Summit 2024 (22 October 2024).

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to consider a request received to provide financial support for the NICVA Future Thinking Summit 2024, which took place on 22 October 2024.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 As Members will be aware, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) is a membership and representative umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. With over a thousand members - ranging from household name charities to grass roots community groups - NICVA lobbies and campaigns to advance the interests of the people and communities that their members support. NICVA offers a wide range of practical services, products and support to their members to help them find innovative solutions for social challenges.

3.2 NICVA's strategic goals are as follows:

1. Support - Helping the VCS to innovate, develop and improve to meet the needs of the communities it serves;
2. Influence - Helping the VCS to influence policy;
3. Develop - Helping the VCS consolidate and develop the use of data, digital and technology; and
4. Invest - Ensuring continuous improvement to provide the best service to our members.

3.3 Officers have received a request for Council to provide financial support for the NICVA Future Thinking Summit 2024, which was held on 22 October 2024 in W5 and W5 Life, Belfast. Unfortunately, due to the timing of this request, it was not possible to bring the request to SP and R Committee ahead of the NICVA Summit taking place.

- 3.4 The Future Thinking Summit was modelled after the successful Scottish Gathering and the renowned annual Wheel Conference. The summit was designed to bring together leaders, influencers, and changemakers to address key issues, share best practices, and drive meaningful social change.
- 3.5 The Key Outcomes from the Summit were as follows:
- **Value** : demonstrate the breadth and depth of the voluntary and community sector and the significant impact it makes.
 - **Inspire**: Gain insights from innovators and industry leaders who are shaping the future of the voluntary sector, as well as influencing policymakers with insights and evidence from the sector.
 - **Connect**: Network with peers, build new relationships, strengthen existing ones within the community, and foster partnerships that will drive real and meaningful social change.
 - **Strengthen**: Equip the VCSE with the knowledge and tools needed to advocate effectively and build a stronger, more connected sector.
- 3.6 The Summit was developed with and for the Voluntary and Community sector, covering themes including digital transformation, green economy, mental health, poverty, place-based collaboration. The summit used a variety of formats including:
- **Keynote Sessions**: Inspiring talks from leading influencers and policymakers.
 - **Parallel Sessions**: Member-led discussions showcasing best practices and innovative approaches.
 - **Networking Opportunities**: Facilitated sessions for building meaningful connections.
 - **Resource Hub**: Access to vital information and learning materials.
- 3.7 To ensure this event was accessible to all, NICVA made the Summit free for attendees, including;
- **Sector Leaders**: voluntary and community organisations.
 - **Policymakers**: Government officials and policymakers focused on civic issues.
 - **Practitioners**: On-the-ground staff and volunteers driving change.
 - **Stakeholders**: Businesses and organisations invested in community well-being.

- 3.8 Further details on the summit can be found at: [NICVA Summit 2024 Programme — NICVA Summit](#).

Request for Financial Support

- 3.9 NICVA has requested that Elected Members consider how this summit provided opportunities for capacity building, connections and confidence within the sector and is asked to consider providing financial support the following aspects of the summit:

- **Venue and Logistics:** Contribute to costs of the venue, equipment, and other logistics.
- **Speakers and Sessions:** Contribute towards the cost of travel and honoraria for key speakers and session facilitators.
- **Materials and Resources:** Contribute towards providing attendees with high-quality materials and access to resources.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 It is proposed that this request is supported via £10,000 from the in-year City and Organisational Strategy budget, which is in line with level of support provided to similar events in the recent past. There are no additional finance or resource implications contained within this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.11 There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report.”

The Committee approved the request received to provide financial support for the NICVA Future Thinking Summit 2024 in the sum of £10,000, which had taken place on 22nd October 2024.

Womens Night Safety Charter

The Committee considered a report which sought approval for the Council's involvement with the Safer Socialising Initiative and to the Council signing the Women's Night Safety Charter.

After discussion, the Committee agreed:

- to defer consideration of Belfast City Council's involvement with the Safer Socialising initiative and to the Council signing the Women's Night Safety

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Charter to enable further information to be provided and to allow representatives of Hospitality NI to present to the Committee;

- that the Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Corporate Services champion and actively promote women's night safety;
- that a report be submitted to a future meeting on how the Council could provide spike testing kits at Council-run events and other events held on Council-owned land; and
- that a further report providing an update on motions previously submitted on the safety of women in the city centre be also submitted to a future meeting.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme

The Director of Property and Projects submitted for the Committee's consideration an update report on the Physical Programme, a copy of which is set out below:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The Council's Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council's Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme, along with updates on capital letters of offer and contracts awarded.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note that St Comgall's won the National RICS Award for Best Refurbishment / Revitalisation Project 2024.**
- **Capital Programme:**
 - **IT Programme – Grants Management System – Note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of £60,000 be allocated.**

- **IT Programme – Palo Alto Firewalls** – Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
 - **IT Programme – Complex Lives CMS** - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
 - **Innovation Factory Access Control** - Agree that the Innovation Factory Access Control project is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.
- Pitch provision - to authorise officers to discuss opportunities with partners across the city to facilitate opportunities for additional/enhanced pitch provision with further detail to be brought back to Committee as required in respect of potential opportunities.
 - Capital Letters of Offer – to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer in Q2 2024/25.
 - Contracts awarded – to note the update in relation to contracts awarded in Q2 2024/25.

3.0 **Main report**

Key Issues

3.1 **Awards and recognition**

Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Awards - Two of the Council’s physical projects were successful at the regional RICS Awards this year. Members may have noted that earlier this month St. Comgall’s also went on to win at the RICS National Awards for Best Refurbishment / Revitalisation Project 2024.

Construction Employer’s Federation (CEF) Awards 2024 – Shankill Shared Women’s Centre won the Social / Community Construction Project of the year (above £2m).

3.2 Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. Members are advised that the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.

3.3 Members have agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme:

Project	Overview	Stage movement
IT Programme – Grants Management System	Procurement of a replacement Grants Management System	Stage 3 – Committed: With a maximum budget allocation of £60,000
IT Programme – Palo Alto Firewall	Procurement of replacement firewall hardware	Move to Stage 3 – Committed
IT Programme – Complex Lives CMS	Procurement of a case management system for the Complex Lives initiative	Move to Stage 3 – Committed
Innovation Factory Access Control System	Procurement of a replacement for the access control system at the Innovation Factory.	Add to Stage 1 – Emerging

3.4 IT Programme – Grants Management System

Members will be aware that the Grants Management System was approved at SP&R Committee in November 2023 to move to *Stage 3 – Committed* on the Capital Programme. Members agreed that the necessary procurement processes be initiated as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has now been achieved and it is recommended that a maximum of £60,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

3.5 IT Programme – Palo Alto Firewall

This project is part of the overall IT Programme and will replace and licence new firewall hardware. The licencing on the current Palo Alto firewall ends in March 2025. Replacement is required before this date. Palo Alto Firewall is used to protect the Council from internet based attacks and provides web filtering, VPN services to suppliers including the new E5 finance system as well as the Global Protect service which allows staff and Members to work remotely.

Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.6 IT Programme - Complex Lives Case Management System

The Complex Lives initiative was established under Community Planning. It provides joined up support for some of Belfast’s most vulnerable people who have fallen into a cycle of rough sleeping, addiction, poor mental and physical health and offending behaviour. It is a multi-agency commitment across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors which brings together nine key organisations to address chronic homelessness in Belfast.

This project can be delivered via Digital Services and involves the procurement of a case management system for the initiative to collate data on performance and impact. The system will be accessible to Council staff and to users in six external organisations. The Council will continue to act as the lead partner. The project has received funding from NIHE for this financial year which it is anticipated will meet the costs of the IT project.

Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory

tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.7 Innovation Factory Access Control

The project is for the replacement of the access control system at Innovation Factory. The current system is no longer fit for purpose. This project is expected to come forward at pace. The Innovation Factory opened in 2016 and is operated by Oxford Innovation. The facility is currently operating at 83% occupancy with a range of businesses availing of the space and wrap around support through the centre. Flexible access to the centre is essential to the success and appeal to existing and potential tenants. The access control system has been an issue for several years with various mitigating steps taken over the years to try and repair the current system to ensure it is fit for purpose. All other options to fix the current system are exhausted and there is a requirement to upgrade the system which includes new door controllers, readers, and associated software.

Members are asked to agree that the Innovation Factory Access Control project is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.

3.8 Pitch provision

Members will be aware that the provision of additional pitches across the city has been identified as a priority and that a piece of work is currently underway on developing a strategy for Belfast on Pitches and Outdoor Sports Facilities. Officers are currently looking at all options within the Council's own estate however Members will recognise that available land for additional and/or enhanced pitch provision within the Council estate is limited. However, officers are aware that there may be opportunities to work with partners across the city in terms of looking at sites for additional provision either via unutilised or under utilised land that is not suitable for other purposes, existing provision that is not being fully maximised in terms of community use, land that is surplus to requirements or where there is the potential to work with partners to ensure that pitch provision is fully developed within any new proposal (e.g. a new school development.).

Members are asked to authorise officers to discuss opportunities with partners (including the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Education Authority, Belfast Met,

Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure) across the city to facilitate opportunity for enhanced pitch provision with further detail to be brought back to Committee as required in respect of potential opportunities.

3.9 Capital Letters of Offer

Members are asked to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer accepted in Q2 2024/25 at Appendix 1.

Contracts Awarded

Members are asked to note the award of tenders for capital works including services related to works in Q2 2024/25 at Appendix 2.

3.10 Financial & Resource Implications

Financial Implications – IT Programme – Grants Management System - a maximum of £60,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

Resource Implications – None

3.11 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2.0.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Contracts

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1), subject to the omission of the Security Guarding Services tender to enable consideration to be given to the introduction/delivery of an in-house model, with a report thereon to be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee;
- approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2); and

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- approve the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3):

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Supply of vehicle spare parts and consumables	Up to 4 years	£400,000	D Sales	To supply a wide range of spare parts and consumables to support the maintenance and operation of the Council's 400+ fleet.
Security guarding services	Up to 5 years	£5,000,000	N Largey	To fulfil security responsibilities across the Council in respect of the safety and security of staff, the public and buildings. Security services include manned guarding, keyholding, mobile patrolling and events stewarding.
Taxi services	Up to 3 years	£165,000	T Wallace	For the transportation of Staff and Members for the purposes of Council business
Replacement of external firewalls	Up to 5 years	£365,000	P Gribben	Current firewall will require license upgrades in March. Project includes replacement of current hardware with higher specification hardware and licenses which represents the best VFM option.
Occupational health service	Up to 3 years	£900,000	C Sheridan	Provision of occupational health services for staff in line with HR policies and procedures. Previously approved April SP&R for £380,000. Error with original contract value estimate. Now updated.
Employee Counselling Service	Up to 3 years	£900,000	C Sheridan	Provision of an employee counselling service for staff in line with HR policies and procedures
Provision of building management, operation and café	Up to 12 months	£196,096	D Martin	2 Royal Avenue has been operating since 2022 providing a non-commercial

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provision at 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast				space in the heart of the city providing citizens and visitors with a free and accessible place to relax, have a coffee and enjoy an arts and cultural offering.
Segmentation tool to provide resident classifications at a post code level including health and wellbeing issues and characteristics	Up to 2 years	£32,734	J Tully	The need to meet the requirement arising from the Belfast Agenda specifically around health and wellbeing and to understand the behaviours of our residents at a post code level for communications, engagement and interventions.

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
Advertising panels at bus stops and outside newsagents	Up to 18 months	£140,000	E McConville	For the advertising of council initiatives to the citizens of Belfast and areas of Northern Ireland as required. Clear Channel is the only company that provides advertising at bus stops and newsagents in Northern Ireland.	Clear Channel
Bus internal and external advertising	Up to 18 months	£140,000	E McConville	For the advertising of council initiatives to the citizens of Belfast and in areas of Northern Ireland as required. Global is the only company to provide advertising on Metro and Ulsterbus buses in Northern Ireland.	Global

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Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Duration	Modification	SRO	Description	Supplier
Procurement of Public Bike Share Scheme.	Up to 9 years	Additional 9 months and £476,080	D Martin	Previous Contract Modification approved by SP&R in Jan 2024 for additional 9 months and £391,000 for the period of March 2024 – December 2024. From January 2025 the monthly fee will increase to £52,897.78, increasing the additional 9 months to £476,080.	NSL Service Group

Equality and Good Relations

Dual Language Signage at Olympia Leisure Centre - Call In

The Committee noted an update in relation to the receipt of legal opinions on the call-in which would be submitted to the meeting of the Council on 4th November for consideration.

Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting on 7th October 2024

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 7th October 2024 including:

Presentation from MEARS

- To note the contents of the presentation detailed in the minutes.

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Presentation from Migrant Help

- To note the contents of the presentation detailed in the minutes.

Good Relations – Quarter 2 Update

The Shared City Partnership recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it:

- Notes the contents of the report, including the reprofiling of £7,500 within BCC9 to refresh the Good Relations Strategy and undertake an Audit to inform and develop a 3-year Good Relations Action Plan, through a co-design process. This project will continue as part of the 2025/26 Action Plan; and
- Agrees that the Chair of the Partnership issue the recently launched report, 'Segregation and the Environment, Breaking Down Barriers', to all NI Executive Ministers.

PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan – Update

- The Partnership recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it notes the contents of the report.

AOB

- The Partnership recommend to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it notes the verbal update from Ms. A Roberts EBCDA who gave an overview of the work which had been undertaken in collaboration with a number of community and voluntary groups in the creation of a 'welcome pack' which was being distributed to new residents in the greater east Belfast area.
- The Partnership agreed the request of Fr. M. Magill, that Members would undertake a walking tour on the Forth Meadow Greenway in west Belfast at a future date.

Diversity Action Plans 2024-27

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To agree the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and LGBTQIA+ Action Plan for 2024 – 27 including resources to deliver year 1 activity.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **agree the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and LGBTQIA+ Action Plan for 2024 – 27 and associated year 1 costs.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

Our Equality and Diversity Action Plan outlines how we will promote equality and diversity in our ambitions to create a city in which people love to live, learn, invest, work and visit. It also contributes to our compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Actions are categorised under the following corporate plan priorities:

- Growing an inclusive economy
- Living here
- Cross cutting
- Organisational priorities

3.2 As part of the Equality and Diversity Action Plan the Council has committed to developing and delivering a Gender Action Plan, LGBTQIA + Action Plan and a Race Equality Action Plan. The Women's Steering Group has developed and agreed a three-year GAP for delivery between April 2024 to March 2027. Year 1 has been costed and is being presented to Committee for approval. HR has developed a three-year LGBT+ Action Plan for 2024-27, in collaboration with the LGBTQIA + staff network and this is also being presented, with costs for year 1, for approval.

Gender Action Plan (GAP)

3.3 Gender inequalities are deeply embedded in our social, economic and cultural systems. There is overwhelming evidence that women disproportionately experience disadvantage and discrimination, a reflection of historical unaddressed inequality, but also that inequalities have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reform and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics affirm the persistence of gendered inequalities, which continue to inhibit women's life opportunities in Northern Ireland. Men will benefit from gender equality as they too face gender-specific issues such as lower life expectancy, bad health, lower education levels and are impacted negatively by rigid gender norms.

3.4 The proposed GAP 2024-27 (see Appendix One) has been developed following a facilitated workshop to agree the overall vision and aim of the Gender Action Plan, take stock of progress to date and the current situation with regard to gender equality issues, generate ideas and proposals for the future and agree actions for the 2024-2027 action plan.

The feedback from the workshop and consultation process with the Women's Steering group and the Women's Network Group has been incorporated into the draft 3 year plan. Members will be aware of the recently launched Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and it is planned that a representation from TEO will attend CMT in the coming weeks to discuss in more detail how the Council can work with TEO to help deliver the Strategic Framework

Request for additional funding for the annual International Women's Day rally in the city.

- 3.5 At its meeting in January 2014, Strategic Policy and Resourcing Committee agreed recurring annual expenditure of £6000 to fund the annual International Women's Day rally in the city. The annual funding was increased to £6500 following approval at the Committee in January 2019. To date, the costs, like other Gender Action Plan costs, have been met through the Organisational Development (OD) budget. In December 2023, representatives from Reclaim the Agenda, organisers of the annual rally attended Women's Steering Group (WSG) to request an increase in the funding provided, to account not only for additional costs caused by inflation but also so those arising as a result of the increase in size and scope of the event. The group requested an additional £8,900, making the total request for funding £15,400. Going forward, Reclaim the Agenda has ambition to develop further the scope and size of the annual IWD celebrations and programme, in particular for 2025, the 50th anniversary of the United Nations officially adopting 8th March as International Women's Day.
- 3.6 WSG requested a breakdown of the event costs and undertook to explore the feasibility of increased funding. Reclaim the Agenda was also advised to explore the possibility of additional funding with other organisations, including those which have made contributions to the event in recent years (e.g. Equality Commission for N Ireland and various trade unions) and other organisations, in particular those that will benefit from the rally increasing its presence in the city.
- 3.7 The OD budget, which has not been increased for a number of years, funds a variety of activities and projects being delivered as part of the People Strategy and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including officer learning and development, equality, diversity and inclusion and health and wellbeing initiatives. Other OD initiatives, for example, the elected member development programme, are also funded through the OD budget. OD commitments for 2024/25 and the next two years of the People Strategy years have been considered and in light

of current and continuing demands on the OD budget, it is possible to allocate an additional £3500 each year to the IWD rally. It is therefore proposed that the allocation in the GAP increases to £10,000 for 2024/25 and annually going forward.

LGBTQIA+ Action Plan

- 3.8 HR has developed a three year LGBTQIA+ Action Plan for 2024-27, in collaboration with the staff network 'Proud' and this is also being presented, with costs for year 1, for approval. Please see Appendix Two. The plan has been developed to ensure that our organisational culture and working environment allows staff to feel comfortable to be their whole selves at work and that policies and practices empower talent development at all levels and the removal of any form of discrimination. It also aims to increase the understanding of the wider workforce of issues facing the LGBTQIA+ communities.

Disability Action Plan

- 3.9 Members should also note that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 ('DDA') Section 49 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons, and to the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life. Our current Plan runs, approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and reported on annually, runs from 2022 until 2025.

Detail on all of the actions delivered as part of the Disability Action Plan, the Gender Action Plan and the LGBTQIA+ Action Plan are included in the annual report to the Equality Commission.

Race Equality Action Plan

- 3.10 Members will be aware that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy, as Executive Sponsor for Race, has been leading on the development of the Race Equality Action Plan. The development of the plan has considered how we deliver our services and actions that we can take as an employer to create a more diverse workforce, and as a city leader, to influence and bring about change. Directors and senior managers have undertaken Cultural Competence and Anti Racism Training and CMT has participated in one-to-one coaching with Dr Lucy Michael to identify and develop appropriate individual departmental actions. Members should also note that that Dr Michael briefed party group leaders on progress with development of the plan on 26 September 2024.

Financial & Resource Implications

Financial

- 3.11 The cost of delivery of the proposed Gender Action Plan 2024 - 2027 year 1 activities is estimated at £28 000. The cost of delivery of the LGBTQIA+ Action Plan 2024-2027 year 1 is estimated at £10 200. Both plans will be met from the Organisational Development budget.

Human Resources

- 3.12 The plans also identify the role that individual business units and departments have in delivery of the plans.

Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Implications

- 3.13 The delivery of the Gender and the LGBTQIA+ Action Plans will result in positive outcomes. The promotion of equality and diversity entails more than the elimination of discrimination, it requires proactive action. The actions contained within both plans will not only impact on internal operations but also have a positive impact externally on women and the LGBTQIA+ community in our city.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Forth Meadow Community Greenway

The Committee considered a report in relation to signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Alderman McCoubrey,

That, due to the late receipt of the report, it be deferred until the next monthly meeting of the Council.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor Black,

That consideration of the report be deferred for a period of one week.

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On a vote, fourteen Members voted for the amendment and five against and it was declared carried.

The amendment was put as the substantive motion and passed.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report, in relation to the erection of signage on the Forth Meadow Community Greenway, to a special meeting to be held on Friday, 1st November at 9.30 a.m.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of the Party Group
Leaders Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 17th October.

**Requests for use of the City Hall
and the provision of Hospitality**

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
2024 Functions					
Newstart Education Centre	11 December 2024	35th Anniversary Youth Celebration of Achievement of non-political, community-led organisation who deliver large-scale peace funded, cross-border, cross-community youth intervention programme called STRIVE for young people vulnerable to racism and sectarianism as well as manipulation from criminal/paramilitary gangs.	C	Current rate free as not for profit	Yes, Wine and Soft Drink reception as significant anniversary

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
		Numbers attending – 100			
Chartered Institute of Marketing Ireland	12 December 2024	Celebrate 15 years of the Chartered Marketer - the reception to celebrate the dedication, excellence, and achievements in personal development to becoming a Chartered Marketer. Numbers attending – 40 – 50	C	Room hire £450	No hospitality as Corporate Sponsor involved with reception.
2025 Functions					
Immaculata Football Club	18 January 2025	Celebration of 80 years of Immaculata Football Club - Reception, Dinner, Speeches, and entertainment organised in conjunction with Grosvenor Community Centre. Numbers attending – 250 - 300.	C & D	Current rate free as charity	Yes, Wine and Soft Drink reception as significant anniversary

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
4 Corners Festival	4 February 2025	Celebrating Local Peacebuilding for a Shared Home – celebration of the contribution of local organisations to peacebuilding in Belfast with particular reference to the creation of a shared home in line with the Festival’s 2025 theme of ‘Home?’. Numbers attending – 50	D	Current rate free as charity	Yes, Tea and Coffee reception as charity
Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful	13 February 2025	Live Here Love Here Community Awards – an awards night to celebrate the work of volunteers and groups who participate in our Live Here Love Here Campaign, working towards the vision of a beautiful Northern Ireland by inspiring people to take responsibility for creating cleaner, greener and more sustainable communities. Numbers attending – 130	B and C	Current rate free as charity	Yes, Wine and Soft Drink reception as charity

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Queen's University Computing Society	13 March 2025	Gala Dinner for colleagues and student of the Computing Society – reception, speeches, dinner and entertainment. Numbers attending – 350 - 400	D	Room hire £1250	No Hospitality.
ASG – Anderson Spratt Group	20 March 2025	NI Hummingbird Awards – daytime event to celebrate equality, diversity, and inclusion within workplaces and across communities in Northern Ireland. Numbers attending – 100	C	Room hire £450	No hospitality as Corporate Sponsors involved with the event.
Food Standards Agency NI	29 April 2025	FSA UK & International Affairs Celebration to showcase the work of protecting food businesses, environmental health, and ports to colleagues from England and Wales. Numbers attending – 150	B	Room hire £450	No hospitality

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Ormeau Runners	27 September 2025	10th Anniversary celebration of this community racing club, established to raise awareness of running fitness for mental health, social interaction and physical health. Numbers attending – 100	C	Current rate free as voluntary group	Yes, Wine and Soft Drink reception as significant anniversary

Request for the use of the Council Chamber

The Committee approved a request by the Ledley Hall Boys and Girls Club for the use of the Council Chamber for a mock debate as part of the ‘Democracy Works?’ Programme.

Request for Suffolk Winter Wonderland event at Suffolk Community Garden

The Committee was advised that the Council had received a request from Suffolk Events Circle to host a winter wonderland at Suffolk community garden on the 29th and 30th of November and 1st of December 2024. The event would be aimed at children between the ages of 0-16 and would allow them to experience a magical Christmas experience along with a visit from Santa and his elves. There would also be a live reindeer in attendance to make it feel authentic.

The group also planned on having a range of lights and displays to animate the garden to make it a memorable experience. The group had informed the Council that there would be a fee of £5 per child. However, this would be discounted for families with multiple children. The income that was generated from the event would be invested back into the community for future events. The event had taken place last Christmas and had passed off without any incidents. The money raised from that event allowed the organisers to host an easter event.

The Committee granted authority to the applicant for the proposed event on the dates noted; subject to the completion of the appropriate event management plan and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers:

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- I. resolves all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
- II. meets all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and
- III. shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.

The Committee noted that the above decisions were taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which was currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Council's Commercial team.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Disability Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Disability Working Group of 14th October.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Language Strategy Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Language Strategy Working Group of 18th October.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the All-Party
Working Group on the City Centre**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the All-Party Working Group on the City Centre of 27th September.

Aisling Awards

The Committee was advised that correspondence has been received from the Aisling Awards for Belfast City Council representatives to attend its Awards Ceremony on 22nd November 2024.

Operating for 27 Years, the Aisling Awards celebrated the best of Belfast in the private, voluntary and community sectors. Previous honorary guests had ranged from Special Olympians to the Rev. Jesse Jackson and the family of Daithí Mac Gabhann.

The 2024 event would be held at the Europa Hotel on 22nd November.

The Committee was informed that various sponsorship opportunities for the event have been received by the Council. Those to be considered included:

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 25th October, 2024**

- Table for 10 at the Banquet £1500 + VAT
- A pair of tickets for the banquet £300 + VAT
- A single ticket for the banquet £175 + VAT

The Committee agreed to sponsor a table for 10 at a cost of £1500 + VAT at the Aisling Awards.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the City
Regeneration Members Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the City Regeneration Members Working Group of 3rd October.

Issues raised in advance by Members

**Fundraising box at the City Hall Christmas
Tree – Councillor McKeown to raise**

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor McKeown raised the issue of locating a fundraising box at the City Hall Christmas Tree.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to the use of a fundraising box, on an annual basis, at the City Hall Christmas tree and that the monies raised this year be donated to the Medical Aid for Palestine (MAP) Charity; and that match funding of the monies raised be donated by the Council to the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice.

**Incident regarding Portrait in the City Hall
On 19 October – Councillor Bunting to raise**

The Committee noted that Councillor Bunting had indicated that this issue had already been dealt with.

Chairperson

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Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 1st November, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson); and
Alderman McCoubrey;
Councillors Beattie, Black, Brennan, Bunting, Cobain,
de Faoite, R-M. Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett,
Groogan, Long, Maghie, McDonough-Brown, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin, Nelson and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

Forth Meadow Community Greenway

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1

- **To provide members of the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee (‘the Committee’) with an update on the steps which were agreed at its meeting on 22nd September 2023 namely that an equality screening be undertaken by an external organisation with experience in minority languages in relation to the decision to erect dual language signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway and a further legal opinion be obtained on the issues raised at the meeting from an appropriately qualified person in relation to minority language rights.**

2.0 **Recommendation**

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report; and
- Determine next steps in relation to the erection of signage on the Forthmeadow Community Greenway

3.0 **Main Report**

Background

3.1 At its meeting on 23rd March, the Committee was presented with a number of options in relation to dual language signage on parts of the Forthmeadow Community Greenway.

The Committee agreed to the following proposal:

‘That the Committee agrees the proposals in respect of signage for the Forth Meadow Community Greenway as outlined in paragraph 3 of the report, subject to the Beacons, Information Panels and the Directional Finger Post Signs located in the Gaeltacht Quarter area (that is Section 3 – Fall Park, Section 4 – Bog Meadows, Section 5- Westlink to City Centre and Springfield Park/Dam) all being in dual-language, that is, English and Irish’.

3.2 The officer recommendations are set out below, with the Committee decision on additional signage shown in red.

Beacons

Section 1 - Glencairn - 2 sides English and 2 sides Ulster Scots
Section 2 - Forth River / Springfield Road/Innovation Factory - 4 sides English
Section 3 - Falls Park - 2 sides English and 2 sides Irish
Section 4 - Bog Meadows - 2 sides English and 2 sides Irish
Springfield Park/Dam - 4 faces English (Irish)

Information Panels

Section 1 - Glencairn - English
Section 2 - Forth River / Springfield Road/Innovation Factory - English
Section 3 - Falls Park Dual - English/Irish
Section 4 - Bog Meadows Dual - English/Irish
Section 5 – Westlink to City Centre - English (Irish)
Springfield Park/Dam – English (Irish)

Directional Finger Post Signs

Section 1 - Glencairn English

Section 2 - Forth River / Springfield Road/Innovation Factory - English

Section 3 - Falls Park - English

Section 4 - Bog Meadows - English

Section 5 – Westlink to City Centre - English (Irish)

Springfield Park/Dam - English (Irish)

3.3 On 3rd April 2023, the Chief Executive received a ‘call-in requisition’ in relation to this decision.

3.4 Previous Call-in

Members will be aware that the call-in process is provided for in Section 41 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 (‘the 2014 Act’), with more detailed provision about how that process operates being contained within the Council’s Standing Orders.

3.5 According to Section 41 of the 2014 Act, 15 per cent of members may ask for a decision to be called-in because they consider that the decision is flawed on ‘either or both of the following grounds— (a) that the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues; (b) that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district’. Members will note that the call-in requisition referred to both grounds as set out above.

3.6 In accordance with Standing Orders, on receipt of an admissible call-in under Section 41(1)(b), the opinion of a practicing solicitor or barrister will be sought on whether the call-in has merit. Where a decision is called in under both grounds of Section 41 of the 2014 Act and is found to have merit, Standing Order 48(b)(8) requires the substantive decision to be taken by qualified majority.

3.7 Counsel’s opinion was subsequently sought and counsel took the view that the call-in had merit on procedural grounds as the decision had not been subject to equality screening.

3.8 The legal opinion was circulated to Party Group Leaders on 30th June 2023 who were advised that officers were making arrangements to have the decision screened. Unfortunately due to officer error, the legal opinion was not placed before the next available meeting of the Committee, which is required under Standing Order 48(b)(8).

3.9 Whilst the opinion was not formally tabled, Committee will note that the opinion was discussed by the Committee at its meeting on 23rd September 2023. In light of those discussions, Committee requested an external expert with experience in dealing with minority language issues conduct a screening of the March 2023 decision and that officers seek a further legal opinion on the wider issues.

3.10 Given the additional information contained within this report in relation to the external screening and senior counsel's opinion, which was not before Committee in September 2023, officers are of the view that any decision taken on foot of this report is a new decision and is not therefore subject to qualified majority vote.

3.11 Language Strategy

Members will be aware that the Council's Language Strategy was adopted in 2019. This Strategy states that the Council aspires to create a place where linguistic diversity is celebrated and respected, and where those who live, work and visit Belfast can expect to access what Belfast has to offer, using forms of language with which they are familiar and comfortable.

3.12 In 2022, officers brought forward a draft Action Plan flowing from the Language Strategy which was informed through regular stakeholder meetings. Following a period of public consultation, the final version of the Action Plan was adopted in June 2024. This sets out a number of actions which are intended to further the ambitions set out in the Language Strategy, including the promotion of the use of Irish in delivering Council services.

3.13 In tandem with this process, officers were also working with Irish Language stakeholders to co-design a draft Irish Language Policy, which is currently subject to public consultation. This policy includes a commitment to rolling out dual language signage across Council facilities, including parks and greenways. As part of those proposals, the Forthmeadow Community Greenway is likely to fall under the priority 1 categories of Council facilities for the roll out of dual language signage.

3.14 Equality screening

The Forthmeadow Community Greenway was subject to significant consultation and was equality screening in 2020 but

was screened out at that time. However, there is no reference to bilingual signage as part of that consultation or screening process.

3.15 Officers have been working with an external expert in relation to the screening as requested by Committee meeting in September 2023. As part of that screening work representations have been considered from Conradh na Gaeilge and the Committee on the Administration of Justice, together with advice received from senior counsel in relation to the wider legal issues. The draft screening report is attached at Appendix Two.

3.16 Equality & good relations considerations

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 ('the 1998 Act') requires public authorities to have regard to 'the need to promote equality of opportunity' and to 'the desirability of promoting good relations'.

3.17 Senior counsel opinion on wider language issues has advised that there are a number of factors to be taken into account in circumstances where there appears to be a conflict between both of these duties. These are set out below:

- a) It would appear that the good relations duty is intended to be complementary to equality rather than in conflict with it, and it is intended to embrace diversity in all its forms.
- b) Both duties must be discharged, i.e. the Council must have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.
- c) The Council's Equality Scheme requires the Council to assess compliance with both obligations under Section 75 through Equality Impact Assessments, screening etc.
- d) Neither duty requires a particular substantive outcome (albeit that the substantive outcome must be appropriately informed by the procedural consideration under the duties).

3.18 Committee will recall that Forth Meadow Community Greenway is a £5.1million EU PEACE IV-funded project to connect existing open spaces in north and west Belfast along a 12km route from Clarendon Playing Fields to Weavers Cross, the new Transport Hub in the city centre. The greenway passes through two District Electoral Areas (DEAs), Black Mountain and Court. While Black Mountain DEA is predominantly single

identity in terms of community background, parts of Court DEA are far more mixed. There is detailed discussion in relation to community background within the screening.

3.19 Committee will note that the draft screening report concludes that whilst many of the measures proposed by the Council align closely with its statutory obligations and its own strategies in relation to the promotion of minority languages and the enhancement of good relations, there is also the possibility that the proposed inclusion of dual language signage at certain locations may act as a catalyst for heightening community tensions, given the local demography and history of those areas.

3.20 Committee will further note that the screening identifies a potential mitigation of erecting trilingual signage at Springfield Dam, to include Ulster Scots and Irish.

4.0 Recommendations

Committee is asked to:

1. Note the contents of the report; and
2. Determine next steps in relation to the erection of signage on the Forthmeadow Community Greenway.

5.0 Equality & Good Relations Issues

None other than those detailed in the report above.”

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor Garrett,

That the Committee agrees to the erection of signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report as follows:

Beacons

Section 1 – Glencairn - 2 sides English and 2 sides Ulster Scots
Section 2 – Forth River / Springfield Road/Innovation Factory – 4 sides English
Section 3 – Falls Park - 2 sides English and 2 sides Irish
Section 4 – Bog Meadows - 2 sides English and 2 sides Irish
Springfield Park/Dam – 4 faces English (Irish)

Information Panels

Section 1 – Glencairn – English
Section 2 – Forth River / Springfield Road/Innovation Factory – English
Section 3 – Falls Park Dual – English/Irish

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Section 4 – Bog Meadows Dual – English/Irish
Section 5 – Westlink to City Centre - English (Irish)
Springfield Park/Dam – English (Irish)

Directional Finger Post Signs

Section 1 – Glencairn English
Section 2 – Forth River / Springfield Road/Innovation Factory – English
Section 3 – Falls Park - English
Section 4 – Bog Meadows – English
Section 5 – Westlink to City Centre – English (Irish)
Springfield Park/Dam – English (Irish)

Amendment (1)

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor Maghie,

That the Committee agrees that erection of all the signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway be trilingual, that is, in English, Irish and Ulster Scots.

On a vote, five Members voted for the amendment (1) and fifteen against and it was declared lost.

Amendment (2)

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Alderman McCoubrey,

That the Committee agrees to erection of signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report, except for the signage at Springfield Park/Dam which would be trilingual, that is, in English, Irish and Ulster Scots.

On a vote, nine Members voted for the amendment (2) and ten against, with one no vote and it was declared lost.

Original Proposal

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Beattie and Seconded by Councillor Garrett was put to the meeting when fifteen Members voted for it and five against and it was declared passed.

Standing Order 14 - Submission of minutes to Council

In accordance with Standing Order 14, the Committee agreed, as the meeting had been held later than seven clear days before the meeting of the Council, that the minutes of the meeting be submitted to the Council on 4th November for ratification.

Chairperson

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Extract from minutes of:

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

20th September, 2024

“Equality and Good Relations

Dual Language Signage at Olympia Leisure Centre

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of report or summary of main issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of the outcome of the consultation on the draft Equality Impact Assessment carried out in relation to the erection of bilingual Irish/English signage at Olympia Leisure Centre.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report;
- Note the contents of the Consultation Report at Appendix 1;
- Note and approve the contents and findings of the Equality Impact Assessment Draft Final Decision Report at Appendix 2;
- Determine whether it wishes to proceed with the erection of bilingual signage at Olympia Leisure Centre.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Belfast City Council carried out a consultation into the proposed erection of bilingual or multilingual external naming and internal directional signage at its four city wide leisure centres (Andersonstown, Olympia, Lisnasharragh and Templemore) in 2019 / 2020.

On 24th January, 2020 [Agenda for Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on Friday, 24th January, 2020, 9.30 am - Belfast City Council \(www.internalminutes\)](#) the Council’s Strategic Planning and Resources Committee agreed to erect bilingual external naming and internal directional signage in Andersonstown Leisure Centre.

3.2 At a subsequent meeting on 24 September 2021, [Agenda for Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on Friday, 24th September, 2021, 9.30 am - Belfast City Council \(www.internalminutes\)](#) the Committee considered agenda item 2(f)

‘consultation on signage – Andersonstown, Lisnasharragh, Olympia and Templemore Leisure Centres – Options Paper.’ Committee agreed to the erection of bilingual signage at Olympia Leisure Centre but did not take any decision on the erection of bilingual signage at Lisnasharragh or Templemore leisure centres, instead agreeing for a report on linguistic accessibility at those centres to be presented to Committee in the future.

The decision with respect to Olympia was subsequently called in and a barrister’s opinion was obtained on 8 December 2021, which found merit in respect of Ground 41(1) (b) of the Local Government Act (2014) – that ‘the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district’.

Committee will be aware that this opinion was given in the absence of an Equality Impact Assessment.

- 3.3 Following receipt of the barristers opinion, the ‘called in’ decision of the Committee of 24 September 2021 to erect bilingual signage at Olympia was placed on the agenda of the next available Council meeting on 10 Jan 2022, in accordance with standing orders, where the taking of any such decision would have required the support of a qualified majority vote of 80% of the Members present and voting. At the Council meeting, Members took a decision to refer the matter back to the Committee and the original decision to erect the signage did not proceed to a vote.**

Committee agreed at its meeting on 21 January 2022 to proceed with an Equality Impact Assessment on the erection of bilingual external naming and internal directional signage at Olympia Leisure Centre.

3.4 Key Issues

A consultation on the Draft Equality Impact Assessment was launched on 12 June 2023 and ran for 14 weeks until 17 September 2023. The public were encouraged to respond online through the Council’s consultation platform and there was an opportunity to submit written information to the consultation. There were also a number of online and in-person public meetings.

- 3.5 The consultation report gives an analysis of the statistical responses for each question and an analysis of some of the key themes in the commentary under each question. The consultation responses showed a strength of feeling both for and against the erection of bilingual signage.**

- 3.6 Much of the commentary opposing the erection of bilingual signage is based on the concept that it will cause alienation and damage community relations. Commentary in favour of the erection of the bilingual signage states that this is in line with the concept of rights and inclusivity, and is in keeping with international guidance on minority language issues.**

- 3.7 Committee will be aware of developments in the Council's approach to language since the EQIA on the proposal to erect bilingual signage at Olympia was conducted. In May 2024 Council approved a Language Strategy Action Plan that sets out how the Council will deliver its commitments under the five strands of the Language Strategy (those five strands being Irish, Ulster-Scots, new communities, sign language and disability communications).

Committee will further be aware that the Council is currently conducting a consultation on a draft Irish Language Policy, which itself is the subject of an EQIA. The draft policy, among other things, commits the Council to adopting a dual language approach to signage in all its facilities and will, as part of a rolling programme, prioritise the erection of such signage through a categorisation approach.

- 3.8 Committee will be aware that the original Committee decision of September 2021 to erect bilingual signage at Olympia Leisure Centre did not proceed. The matter was referred by Council back to the Committee who decided to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment into the matter. Committee are now being asked to make a new decision on signage at Olympia, based on all of the information available, including the findings of the EQIA.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.9 None. The cost of the signage will be met out of existing budgets.

Equality, good relations or rural needs implications

- 3.10 Committee will be aware of the Council's two statutory duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the 'Act'). Section 75(1) states that the Council must have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine different groups: persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, marital status or sexual orientation; between men and women generally; between persons with a disability and persons without; and between persons with dependants and persons without. Section 75(2) states that the Council must have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
- 3.11 Schedule 9 Paragraph 4(2)(a) of the Act requires the Council to have a scheme that states the Council's arrangements for assessing compliance with its duties (with regard to both equality and good relations) under Section 75 of the Act.

The Council's Equality Scheme currently provides that the Council uses Equality Impact Assessments for this purpose.

Recent legal advice obtained by the Council in an opinion dated June 27, 2024 advised that the key legislative requirement for the Good Relations Duty requires the Council to have a scheme which states the Council's arrangements for assessing its compliance with the Good Relations Duty and for consulting on matters to

which the Good Relations Duty is likely to be relevant (including details of the persons to be consulted).

Section 75 does not require the use of Equality Impact Assessments in relation to the Good Relations Duty, nor does the Equality Commission, although it does make a recommendation to that effect.

It is open to the Council to adopt different arrangements, not involving the use of an EQIA, for assessing compliance with the Good Relations Duty. However that would require an amendment to the Council's current Equality Scheme.

3.12 Committee will note that Section 75 of the Act requires the Council to carry out a review of its Equality Scheme every five years and make any relevant updates to a revised Equality Scheme. Therefore the Scheme is due for revision next year.

3.13 Section 4 of the Draft Final Decision Report provides an analysis of potential impacts on both equality of opportunity and good relations.

Committee will note that the primary function of an EQIA is to determine the extent of differential impact of a policy upon nine groups listed in Section 75(1) of the Act and in turn whether that impact is adverse, that is, whether it has a negative impact on one or more of the nine equality categories. If it is decided that the policy has an adverse impact, the public authority must consider measures which might mitigate the adverse impact, and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.

The Draft Final Decision Report states with regard to equality of opportunity that prior to consultation, it was suggested that the proposal for bilingual signage may give rise to a potential adverse impact for those from a Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist ('PUL') background and that signage may discourage access or use of Olympia by those groups. The consultation confirmed that this perception did exist within PUL communities i.e. the proposal did have potential to alienate users from these communities, making it less likely that they would use the centre. However, the report further states 'At the same time it was also suggested during the consultation that the absence of bilingual signage may have an adverse impact on those from the Irish language community.'

The report notes that a very small number of respondents with a disability did indicate that multilingual signage may have the potential to cause confusion given the nature of their disability (e.g. dyslexia, learning difficulties).

With regard to Good Relations, the report states that 'The evidence that is available to date, and including the previous round of public consultation in 2019/20 along with the current consultation, does indicate that the proposal for bilingual naming and signage has the potential to have an adverse impact on good relations on grounds

of religious belief, political opinion, and also perhaps national identity.’ The report concludes that ‘evidence available prior to consultation suggested that the proposal may have the potential for adverse impact and the consultation has confirmed that, within certain communities, this impact is perceived to be real and to be significant.’

These findings are discussed in more detail in Section 4 of the Draft Final Decision Report attached to this report at Appendix 2.”

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor R-M Donnelly,

That the Committee agrees to proceed with the erection of dual language signage, that is English and Irish, at the Olympia Leisure Centre.

On a vote, fifteen Members voted for the proposal and five against and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- noted the contents of the report;
- noted the contents of the Consultation Report at Appendix 1;
- noted and approved the contents and findings of the Equality Impact Assessment Draft Final Decision Report at Appendix 2;
- Agreed to proceed with the erection of dual language signage, that is English and Irish, at the Olympia Leisure Centre.”

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RE: BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

In the Matter of a Call-in Wholly or Partly Under Section 41(1)(b) of the Local Government (NI) 2014

OPINION

INTRODUCTION

1. Counsel have been asked to provide an opinion with respect to the call-in of a decision regarding dual language signage at Olympia Leisure Centre.
2. Pursuant to Section 41(2) of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, this opinion relates to the issue of whether the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district under Section 41(1)(b).

FACTS

COUNCIL'S DECISION

3. On 20 September 2024 the Council's Strategic Policy & Resources Committee made a decision to erect dual language signage at Olympia Leisure Centre.

SECTION 41 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT (NI) 2014

4. Section 41 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 provides as follows:

(1) Standing orders **must make provision requiring reconsideration¹** of a decision if 15 per cent, of the members of the council (rounded up to the next highest whole number if necessary) present to the clerk of the council a requisition on either or both of the following grounds –

- (a) that the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues;
- (b) that the **decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district.**

(2) Standing orders **must require the clerk of the council to obtain an opinion from a practising barrister or solicitor before reconsideration** of a decision on a requisition made wholly or partly on the ground mentioned in subsection (1)(b).

¹ All emphasis is added save where it appears to the contrary

(3) Regulations may amend the percentage mentioned in subsection (1) and the process by which a legal opinion is obtained in subsection (2).

(4) In this section –

“decision” means a decision of the council or a committee of the council and includes a decision to make a recommendation;

“reconsideration” means –

(a) in the case of a decision of the council, reconsideration by the council;

(b) in any other case, consideration by the council or any specified committee of the council (whether or not the decision is a decision of that committee);

“section” , in relation to the inhabitants of a district, means a section of a specified description;

“specified” means specified in standing orders.

THE CALL-IN

5. On 1 October 2014 a call-in was submitted pursuant to section 41. The call-in was partly on the ground that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district, and in particular:
 - a. The community of Blackstaff/The Village.
 - b. The Protestant Community.
 - c. The British Community.
 - d. The Northern Irish Community.
6. The Community Impact Grounds under s.41(1)(b) are set out from pages 4 – 9 of the call-in form. Each ground relies on section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

OPINION

STANDING ORDERS

7. Section 48 of the Council’s Standing Orders set out the call-in process.
8. In particular, section 48(b)(4) provides that:

*In this part, “section of the inhabitants of the district” means any section of the inhabitants that is **clearly identifiable by** location, interest or other category (including **those categories indemnified in Section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**).*

RELEVANT PROVISIONS OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ACT 1998

9. The grounds for call-in with respect to each category of the community rely on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (and it is noted that Section

48(b)(4) of the Standing Orders specifically refer to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998).

10. Section 75 provides for equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation, between men and women generally, between persons with a disability and persons without, and between persons with dependants and persons without.
11. Section 75 does not include “*language*” as a category. Relevant extracts from Hansard make clear that “*language*” was expressly considered and expressly omitted from section 75.
12. The relevant extract from Hansard for 27 July 1998² indicates that the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) begged to move an amendment which would, inter alia, expressly introduce ‘*language*’ as one of the categories in section 75. The exchanges are relevant and instructive:

In response, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Marjorie Mowlam) said:

Paragraph 3 on page 16 of the agreement, which deals with “Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity”, does not include language in the list of equality of opportunity issues that are to be covered by statutory obligation. That does not mean that we do not consider language as central to the cultural identity of the different communities in Northern Ireland. There are a number of commitments on linguistic diversity, and the Irish language in particular, in the agreement, as several hon. Members, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), pointed out. They are being implemented by administrative and, where appropriate, legislative means. For instance, the commitment to place a statutory duty on the Department of Education to encourage and facilitate Irish medium education has already been enacted. The Government have also decided to sign the Council of Europe charter for regional or minority languages and will specify Irish for part III purposes, at an early date.

The Member for Falkirk, West (Dennis Canavan) then asked as follows:

I am listening carefully to my right hon. Friend, but will she confirm that nothing in the agreement would exclude placing a statutory responsibility on public authorities to promote and encourage equality of opportunity in the matter of the Irish language vis-a-vis English or any other language?

In response the Secretary of State said:

² The relevant extract is appended to this Opinion.

I thank my hon. Friend. I was making it clear that we have already made much progress on language as part of cultural identities in Northern Ireland. He knows that we have been trying all along in the settlement Bill to implement the Good Friday agreement without taking away from it or adding to it so that it is what the parties agreed. If the Assembly wants to make other changes in the months and years ahead, it is up to its elected Members so to do.

Jeremy Corbyn asked further as follows:

Before she sits down, will she say a word about the issue of language and the way that it is included in the agreement? If, as seems likely, my amendment is not accepted, what happens in relation to language?

The Secretary of State said:

As I said earlier, language is an important part of cultural identity in both communities and the Irish language is crucial. We have moved a long way in terms of the Irish language – for example, with a statutory obligation in respect of Irish-medium schools. Our specification of Irish for the purposes of part III of the Council of Europe charter for regional or minority languages will make a difference. That comes close to fulfilling the obligations relating to language in the Good Friday agreement. If my hon. Friend believes that that is not the case and he comes to me with other specific changes, we shall consider them; however, I must point out that we are addressing these questions within the Good Friday agreement.

13. The use of such language in aid of interpreting legislation is summarised in ‘Erskine May: Use of parliamentary material in court proceedings’³ as formulated by the Speaker’s counsel and adopted in judgments:

‘The Speaker accepts that there are circumstances in which reference can properly be made to proceedings in Parliament and where therefore this will not constitute impermissible “questioning” of statements made in Parliament:

- (i) The Courts may admit evidence of proceedings in Parliament to prove what was said or done in Parliament as a matter of historical fact where this is uncontroversial: see *Prebble v Television New Zealand Ltd* [1995] 1 AC 321, at 337.*
- (ii) Parliamentary material may be considered in determining whether legislation is compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights: see *Wilson v First County Trust Ltd (No. 2)* [2004] 1 AC 816, at paragraph 65 (Lord Nicholls of Birkenhead).*

³ See at <https://erskinemay.parliament.uk/section/4594/use-of-parliamentary-material-in-court-proceedings#footnote-link-21>

- (iii) *The Courts may have regard to a clear ministerial statement as an aid to the construction of ambiguous legislation: see Pepper v Hart [1993] AC 593, at 638.*
- (iv) *The **Courts may have regard to Parliamentary proceedings to ensure that the requirements of a statutory process have been complied with.** For example, in this case, the Courts may admit such material in order to be satisfied that the steps specified in section 9 of the Planning Act have been complied with.*
- (v) *The Courts may have regard to Parliamentary proceedings in the context of the scope and effect of Parliamentary privilege, on which it is important for Parliament and the Courts to agree if possible: see the decision of Stanley Burnton J (as he then was) in Office of Government Commerce v Information Commissioner [2010] QB 98, at paragraph 61.*
- (vi) *An exception has also been identified for the use of ministerial statements in judicial review proceedings. The Speaker accepts that such an exception exists but contends that the scope and nature of this exception has not yet been the subject of detailed judicial analysis. It calls for careful consideration of the constitutional issues involved. We respectfully agree.’ R (Heathrow Hub) v Secretary of State for Transport [2020] EWCA Civ 13, [2020] 4 All ER 276, para 158 and R (PRCBC) v SSHD [2019] EWHC 3536 (Admin), [2020] 2 All ER 572, para 90.*

14. This is not considered to be an exhaustive list of circumstances, rather as illustrative.
15. In the circumstances of this case, in which there is a clear claim based on a legislative provision, we consider that it is entirely permissible and appropriate to have regard to the express consideration that was given to including ‘language’ as a category in section 75, and expressly **not** included as a category. In our view there are strong grounds to suggest that Parliament did not intend the other categories in section 75 to be engaged by language matters.
16. Moreover, as foreshadowed by the Secretary of State in 1998, Parliament has since legislated to make further provision for language, in the form of the Identity and Language (NI) Act 2022 (“the 2022 Act”). This inserts Parts 7A – 7C into the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (directly after Part 7 which includes s.75). This further suggests that the language matters covered by the 2022 Act were not already covered by Part 7 of the 1998 Act and are intended by Parliament to be dealt with separately.
17. Parts 7B and 7C both provide for the appointment of commissioners and for addressing complaints against public authorities under Sections 78P and 78T. (Thus leaving complaints with respect to a public authority’s approach to

language issues to be dealt with via Parts 7B and 7C rather than via section 75 would therefore also ensure that such complaints are dealt with by a single entity with authority over such issues, i.e. the relevant Commissioner, which would ensure consistency of approach to language issues by public authorities).

18. These provisions were inserted into the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in the context of the resolution of longstanding political disagreement on how to deal with issues relating to language.
19. Sections 78K and 78R are currently in force. It is noted that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have not yet complied with their statutory duty to appoint Commissioners under those provisions. That is a matter for the First Minister and deputy Minister.
20. It is also recognised that the other provisions in Parts 7B and 7C are not yet in force. That is a matter for the Secretary of State. However, although the provisions are not yet in force, they are on the statute book, and this remains relevant to statutory interpretation. See *R v SSHD ex parte Fire Brigades Union* [1995] 2 AC 513.
21. In these circumstances, it is counsels' opinion that Parliament's intention is that section 75 does not engage language issues, and further that Parliament's intention is that language issues are to be addressed via the specific provisions in Parts 7B and 7C of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

RELEVANCE OF ECNI'S VIEW ON WHETHER USE OF MINORITY LANGUAGES WOULD BE DISCRIMINATORY

22. In January 2023, in its Response to the Consultation by the Education Authority on draft Interim Language Policies, the Equality Commission stated at 3.5 - 3.7:

The Commission considers that the use of minority languages, particularly Irish or Ulster Scots languages in Northern Ireland, for common or official purposes would normally and objectively be considered to be a neutral act that would not be discriminatory.

The speaking or use of any language in Northern Ireland should be a neutral act and should not be perceived as a threat to any individual or group, nor should it be intended in such a manner.

The Commission considers that the speaking or use of the Irish language in the community does not diminish the entitlements of those whose right to their British identity is guaranteed in the Good Friday Agreement. Similarly, the Commission considers that the wider use of Ulster Scots does not diminish the entitlements of those whose right to their Irish identity is guaranteed.

23. This provides further support for the view that the use of language is a neutral act that would not engage section 75.

OPINION ON THE CALL-IN

24. With respect to each section of inhabitants specified in the call-in, reference is made to section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

25. As set out above, the issue of “language” was expressly considered and omitted from section 75, and Parliament has expressly made provision for language issues in subsequent sections of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and in particular Parts 7B and 7C.

26. It is therefore our opinion that the call-in does not establish that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district, because each ground of call-in relies on and is linked to s.75, and it is our opinion that Parliament did not intend the categories under s.75 to be engaged by language issues, and instead intended any language issues to be dealt with by the relevant Commissioner via the mechanisms set out in Parts 7B and 7C of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Monye Anyadike-Danes KC
Aidan McGowan BL
Bar Library
17 October 2024

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RE: BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

In the Matter of a Call-in Wholly or Partly Under Section 41(1)(b) of the Local Government (NI) 2014

ADDENDUM OPINION

INTRODUCTION

1. This opinion is provided by way of addendum to the opinion dated 17 October 2024. It is provided in relation to the merits of the grounds for call-in under Section 41(1)(a).

DECISION

2. On 20 September 2024 the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee considered a proposal for dual language signage at Olympia Leisure Centre.
3. The minutes record that the Committee considered the Report on the proposal and, noted the contents of the report, noted the contents of the Consultation Report at Appendix 1, and noted and approved the contents and findings of the Equality Impact Assessment Draft Final Decision Report at Appendix 2.
4. The minutes of the meeting record that, after discussion, and on a vote, the proposal was declared carried.

THE CALL-IN UNDER SECTION 41(1)(A)

5. On 1 October a call-in was submitted pursuant to section 41. The opinion of 17 October 2024 addresses the merits of the grounds for call-in under s.41(1)(b). This opinion addresses the merits of the grounds for call-in under s.41(1)(a).
6. Section 41(1)(a) provides:

- (1) Standing orders must make provision requiring reconsideration of a decision if 15 per cent of the members of the council (rounded up to the next highest whole number if necessary) present to the clerk of the council a requisition on either or both of the following grounds –*
- a. That the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues; ...¹*

¹ All emphasis is added, save where it appears to the contrary

7. The grounds cited under s.41(1)(a) are as follows:
 - a. Failed (adequately or at all) to consider the cost implications of replacing the signage at Olympia before making this decision.
 - b. Failed (adequately or at all) to show the Section 75 screening outcome before making this decision.
 - c. The decision is inconsistent with, or contrary to, the Council's Language Strategy.
 - d. Failed (adequately or at all) to consider the fact that there is a community space within Olympia.
 - e. In the premises, the decision was Wednesbury unreasonable.

8. This opinion takes each of those grounds in turn.

a. FAILED (ADEQUATELY OR AT ALL) TO CONSIDER THE COST IMPLICATIONS OF REPLACING THE SIGNAGE AT OLYMPIA BEFORE MAKING THIS DECISION

9. The Report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee dated 20 September 2024 addresses Financial and Resource Implications. It states:

Financial & Resource Implications

3.9 *None. The cost of the signage will be met out of existing budgets.*

10. The minutes of the meeting record that the Committee noted the contents of the report. Some Council members also raised issues regarding cost during the discussion prior to the vote on 20 September 2024.

11. In the circumstances, the position with respect to cost was dealt with in the Report, which noted that cost would be met out of existing budgets, and cost was raised as part of the discussion prior to the vote.

12. It is therefore our opinion that this ground does not identify any failure in the proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues. Whether there are some members who disagreed with the decision is a wholly separate question. The issue is one of how the decision was arrived at. What is required is for the decision to be arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues. In our view the minutes indicate that this was done.

b. FAILED (ADEQUATELY OR AT ALL) TO SHOW THE SECTION 75 SCREENING OUTCOME BEFORE MAKING THIS DECISION

13. This ground relies on a failure to show the Section 75 screening outcome. It is important to recognise that a Section 75 screening process is conducted in order to assess whether to have a full Equality Impact Assessment.

14. In this case, the Council did carry out a full Equality Impact Assessment in relation to the decision.
15. In the circumstances, given a full EQIA was carried out, it is our opinion that this ground does not identify any failure in the proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues.

c. THE DECISION IS INCONSISTENT WITH, OR CONTRARY TO, THE COUNCIL'S LANGUAGE STRATEGY

16. This ground contends that the decision is inconsistent with or contrary to the Council's Language Strategy. It cites an extract from Appendix 3 to the Independent Report of 2021 when the Council was considering this issue previously. The Addendum at Appendix 3 to the 2021 report states:

"The Council's Language Strategy makes explicit a commitment to adopt the use of Irish and Ulster-Scots in signs, and in particular where, 'it will be seen primarily by users of Irish/Ulster Scots.' While this commitment is not specific on this point, it could be inferred that the imposition of bilingual signage, contrary to significant, expressed views of local residents, does not fall within the current scope of the strategy."

17. However, that extract on signage referenced in the Addendum at Appendix 3 to the Independent Report of 2021 is not contained in the Language Strategy itself. Rather it appears in Appendix 2 to the Language Strategy, which contains extracts from a previous draft policy.
18. The Language Strategy expressly states in relation to Appendix 2 that, following public consultation, the areas identified in Appendix 2 were redefined into specific community needs.
19. In the circumstances, the Addendum at Appendix 3 to the Independent Report of 2021 is not accurate when it describes the quoted extract as an explicit commitment made in the Language Strategy.
20. In relation to signage, the Language Strategy states: *"Each work stream will include consideration of the council's approach to key council services, including...signage and branding."* The Strategy then identifies the needs of each language community.
21. The Council's Language Strategy was referenced in the Report to the Committee for 20 September 2024, in Appendix 1 to the report and in Appendix 2 to the report.
22. In the circumstances, given that the Strategy does not in fact contain the quote relied upon, given that the Strategy was dealt with in the Report, and given that the Committee *"noted the contents of the Report"*, it is our opinion that this ground does not identify any failure in the proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues.

d. FAILED (ADEQUATELY OR AT ALL) TO CONSIDER THE FACT THAT THERE IS A COMMUNITY SPACE WITHIN OLYMPIA

23. This matter was raised in the Appendices to the Report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee dated 20 September 2024. For example, Appendix 3 to the Consultation Report dated October 2023 specifically raises this issue.

24. In the circumstances, given that this matter was included within the Report to the Committee, and given that the Committee "*noted the contents of the Report*", it is our opinion that this ground does not identify any failure in the proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues.

e. IN THE PREMISES, THE DECISION WAS WEDNESBURY UNREASONABLE

25. This ground relies on the four grounds identified above as a., b., c., and d. already set out above.

26. In the circumstances, and given our opinion on each of those grounds as addressed above, it is our opinion that this ground does not identify any failure in the proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues.

CONCLUSION

27. For the reasons given, it is our opinion that the grounds cited in the Call-in do not identify any failure in the proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues.

Monye Anyadike-Danes KC
Aidan McGowan BL
Bar Library
25 October 2024

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 8th October, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor R Brooks (Chairperson);
Councillors Abernethy, Black, Bower, Bradley,
Bunting, Canavan, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
R-M Donnelly, Flynn, Garrett, Magee, Maghie,
Maskey, McKeown, McLaughlin and Verner.
- In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of Communications, Marketing
and External Affairs; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Cobain.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 8th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st October.

Declarations of Interest

In respect of item 4a, viz., Social Supermarket Fund Update, Councillors Canavan, M. Donnelly, Doherty and Verner declared an interest in that they were associated with organisations which had previously applied for funding under the terms of the Fund. However, as that item did not become the subject of discussion, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Restricted

The information contained in the reports associated with the following four items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were advised that content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

**Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) –
Proposed Annual Schedule of Charges 2025/26**

The Committee considered the proposed Annual Schedule of Charges for 2025/26 which had been prepared by GLL in relation to the Council's leisure centres.

The Committee noted the schedule of charges for 2025/26 and the rationale used in support of the price revisions. In addition, the Committee agreed to the following course of action:

1. that officers be authorised to create a 'Family Membership' pricing package aimed at single-adult families which would be at a lower rate than the current package available for two-adult families;
2. that a request be forwarded to GLL requesting that they consider sponsoring additional schemes aimed specifically at widening participation by children with additional needs within leisure facilities; and
3. that a report outlining plans for future capital development across the Council's leisure estate be submitted to a future meeting for the Committee's information.

**Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) –
Annual User Survey Outcomes 2024**

The Committee deferred consideration of the above-mentioned survey to enable a more detailed report to be submitted. It was noted that the updated report would provide additional detail on the survey outcomes, scoring matrixes and samples used. In addition, the report would include further demographic detail and also reflect user experience in a more qualitative and user-friendly manner; and would seek also to incorporate the views of those users who had not partaken in the survey electronically.

4G Pitch at Marrowbone Park - Usage Schedule

The Committee considered a report which outlined a number of proposals to manage pitch bookings at the above-mentioned site.

The Committee adopted the following recommendations as set out within the report:

- that the Crumlin Star first team would be afforded primacy for bookings on Saturdays from 1.00pm to 4.00pm;
- that, when a first team league match was arranged, or rearranged, by the league for a midweek date, Crumlin Star would be given primacy for that fixture and any bookings already made at by other clubs would be cancelled;
- that, on weeks when Crumlin Star did not have a home fixture on a Saturday afternoon, Shamrock FC would be afforded use of the pitch for first team home league fixtures. (This had been agreed between the two clubs and

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with the Northern Amateur Football League who do not schedule home fixtures for Crumlin Star and Shamrock FC on the same weekend);

- that Cliftonville Academy be afforded primacy for daytime weekday use – during term-time only - by their academy; and
- that all of the above bookings to be paid for as per the Council's pricing policy.

**Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium
Working Group Update**

The Committee considered a report which gave an overview of the outcomes of the meeting of the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Working Group, which had taken place on 2nd October.

The Committee agreed to the following course of action:

- that the minutes of the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Working Group of 2nd October be approved and adopted;
- that the Notice of Motion relating to burial fees be closed;
- that a memorial tree be planted in Roselawn Cemetery to mark the 150th anniversary of the Cremation Society; and
- that consideration of the section of the report under the heading 'Crematorium Budget – Income Generation' be deferred to November to enable Members to consider further the information outlined.

Matter Referred Back by the Council

Use of Botanic Gardens - Christmas Ice Experience

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 10th September, it had agreed, in principle, to grant the use of Botanic Gardens for the holding of the above-mentioned event. That decision was subject to a due diligence process being undertaken in respect of the applicant, the completion of the appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed on the condition that the event organisers met all of the Council's pre-conditions.

At the meeting of the Council on 2nd October, that decision, on the proposal of Councillor Flynn, which was seconded by Councillor McKay, had been referred back to the Committee for further consideration. Accordingly, the Committee considered an updated report in the matter which had been prepared by the Strategic Director of Neighbourhood Services.

After further consideration, it was,

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Garrett and

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Resolved - that the Committee agrees not to grant the use of the Botanic Gardens for the Christmas Ice Experience event for the several reasons outlined within the updated report considered.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Community Support Plan 2024/29

The Committee considered a report which provided an update in relation to the ongoing work in the drafting of a Council Community Support Plan for 2024/29. The Director of Neighbourhood Services outlined the principal aspects of the report and gave an overview of the outcomes of the research, public engagement sessions and surveys which had been undertaken. He explained that the priorities identified would help align the Plan with the Belfast Agenda, which would link also to service delivery and funding priorities. He gave an outline also of the next steps in the process, which would include further community and Elected Member engagement, with a view to the Plan being published in April 2025.

After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the report and noted further that two engagement sessions would take place to update the groups and individuals who had engaged previously on the emerging priorities. In addition, the Committee agreed:

1. that a draft overall framework (including outcomes) and further detail on the development of a new funding programme be submitted to the Committee's meeting in November, with all proposals being sourced from within existing resources; and
2. that the detail of the proposed priorities to be included within the Plan be approved.

Pavement Parking - Update on Notice of Motion

(The Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 4th October, 2023, had passed the following notice of motion, which had been proposed by Councillor T. Brooks and seconded by Councillor Nelson:

"That this Council notes that inconsiderate pavement parking affects everyone in Belfast, but disproportionately children, people with visual impairments, mobility aid users, neurodiverse people and people with prams or pushchairs; and therefore it is essential that the Council plays its full role in reinforcing the message that pavements are for people and it is never acceptable to park in a manner which forces people off a footway and into the road.

This Council acknowledges the challenges in solving this issue but resolves to work towards stopping vehicles from blocking pavements through inconsiderate or dangerous parking, including by undertaking a public information campaign

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about the negative impacts of pavement parking in its forthcoming communications.”

The Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs reminded the Committee that the Department for Infrastructure (DFI) was responsible for pavement parking and enforcement, in conjunction with the PSNI. He outlined the steps which had been taken at a corporate level regarding the matter, which had included the Council’s involvement in a campaign entitled ‘Park with Us in Mind’, which had highlighted pavement parking and its effect on services, particularly bin emptying. He explained that the Council would continue to draw attention to the issue on a multi-agency basis as well as using corporate media channels to highlight the matter.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the Director’s comments in relation thereto. In addition, the Committee agreed that opportunities for further collaboration be sought, in conjunction with PSNI and DFI, and to highlight through digital channels the issue of pavement parking, as well as highlighting this subject in future editions of City Matters.

Operational Issues

Social Supermarkets – Update

Further to the Committee’s decision of 8th September, at which it had requested that an update report be submitted on the operation of the projects supported through the Social Supermarket Fund, the Committee considered a report in this regard.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Static Park Warden Pilot Scheme – Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To update Members on the ongoing Static Park Warden initiative including its recent expansion into Falls Park, and to ask Members to approve an extension until the end of the financial year.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note the content of the report and approve an extension to March 2025.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 Members will be aware that at People and Communities Committee on 9th April 2024 (Appendix One) they received an

update from officers on the ongoing Static Park Warden Pilot in place to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour (ASB) in a number of parks. At that time Committee agreed, subject to budget, “to extend the pilot until the end of the September 2024 and that Falls Park be included as an additional site for the pilot”.

Key Findings – Pilot Period to Date

- 3.2 The Pilot has now been operational for 13 months and as of mid-September 2024 we now have a full complement of nine Static Park Wardens working across the 4 Pilot sites. ASB reporting statistics for the Pilot are now available for 12 consecutive months from September 2023 through to end of August 2024 for Dunville Park, Pairc Nui Chollann and Woodvale Park, and for a total of three months (June-August 2024) for Falls Park.
- 3.3 At April’s Committee Members were advised that since the start of the Pilot there has been a 26% decrease in ASB incidences reported overall for the September 23 - February ‘24 ‘Pilot period’ at the 3 park sites (61) when compared to data for the same months in the previous year prior to the Pilot commencing (82).
- 3.4 Further data recorded over the past six months in the three original sites show continued positive overall trends as a result of the Pilot. This includes a slight increase in figures for ASB reports for the Woodvale Park site. For Falls Park, since its inclusion in the Pilot scheme, incidences of ASB over past 3 months (June - August) have decreased by 68% from 65 to 21 reports when compared to previous 3-month period before expansion of Pilot into the park site.
- 3.5 ASB reporting trend for the original three park sites over the past 6 months of the Pilot period when compared to previous 6mth (also with the Pilot period) were as follows:
- 3.6 Dunville Park- incidences of reported ASB over past 6 months (March- August 2024) have decreased by 93% from 14 to 1 report when compared to previous 6-month Pilot period. Pairc Nui Chollann – incidences of reported ASB over past 6 months (March- August 2024) have decreased by 10% from 48 to 43 reports when compared to previous 6-month Pilot period.
- 3.7 Woodvale Park - incidences of reported ASB over past 6 months (March- August 2024) have increased by 17% from 12 to 34 reports when compared to previous 6-month Pilot period.
- 3.8 Members should note that evening programming (midnight soccer and other diversionary activities) continue to take place with likely positive impacts on ASB at these locations; and that

the Pilot continues to be supported by the Safer Neighbourhood Officers and the PSNI - with good working relationships in place ensuring improved response to ASB incidents at the sites.

- 3.9 With support from Continuous Improvement (CI), City and Neighbourhood Services Department are currently progressing a Park Warden review with focus on the requirements for/of the role, and that of the parallel SNO and Dog Warden functions. Over the coming months the findings from the Static Park Warden Pilot will feed into this review. This work is likely to take several months to progress and accordingly members are asked to approve an extension to the static warden pilot until March 2025.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 Should members agree to the extension it should be noted that the cost can be met from within existing CNS budgets.

Equality or Good Relations Implications Rural Needs Assessments

- 3.11 There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments associated with this report.”

The Director of Neighbourhood Services answered several questions which had been raised by Members and the Committee noted the contents of the report and approved an extension to the scheme until 31st March 2025.

Proposal for Naming of New Streets

The Committee granted permission for the naming of the following four new streets in the city, namely, Black Ridge Row, Black Ridge Close, Black Ridge Park and Black Ridge Parade.

Proposal for Dual Language Street Signage

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplates, in Irish, at the following streets: Brookvale Street, Beechlawn Avenue, Linen Grove, Dawson Street, Jubilee Avenue, Thorndale Avenue, Woodland Grange and Grangeville Gardens.

In respect of an application for a second street nameplate at Wellington Park Terrace, the Committee, at the request of Councillor Bunting, agreed, despite the application having met the threshold for approval within the policy, that it be deferred to enable further consultation to be undertaken with residents. It was noted that the application would be re-submitted for consideration in due course.

**Temporary Closure of Alexandra Park
Household Waste Recycling Centre**

The Committee considered a report which outlined the alternative arrangements that would be in put place during the temporary closure of Alexandra Park Household Waste Recycling Centre to facilitate repairs to road surfaces and concrete bays. It was anticipated that the work would take place between 20th October and 10th November.

Noted.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Pitch Bookings at Sally Gardens Playing Fields

At the request of Councillor Garrett, the Committee agreed that officers would liaise with teams and service users at the Sally Gardens Playing Fields to ascertain the underlying reasons for recurring pitch cancellations with a view to enabling other teams and clubs to maximise the use of the facility in the event of such cancellations.

It was noted that a report in this regard would be submitted to a future meeting.

Chairperson

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 9th October, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nelson (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor;
Councillors Black, De Faoite, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Harvey, Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, F. McAteer, McCabe
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin, McKay, O'Neill and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy;
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Ms. E. Clark, Programme Manager;
Mr. A. Ferguson, Senior Development Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

An apology was received on behalf of the Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCormick.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st October, subject to an addendum to the decision under the heading 'Night-time Economy Notice of Motion Update' in that the Council agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure, John O'Dowd, requesting that he review the decision to put on hold consideration of the pedestrianisation of Hill Street.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McCabe declared an interest in item 4. (a) 'Major Events Update' in that she worked for an organisation that was associated with event funding.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following three items was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt

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information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Vacant to Vibrant Update

The Committee was provided with an update on the Vacant to Vibrant Programme and the associated recommendations from the assessment panel.

During discussion, in response to a Member's concern in relation to the type of private sector applications which had been received, such as private health care, the Director of City Regeneration and Development undertook to consider the matter further.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor R. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy, and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees that the current arrangements for reporting all recommended grant awards under Grant 1 and 2 on the Committee would remain.

After discussion, the Committee agreed also to:

- note the update in relation to the city centre Vacant to Vibrant Programme which was currently supporting up to 32 businesses to locate or expand into long-term vacant city centre units;
- agree to the recommended grant awards; and
- note the update in relation to the position of external funding applications to progress the proposed city-wide Vacant to Vibrant scheme.

Housing-Led Regeneration Update

The Committee was provided with an update on a number of strands of the Housing-Led Regeneration programme of work as agreed within the Committee Plan.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor McAteer,
Seconded by Councillor Hanvey and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees that a report be submitted to a future meeting in relation to the impact that the lack of adequate water

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infrastructure has had on housing development across the city, including the impact that it might have on the environment, economy and the Belfast Agenda's growth targets.

During discussion on the public procurement exercise to appoint a partner to work with the Council on the delivery of housing-led regeneration, the Director of City Regeneration and Development responded to Members' queries regarding the approach and mechanism utilised in delivering social value. The Committee expressed support for the work which had been undertaken to date and a Member requested that work be carried out to support the Council in developing mechanisms that would help to address the viability issues associated with progressing housing regeneration and city centre living in a similar manner as had been used in other UK regions.

After discussion, the Committee agreed also to:

- note that the Director of City Regeneration and Development would provide party briefings, if requested, in relation to the Housing Led Regeneration.
- note that the public procurement exercise to appoint a Private Sector Partner (PSP) for the delivery of housing-led regeneration at scale had concluded and that a report would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee October with a recommendation for an appointment being made in November, following Council ratification;
- note the update in respect of the Inner North-West Development Brief and the ongoing evaluation process;
- note the update in relation to the city-wide Strategic Site Assessments and the next steps to be taken, including referral to the forthcoming All-Party Roundtable on Housing-Led Regeneration and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee regarding options for the disposal/development of various sites; and
- to write to the Minister for Infrastructure highlighting the impact the aforementioned issue had on housing delivery, particularly in light of the current housing crisis, and to seek additional funding for water infrastructure.

Belfast 2024

The Committee considered an update which outlined the success of the Belfast 2024 Programme to date, which included both quantitative and qualitative feedback from the evaluation process and outlined the next stages of the programme and engagement work.

The Committee noted the progress of the Belfast 2024 programme to date.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

**Belfast City Centre Regeneration and
Investment Strategy 10-Year Stocktake Update**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the 10-year stock take of Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy, as agreed as an in-year deliverable in the City Growth & Regeneration Committee Plan 24/25.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee are asked to note:

- The emerging findings from the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) 10-year stock take, in the context of the existing strategy.
- The proposed BCCRIS Summit event to launch the key messaging.
- Request for Members to provide any further comments to inform the final stocktake report.

3.0 Background

3.1 As Members will be aware the Committee agreed as part of the Committee Plan for 24/25 *‘to take forward a ten-year review of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) building on the work of the recent Regeneration Trackers to inform city and Council priorities going forward’*.

3.2 By way of background, BCCRIS launched in 2015 and is the adopted regeneration policy for the city centre. BCCRIS recognised that the city centre is one of the most important places in the Region, where investment impact can be maximised, where rates are generated and where momentum can be built to support growth in the surrounding neighbourhoods and wider region. Belfast as the capital city, and regional economic driver generates £16.2bn GVA with 14.3% of Northern Ireland’s business base and accounts for 30% of total employee jobs. The stocktake has evidenced that this is very much the case today, it is clear that Belfast is everyone’s main city and has an important role to play as a centre for commerce, culture, tourist attractions, recreation, entertainment, learning and employment. Its core centre area

needs to ensure collective efforts are intensified to ensure it can continue to perform these important roles for all areas of the city and the region to derive benefit.

3.3 The Strategy sets out the context for developing the city centre and outlines collective aspirations for the continued growth and regeneration of the city core and its surrounding areas. The Strategy is based on the following core principles, which are referred to as the policy areas:

- **Increase the Employment Population**
- **Increase the Residential Population**
- **Manage the Retail Offer**
- **Maximise the Tourism Opportunity**
- **Create Regional Learning and Innovation Centres**
- **Create a Green, Walkable, Cyclable Centre**
- **Connect to the City Around**
- **Shared Space and Social Impact**

3.4 To facilitate the implementation of these policies the strategy also identified a series of projects and a number of opportunities. The projects were intended to focus efforts on discrete initiatives which will help to achieve the policies and create a liveable and economically thriving city. Five Special Action Areas were identified for parts of the centre where it recommended that more intensive local plans should be prepared.

3.5 At the time of publication of BCCRIS and as part of Local Government Reform in 2015 the Council were preparing for the planned transfer of regeneration powers; however, these did not transfer to Councils. In 2016, the Department for Social Development (predecessor of Department for Communities) agreed a joint working arrangement with Belfast City Council, where they adopted BCCRIS going forward as their regeneration policy, although noting that as DSD were considering the evaluation of its area-based Neighbourhood Renewal Programme they could not specifically adopt the 5 Special Action Areas within the Strategy at that time.

3.6 The stocktake involves looking back at what was envisaged through BCCRIS and taking stock in order to assist in a focus to looking forward. The stocktake is not intended to be an in-depth analysis of all the elements of the strategy but rather an overview of progress over the 10- year period and a consideration of the high-level priority areas going forward in the context of what was contained within the existing strategy. It is not seeking to rewrite the strategy, which was subject to extensive consultation at the time of its development

including cross party-political support from the Council Party Group Leaders and adopted by DSD (DfC) as their regeneration policy for the city centre. The stocktake has provided an opportunity to look at progress to date and identify future opportunities through the lens of how the city centre has evolved, and the role of the city centre for all users. It builds on existing agreed principles as set out in our Inclusive Growth Strategy, the Belfast Agenda and A Bolder Vision, all key aspects which have come forward since the launch of the strategy in 2015.

- 3.7 Importantly, when BCCRIS was published in 2015, it was recognised that in order to deliver on the collective ambition collective and collaborative working would be required across the public sector, third sector and private sector, and this is still very much the case today. Given the comprehensive nature of BCCRIS and recognising that the ambition is collective and would require significant partnership working it has been important that the stocktake be shaped not only by the information contained in the annual regeneration and development trackers (which charts physical development activity and previously reported to Committee), but by engagement across all sectors and partners.

4.0 Main Report

4.1 Shaping the stocktake

The stocktake has been shaped by a programme of engagement, revisiting the extensive engagement which was carried out in 2015. Joe Berridge (Urban Strategies) worked with the Council to develop BCCRIS back in 2015 and he has played a key part in the current stocktake exercise. This stocktake exercise has included:

- Party Group Leaders Engagement
- Two online focused community workshops.
- Facilitated community and public in person evening workshop.
- Internal cross departmental engagement.
- Industry conversations (Business & Development).
- Central Government Departments including DfI and DfC.
- City centre site visits.
- Desk based research, including taking cognisance of the breadth of engagement undertaken by the Council in recent years with relevance to the city centre.

4.2 **Members are asked to note the emerging stocktake summary points below, which are in the context of the existing strategy, noting that there is also reference to policy landscape change since 2015 in terms of Local Government Reform; including transfer of planning powers, development of the LDP and the publication of the Belfast Agenda: A couple of overarching comments include:**

- **The Role of the City Centre:** In 2015, it was recognised that the city centre is one of the most important places in the region. City centres are where investment impact can be maximised, where rates are generated and where momentum can be built to support growth in the surrounding neighbourhoods and wider region. Importantly for Council this enables the redistribution of growth, to ensure inclusive growth across our city. The generation of rates income from the city centre also supports the delivery of our vital services and our significant physical programme across the city, bringing much needed investment into communities. The findings of the stocktake evidence that this is very much the case today, and that Belfast, as the regional economic driver is the regional centre for commerce, culture, tourism, recreation, entertainment, learning and employment, and contributes £47million in non-domestic district rates (2022/23). City centre jobs represent c.37% of all Belfast jobs and 11% of all jobs in Northern Ireland. The emerging messaging from the stocktake reinforces the need to set out the role of Belfast, our city centre and support needed to strengthen its role in positioning the wider region for inclusive investment and innovation.
- **Much has been achieved since 2015, and there is still room and the to grow – sustainably:** The stocktake review underscores a very positive trajectory of development over the period from 2015, recognising also the significant impact that Covid has had on the city centre, and highlights areas where further focus is required. Engagement feedback from across a broad spectrum of stakeholders recognises that there has been significant regeneration progress across a number of sectors which has been very positive, but also an opportunity now (in the context of the existing strategy) to take stock on what our collective priorities are as a city going forward and seek to address the challenges that exist. This is particularly important given the return of the Executive and publication of draft Programme for Government, coupled with a continued interest in development in the city, the

changing nature of how the city centre is used and the need to ensure the existing residential and business communities continue to play an important role in the future sustainable development of the city centre.

- **A Number of Game Changers have taken place since 2015:**

The stocktake highlighted the positive progress over the last decade, completed game changing developments including Ulster University relocation, Belfast Grand Central Station, Waterfront Hall extension, the introduction of the first phase of the Belfast Rapid Transit, development along the waterfront area (including Titanic Quarter and City Quays). There has also been significant levels of development across a range of asset classes, particularly offices, tourism / hospitality and student accommodation. The stocktake also highlighted a degree of frustration at the slow pace of progress in other areas including city centre living, improved connectivity, public realm and public and green spaces. The importance of connectivity and public transport, as well as the city centre 'hours of activity' are emerging strongly as key findings. Whilst good placemaking has been identified as being critical, city management, 'place keeping' and the importance of the city centre as a safe, clean, compassionate and inclusive space have also been highlighted.

- **Emerging Key Points in relation to the 8 policy areas:**

4.3

- **Increase the Employment Population: BCCRIS focused on the need to increase Grade A offices given the lack of new city centre office development at that time, coupled with a significant marketing programme for occupiers and investors, and consideration as to how BCC could de-risk private sector investment in Grade A office accommodation. Over the BCCRIS period to date there has been significant investment in office space and increases in employment targets set. In 2015 BCCRIS set a target of 1.5m sq ft of new office space to be delivered by 2030, by 2024 over 2m sq ft of new office space had been delivered. The number of employee jobs in the city centre increased by 12% (above the regional average) from 77,255 in 2015 to 86,427 in 2024. The stocktake did however highlight that vacant secondary office accommodation will be a challenge going forward.**

4.4

- **Increase the Residential Population:** In 2015 BCCRIS noted the low overall city centre residential population and that a significant residential population is highly important for the successful functioning of the city centre, referencing knowledge workers, younger newcomers to the city, and empty nesters, and recognised the importance of existing communities bordering the city centre. It also highlighted the opportunity for student housing development, recognising the importance of students and with a need for a balanced approach to student housing development. Opportunities for market and private rented sector housing were noted, including identification of key residential sites, marketing of publicly owned sites and if necessary, preparation of financial models to underpin and support funding applications. It highlighted that city centre living is not a case of 'build it and they will come' and that a compelling attractive and secure environment is essential. Improvements to open space, public realm, food and entertainment offerings, connectivity and 'buzz' are as important as ensuring availability of appropriate sites.

The 2021 Census indicates a city centre residential population of 13,654 which has increased to an estimated 14,793 people live in the city centre today (2022 Mid-Year Estimates). By early 2024, 5,223 student beds had been completed (with more than 1000 beds under construction), with a recognition that students represent an important source of city centre housing demand not only whilst studying but after they graduate and commence their careers. BCCRIS had set a target of at least 6,000 new homes by 2030, however by 2024 there has been limited development, with less than 500 new homes completed. Although c1,000 are currently under construction and a number of recent planning approvals granted across various tenures including Build To Rent and social which suggests a degree of progress. However, there are a number of residential units in the city centre that have received planning approval, but development has not progressed. City centre living has emerged as one of the most important priorities going forward. Viability issues and lack of specific regeneration and housing funding to unlock housing development comparative to other UK cities have been identified as significant barriers. Council's approach to securing a Private

Sector Partner to deliver a significant programme of Housing Led Regeneration on city centre lands was noted as a positive step.

However, a key theme from the stocktake is a need to address funding, viability and water infrastructure issues to help unlock the delivery of city centre living. Members will also recall recent reports brought to Committee on a Place Based Growth Proposition for the city which provides insight into the economic growth potential for the city on foot of increased regeneration and housing development. The proposition also highlights the significant gap in specific regeneration and housing related funding streams in Northern Ireland / Belfast compared to other UK cities (e.g. High Street Fund, Brownfield Infrastructure Levy Fund etc) which arguably puts Belfast at a distinct disadvantage in terms of city competitiveness and the ability to drive forward city regeneration priorities such as increased city centre living.

4.5

- **Manage the Retail Offer:** BCCRIS noted the fundamental changes to retail across the UK, including online shopping and out of town retail. Reference was made to ensuring a viable future for the North East Quarter (North St /Royal Ave area), as well as the opportunity to re-brand the centre as a retail and leisure destination and develop policies to support speciality and artisanal shopping. The stocktake noted that vacancy rates have decreased over the past few years (eg decrease from 23% in 2022 to 21% in 2024), although still above the UK average, it is recognised that a significant proportion of this is due to vacancy in stalled regeneration schemes. Unlocking stalled regeneration schemes and particularly the Tribeca site, given its scale and location in the heart of the city core and with significant dereliction and vacancy in this area, was noted as a key priority in the stocktake.

BCCRIS had highlighted that given Belfast's regional role there was the potential to attract a greater number of multinational retailers, as well as the benefit of increasing the number of independent retailers to create a point in difference. The stocktake shows that 57% of the city centre retailers are independent versus 43% in 2015. There is also evidence of confidence in Belfast from multinational brands, with a number of recent new to market entrants and first to island

brands. Over the time period other major retailers have also expanded or located flagship stores. BCCRIS had identified opportunities for schemes that encouraged start-ups and attracting new businesses to the city centre. To date, Council's £1m Vacant to Vibrant Pilot Capital Grant Scheme has incentivised a large number of property owners and occupiers to bring vacant space back into use for independents and SME's, supporting the city centre's revitalisation, including reuse of heritage buildings. The stocktake has shown however that retail, in line with other UK cities, remains challenging and stakeholder feedback also highlights that 'place keeping', cleansing, social and environmental issues are a priority in order to create a safe, welcoming and clean environment for customers, coupled also with events, animation and programming to attract people to come into the city. Having people living in the city centre will also be key to supply the retail sector.

4.6

- **Maximise the Tourism Opportunity:** BCCRIS had noted the positive trajectory of tourism indicators in 2015, but with great untapped potential remaining. It referenced the need for more hotel rooms as well as the opportunity for a new major tourist attraction; concerted tourism marketing to build on Belfast is unique brand; increasing events and working with local organisations to amplify the food, music and cultural events. The stocktake highlighted that the vision for tourism proposed in BCCRIS in 2015 has been exceeded, with a very positive progress in increasing hospitality, food & beverage and tourism facilities. By early 2024, 1,928 hotel rooms were completed (with over 300 rooms under construction and c 1,250 rooms with planning approval and others pending). It also noted the successful and ongoing promotion of Belfast as a tourism and cultural destination including increased business tourism; the completion of the extension at Belfast Waterfront/ICC; significant increase in cruise tourism and the wide ranging cultural and tourism events programme, the Cultural Strategy 'A City Imagining' as well as the ongoing Belfast 2024 programme of activities. In 2015, BCCRIS had highlighted potential for a significant new tourism destination within the city centre, and suggested use of heritage buildings on offer. The progress of Belfast Stories as one of the flagship City projects is noted in the stocktake as being catalytic for the city centre.

4.7

- **Create Regional Learning and Innovation Centres:** BCCRIS references the importance of the University of Ulster development and city centre linkages; increasing skills base and innovation as positive developments since 2015. The stocktake has found the Belfast Region City Deal has significantly advanced innovation and learning and noted there are now 40,000 students across two universities and further education campuses. One of the main game changers for city centre has been the Ulster University Campus relocation- £364m development which has delivered £1.4bn in regeneration impact.

4.8

- **Create a Green, Walkable, Cyclable Centre:** BCCRIS had noted the lack of green space; the need to rebalance the scales between tarmac and soft landscaping, the need for transformation of the inner ring road; developing a transformative vision for the river corridor, progressing cycle and bike rental and parking facilities and developing key bike routes. The stocktake has found that whilst some progress has been made, there are opportunities which have not. Positives include Belfast Bikes, Cathedral Gardens proposed redevelopment, various public realm improvements being progressed (Little York Street; 5C's; Blackstaff Square etc), pedestrianisation of Union Street, BRT Phase 1, City Quays Gardens, the Entries Programme etc are all positive signs. However, there was a strong desire to see significantly enhanced public realm, open space and cycling facilities. Delivery of priority schemes from the emerging Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) City Centre Chapter and alignment with A Bolder Vision are seen as critical going forward.

4.9

- **Connect to the City Around:** BCCRIS had highlighted how the hard boundaries of the river and the arterial roads contribute to lack of connectivity with surrounding neighbourhoods and the river. A range of enhanced connectivity measures and improvements were recommended. It was felt that commitment to what BCCRIS envisaged has come forward through A Bolder Vision. This is an ambitious blue print to explore a shared approach to creating a more attractive and connected city. This includes a collective commitment to a number of priority thematic areas and

proposals where there is an opportunity to intervene to transform critical parts of the city to create a green, people focused, connected city centre. Four key priorities were agreed, including a strong civic spine, reimagining the inner ring road, infrastructure to support city centre living and embracing the River Lagan. It is clear from the stocktake that whilst A Bolder Vision provides the blue print for this alongside the Eastern Transport Plan, there is the need now to see delivery on key schemes and interventions. On completion of the ETP for the city centre (envisaged early 2025) there is an opportunity to make this and the outworkings of A Bolder Vision a priority for the city centre will be subject to funding and resources.

4.10

- **Shared Space and Social Impact:** BCCRIS highlighted that the city centre needed to be a place for everyone, with design and management fostering that sense of space for everyone, focusing on what appeals and attracts all citizens. It recommended making public spaces friendly for all ages; informal leisure and sports uses; increased water activity on the river etc and ensuring social benefit is an integral element of city investments. There have been positives on this including for example use of 2 Royal Avenue as a civic and cultural space and opening up of the rear area into Bank Square; Cathedral Gardens pop up park and current redevelopment; incorporation of public space within designs for Belfast Stories; diversification of some retail space for leisure uses (e.g. Castlecourt); various place making schemes, parklets, pavement cafes etc as well as cultural and animation programming. There remains a need to continue to embed this within future development and activity.

4.11

- **Additional Levers for Change (Post BCCRIS 2015)**
 - **Belfast Region City Deal:** A £1 billion programme of co - investment across central and local government and regional partners.
 - **Local Development Plan:** In 2023 Belfast formally adopted the Local Development Plan Strategy, which will shape the physical future of the city. The Plan Strategy provides a statutory basis for the eight policy areas of the BCCRIS to be part of decisions made on development in the city. The LDP provides a 15-year planning framework, and following adoption of the Plan Strategy, work is now underway on the Local Policies

Plan which will include the local policies, allocations and site-specific proposals to deliver the vision and objectives as set out in the Plan Strategy.

- **Community Planning**: BCCRIS was developed in the context of council's new responsibility to produce a Community Plan for the city, the Belfast Agenda, which was launched in 2017 and underwent a statutory refresh in 2024 with delivery of focused action plans. The development of the city centre is a priority area in the Belfast Agenda.
- **A Bolder Vision**: An ambitious blueprint brought forward by BCC/DfI/DfC to help shape how spaces and places are used with a people focus. Priorities include a strong Civic Spine; Inner Ring Road; Waterfront and City Centre Living. Alignment with the emerging ETP is key.
- **Climate Change**: Belfast declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 with a Climate Commission and Carbon Roadmap in place in 2020, which includes a key focus on the built environment and transport and the need to decarbonise, upgrade and retrofit. Local Area Energy Plan was recently launched. Belfast Agenda has 'Our Planet' as a key priority including resilience and sustainability of built environment.

4.12 Emerging Areas of Focus from Stocktake for the next 5 – 10 years (within context of existing strategy):

- Increasing city centre living and addressing viability, funding, policy and water infrastructure issues, noting the economic and social benefits which come from having a bustling lived in city centre. This is also in the context of the recent Place Based Growth Proposition report that was brought to Committee highlighting the growth potential of the city but noting the lack of specific regeneration funding (including for city centre living) comparative to other UK cities to help unlock this.
- Unlocking major regeneration opportunities and particularly the Tribeca site; given its scale and location in the heart of the city core and with significant dereliction and vacancy in this area.
- Delivery of A Bolder Vision priority projects including public realm development, open space, capital infrastructure (inc major junctions) proposals and inclusive placemaking, recognising that the Eastern Transport Plan Belfast City Centre Chapter provides an opportunity to give focus and direction to this. This also includes removing severance and barriers to

movement between the centre of Belfast and the surrounding communities, the waterfront and Titanic Quarter.

- Continuing the transformation of the Waterfront area through the vision of the Belfast Waterfront Promenade Framework and ensuring communities are fully engaged.
- Support to existing retailers and businesses, as well as attracting new businesses and retailers, SME's and social enterprises.
- Belfast Region City Deal and the delivery of transformative, catalytic projects including Belfast Stories and BRT 2.
- Consideration on the future use of secondary vacant office space
- A multi-agency approach required in the management and 'place keeping' of the city centre to ensure it is clean, safe, compassionate and inclusive.
- The importance of climate considerations in the development of the built environment including the protection and preservation of our built heritage
- Ensuring the city centre is vibrant, unique and thriving through animation, shared space and diversification of uses– capitalising on Belfast's distinct draw which will support hospitality, retail, SMEs, social enterprises, tourism and night-time economy. A specific focus on Night-Time Economy and the opportunities and challenges, including transport.
- The importance of developing family friendly, shared and safe spaces with diversification of uses to attract a range of users.

4.13 Key Levers & Ways of Working:

- On the basis that BCCRIS is a collective vision for the city centre and its surrounding areas, as relevant in 2015 as it is today, there is a need for continued partnership working, across public, private and third sectors to properly leverage the ambition and further potential of the city centre for the benefit of the city as a whole and the wider region.
- A collective approach to the recommendations set out in the Place Based Growth Proposition that seek to help address the institutional, physical and market issues that contribute towards barriers to future inclusive growth and development. To include Belfast seeking parity with the core cities in other policy areas including capacity (revenue) funding, place based financial incentives and specific regeneration funding.

- Increased collaborative ways of working, and importantly models which ensure the people of Belfast are part of this process. It is estimated that to deliver on the inclusive growth ambitions of the Belfast Agenda, with the city centre identified as a priority, it is likely to require investment of c£7.5bn, which will require private sector funding alongside public / third sector and collaborative working being critical.
- Prioritisation across public sectors, working alongside private / third sector of catalytic regeneration and infrastructure projects that will deliver optimal outcomes for the city.
- The need to look at funding models to deliver on key priorities and help address viability, infrastructure and placemaking challenges.
- Importance of inclusion of city centre communities (inc those that bound the city centre) in regeneration activities and ensuring that the social impact from development of the built environment is maximised.
- Recognising that the development and management of the built environment and transportation and infrastructure development should be people focused.

4.14 Proposed Launch Event – BCCRIS Summit

It is proposed to hold an event to consider the stocktake findings i.e. a BCCRIS Summit on 25 November, in Belfast City Hall. It is proposed that the event will bring together representatives from the public, private and third sectors to celebrate the key BCCRIS achievements delivered over the past decade whilst providing an opportunity to consider the challenges and opportunities going forward. It will provide an opportunity to discuss collective areas of focus and priorities to support the continued inclusive growth and regeneration of the city core and its surrounding areas to 2030. Proposed participants include political representation; original author of BCCRIS Joe Berridge, together with public sector, business and community representation.

4.15 Moving Forward:

As noted above this stocktake is not a re-write of the existing strategy for the city centre and the emerging areas of focus are based on the current strategy and the feedback from the stocktake. Deliverability will require a continued collaborative approach across public, private and third-party sectors. From a Council perspective, many of these emerging areas of focus are incorporated within the Belfast Agenda Action Plans, the Corporate Plan, CG&R Committee Plan, A Bolder Vision and

with a further policy context via the LDP and emerging Local Policies Plan for the city centre. Members will also recall the recent report brought to committee on a Place Based Growth Proposition for Belfast which highlighted the potential for significant enhanced economic growth of the city but with a disparity of funding and powers currently comparative to other city regions. A further report will be brought back to Members on proposed next steps for the Place Based Growth Proposition.

- 4.16 Members are asked to provide any further comments on the emerging findings of the stocktake and which can be reflected in the final stocktake report. Following the proposed BCCRIS summit and finalisation of the stocktake report, further updates will be brought back to Committee as appropriate.**

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

Met within existing and approved budget.

**6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report.”

During discussion, the Committee provided feedback for inclusion within the 10-year stocktake, as set out hereunder:

- A range of Members acknowledged that the stocktake had been a positive exercise and that many policy areas had exceeded original targets which had been set in 2015 for offices, hospitality and hotels, student accommodation and major developments, including the Ulster University and Grand Central Station. It was noted that a focus on addressing the number of homes delivered in the city centre needed to be addressed. In addition, it was noted that issues of viability needed to be considered to meet the ambition and scale of the strategy. As such, Housing-Led Regeneration needed to be progressed at scale and more levers were required at a local and regional level to incentivise residential development and to overcome a viability gap.
- The Committee noted that Sustainable and Active Travel needed to be prioritised and noted further that the Eastern Transport Plan for the city centre chapter was almost complete. Projects needed to come forward rapidly, underpinned by quality public realm and place-making interventions; funding and delivery mechanisms would be critical. It was noted also that powers, such as the Dilapidations Legislation, should be used to address dereliction and dangerous buildings and to preserve built

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heritage and there should be a degree of consideration of rates reform in relation to vacant properties.

- Several Members suggested that there should a greater degree of pace and flexibility in development delivery and that a review of Local Authority Statutory Powers should be undertaken to address the devolvement of regeneration to enable more efficient and effective decision-making and delivery. In addition, it was noted that consideration needed to be given to the impacts of large development sites within local residential areas. Several Members emphasised the importance which local communities would play in terms of inputting into the future of the city centre and the importance which the River Lagan would play in future regeneration.
- The Committee noted the details in respect of the summit event to be held to launch the stocktake findings, which would be led by Council and would include input from across the political, public, private and community sectors. The event would highlight key areas of focus for the city with key asks to support continued growth.

The Committee welcomed the forthcoming launch event of the stocktake findings at the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) summit on 25th November.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed:

- to note the emerging findings from the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) 10-year stocktake, within the context of the existing strategy;
- the details regarding the proposed BCCRIS which would launch the key messaging; and
- to note that the comments from the Committee would be considered for inclusion in the final report.

Positioning Belfast to Compete

Major Events Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Christmas Programme and the bid for the Fleadh Cheoil.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report.
- Approve attendance of the Lord Mayor and senior officials at the 2025 US Comhaltas Convention and the early release of budget to Ards CCE to allow early booking of flights and accommodation.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Christmas Programme Update:

Background:

The Christmas Lights Switch On event will take place on Saturday November 16th and will be a free of charge ticketed event. With the stage providing family-oriented entertainment including local musicians and performers culminating in the switch on of the lights by our Lord Mayor.

As in recent years, 2RA will provide a programme of Christmas - themed activities across the six weeks of Christmas to supplement the Switch On and provide a focus throughout the festive period.

Members will be aware that a report to committee in June 2023 recommended several adjustments to the Christmas light switch on to mitigate identified health and safety risks - these included:

- Event build in the early hours involving staggered road and lane closures.
- The careful co-ordination of deliveries of equipment and stock of the Christmas market to facilitate an appropriate cut off to allow for the build of the stage and rig.
- The stage and all associated equipment and infrastructure should remain in situ following the event to allow roads to reopen immediately after the event. This will allow of a de-rig to take place on Sunday morning during a less busy period.

Members should be aware that the mitigation outlined above has increased some costs related to both equipment rental and security. Any expenditure will be found from existing corporate budgets.

Planning is very well advanced, with temporary road closure applications submitted in August and many performers contracted.

Proposed Event Programme 2024:

The wider event schedule will consist of a range of elements including:

- The Official Switch - On event
- 2 Royal Avenue
- Christmas Market
- Festive Lighting Scheme
- Marketing and Communications Activity

Belfast's Christmas celebrations will officially begin on Saturday 16th November with the Switch- On. This event will take place from approximately 6:30pm to 7:30pm. The stage programme will consist of:

- Walkabout performers entertaining the audience at each three entrances, Donegall Place & Donegall Square East & West.
- Proposed stage programme: a variety of short acts celebrating the best of Belfast performers both professional companies and community organisations, all supported by Council. This will include:
- Compered by a media partner with 'switch-on' of the lights by the Lord Mayor.
- Young musician to open the event (bagpipes)
- A local singer with live band, sourced from the Oh Yeah Music Centre, a Lord Mayor's Charity.
- Musical excerpt from Christmas Performance.
- A Christmas Theatre excerpt
- A special Circus performance
- Rock Choir – carols and uplifting rock songs.
- A primary school choir.

2 Royal Avenue Programme:

Following the success over the last two years, there will be an allocation of the Christmas programming budget allocated to the 'Winter's Den' activity in 2 Royal Avenue, beginning on Saturday 16th November and running throughout the Christmas period. The programme will be delivered by the operators of the venue- MayWe Events.

The 2RA Christmas programme will also include a variety of sustainable festive workshops, festive Christmas carolling and musical sing – a longs, Jazz afternoons for seniors, family theatre and performances, celebrations from around the world including art, storytelling and dance, baby sensory sessions,

autism and disability friendly events such as sensory workshops, activities and storytelling.

Additionally, the programme launch will support the Christmas Light Switch -On at City Hall on Saturday 16th November by offering a sensory space for families with a dedicated sensory area, sensory decoration making workshop, a relaxed silent disco and walk about characters. An 'alternative tree lighting' ceremony will also take place in the venue for those unable to manage the crowds at City Hall.

This event programme will be supported by external events including, Santa's Post Office, Christmas tea dances, choir performances, a festive Ceilidh, traditional performances and markets including the Potters market and Twilight markets.

MayWe will also work with the Lord Mayor's chosen charities where appropriate.

The Maywe budget allocation also includes all staffing, branding and decoration, technical support and late - nights openings.

Christmas Market:

The Christmas Market will run this year from Saturday 16th November to Sunday 22 December. Market Place Europe Limited (MPEL) currently hold the Continental Markets contract and this year will be celebrating 20 years of the Belfast Christmas Market and hope to have some Dickensian themed weekends and additional activities.

There will be over 100 stalls and the new contract also sets out the requirement for 40% local traders and 60% continental traders. There will be a Santa's Grotto supporting the Lord Mayors Charity and a return of free school educational tours. MPEL also ran the 'Jolly Big Business Boost' offering a free chalet to a young business. When the Continental Market trades at the front of the city hall the footfall increases into St Georges Market and throughout the city Centre. The Christmas Market and the local Christmas offer in St George's trade side by side very successfully. MPEL has offered a free pitch to St Georges Market traders this year and in previous years to further enhance trade for the local traders.

Marketing and Communications Activity:

Council will operate a digital campaign with pulse screens and online advertising to promote the fact that there is an event

taking place on 16th November, as well as weekend entertainment thereafter and seasonal activities in 2 Royal Avenue. Council will be directing people to www.belfastcity.gov.uk/christmas URL, where the switch on event information will be displayed prominently on the page. As information is finalised on the event schedule, online messaging will be strengthened.

Promotion will take place across digital platforms and via key partners including BID One and Visit Belfast. City Matters went to print before event details were confirmed, but a generic update was provided to highlight the Switch On date and 2 Royal Avenue in edition to be circulated to just under 160k homes in early November. A press release will also be issued to promote the ticket release and the confirmed details of the event schedule.

2024 Approach to Ticketing:

As with 2023, our approach to ticketing involves a number of strands, for which we have engaged Visit Belfast due to their service offering. The site capacity is for 10,000 in a comfortable manner. Therefore, the ticket allocation will be slightly above this figure to allow for a percentage of 'no shows'- normal industry practice even for paid for events. There will be a staggered release (both a morning and evening release) as per 2023, to accommodate working parents.

There will be a further allocation of tickets held back for those with no access to computers, tablets and smart phones, to call in to collect tickets. Each year, there is an accessible platform erected, with spaces booked by telephoning Visit Belfast. Tickets will be capped to 5 per booking. Furthermore, Visit Belfast will provide visitor servicing and support staff on the evening of the event to assist with ticket queries and the scanner technology used to expediate entrancing on to the site.

Christmas Lighting Scheme:

2024 will be year 5th and final year of the existing Christmas Lighting Scheme which will begin on the 16th of November and run until the 2nd January.

The installation, storage and maintenance of our festive lighting scheme is managed through a third party that was appointed via a public procurement process. This contract is currently in its final year and due for renewal from 2025

onwards, The supplier has seen significant cost increases relating to insurance, energy costs and labour costs.

The budget for the Christmas Festive Lighting Scheme was unchanged in the previous 4 years and has historically been supported through additional non- recurrent budgets. Whilst there has been an uplift allocated to lighting for 2024, this has covered increasing costs outlined above, repairs to previously damaged sites, a small number of new additional sites and the offset of previous non recurrent funding.

The provision of festive lights covers the city centre with a combination of cross - street and pole mounted features. New sites included in the scheme this year are;

Church Lane, Anne Steet and 2 Royal Avenue. Officers are currently conducting final site visits at the Belfast Stories site, Berry Street and Lower Garfield Steet to provide additional lighting on the Royal Avenue area.

Officers are also investigating alternatives for Arthur Street and Anne Street due to ongoing building works. Officers are currently developing the new tender terms to be progressed for provision from 2025 onwards.

Lighting on Arterial Routes:

Council previously received funding from DfC revitalisation funding which allowed Officers to distribute monies via a funding programme to business clusters on arterial routes for them to produce some Christmas related activity. Given reduced levels of budget within Executive Department budgets funding has not been provided for any additional activity on arterial routes. It should be noted that there would also be significant cost and the lead time required to secure the wayleave agreements and install the mounting infrastructure.

Existing Funding Mechanisms:

Members should note there is a pre-existing mechanism for groups to secure funding to programme activity during the festive period. The 'Community Festivals Fund' is administered via Culture and the Central Grants Unit. This funding scheme is accessible by community groups but not council. Those groups can apply for funding between £2,500 - £10,000, and this is for arts and heritage activities and/or other cultural events that contribute to the cultural

identity of an area or group and celebrates the uniqueness of that area or group.

The fund is currently supporting the following Christmas activities:

- Féile An Phobail - Féile na Nollaig 2024
- Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiaich - Fleadh Feirste 2024 – Christmas festival
- Shankill Winter Festival

Other 'Winter Festival' activities include would be:

- Forward South Partnership - Holyland Winter Festival
- EastSide Partnership - CS Lewis Winter Fest 2024 Belfast
- 'Bring a Little Light lantern festival' from Wandsworth Community Centre.

The current scheme is closed. Any festival must take place between November and March. Council receives applications from a range of community groups and arts organisations.

Shared Prosperity Fund:

At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 20th September, Members agreed to include opportunities for additional animation, lighting enhancements and marketing in a bid for Shared Prosperity Funding. Officers are speaking with BIDS on the potential for provision of additional lighting / dressing in the city centre to address areas where lighting is poor, this work will be ongoing to ensure appropriate provision of wayleaves and eyebolts. Additional marketing and promotion could also be commissioned but all of the above would be subject to receipt of a letter of offer in relation to Shared Prosperity Funding.

3.2 Update on Bid for Fleadh Cheoil

Bid Submission

Council in partnership with Ards CCE continues to bid for the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. Our latest revision of the Bid Book has been delivered to Comhaltas HQ to meet the 30th August deadline for the 2026 iteration of the event, with an announcement expected during early March 2025.

Ongoing Engagement

Lord Mayor, Chief Executive and Senior BCC Officials attended the recent Fleadh Cheoil in Wexford from 7th to 9th August 2025 to participate in a series of engagement, networking and lobbying events with Members of Ards CCE, raising the profile of the Belfast bid.

Additionally, the Events Team attended an operational Familiarisation Day visit with internal and external colleagues on Friday 9th August to further consolidate operational learnings within a new ground footprint context in Wexford – this included observing Campsites, Visitor Servicing, Security, Ancillary and Volunteer provision. The Events Team have previously attended the two consecutive years of the event in Mullingar to scope operational requirements and have met with Sligo representatives, a previous host of Fleadh Cheoil.

Learnings have been considerable and this will further be consolidated by a follow up session with Members of the Wexford FEC scheduled for Friday 4th October. It is anticipated that this operational familiarisation will be further developed for next year, with invitations extended out and a closer shadowing role likely with members of the Wexford FEC.

Moving forward, it is anticipated that members of the Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann will visit Belfast in the coming weeks, ahead of the final decision of the host city for 2025. The itinerary will be in-line with previous visits by the Ard- Chomhairle to Belfast.

Draft Governance

A draft governance structure in line the official fleadh guidance manual is being developed. Operational learnings from Sligo, Mullingar and Wexford have also helped to inform this governance model. This model will no doubt be altered over time to suit the needs of the organising team. However, the Terms of Reference have taken into consideration the plans outlined in our bid book and recognise the various considerations laid out in the manual. Similarly, attention is being given to the lessons learned from Fleadh visits and Executive feedback.

A dedicated Project Plan document has been developed by the Events Team and is now in place to commence 'Task and Finish' work on specific aspects of operational planning with both internal and external stakeholders.

Resource

Roll out of the governance structure, the 'standing up' of the working groups and implementation of the Project Plan is now very much dependent on Fleadh dedicated resource coming into post in the coming months. Work is currently being expedited to secure additional staff resource asap and a report will be presented on short-term staff requirements to SP&R later this month.

Ards CCE

Officer engagement with Ards CCE is ongoing - Officers are meeting with the branch regularly on attendance required at the various conventions across Ireland, the UK and the United States as part of ongoing lobbying and engagement. Ards CCE have also been working with the Events Team to map potential venues and programming content for Belfast Fleadh Cheoil.

On Tuesday 3rd September, the Lord Mayor hosted Ards CCE in the Lord Mayor's Parlour to celebrate their recent success of 4 All Ireland medals at the recent Fleadh Cheoil in Wexford.

Lord Mayor and Chief Executive will attend the Annual Comhaltas Christmas Dinner in Dublin and the GB convention in February as a final lobbying opportunity ahead of bid announcement.

The US Comhaltas Convention 2025 is to be held at the beginning of April 2025 inclusive. This is an important date in the Comhaltas calendar in terms of US votes and connecting with diaspora markets which will play a key role in securing visitors to Belfast for future event iterations. Under the conditions of the current in-year Funding Agreement with Ards CCE, the branch are responsible for making their own travel and accommodation arrangements. This includes for the US Convention at the beginning of April 2025.

To facilitate the early booking of flights and accommodation and ensure value for money, approval is sought to part release some of next years Ards CCE annual funding agreement early and within the financial year 2024 / 2025 (circa 25K). This is subject to drawn down and satisfactory verification of the current year Funding Agreement before release of any additional monies. As per the last two years, it is proposed that Ards CCE will attend with Lord Mayor, Chief Executive and a senior Council Official.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 The cost of delivering the programme is £300k for Christmas Lights and £153k for event delivery, This will be funded from existing budgets. As noted, subject to a timely letter of offer there is the potential for supplementing this with Shared Prosperity Funding.

4.2 Attendance at US Comhaltas Convention 2025 by Ards CCE will be forward funded from part release of next years Ards CCE annual funding agreement.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

There are no Equality, Good Relations nor Rural Needs Implications associated with this paper.”

During discussion, several Members suggested that consideration be given to increasing financial support for financing Christmas lighting in future years, together with the provision of addition lighting on arterial routes as a means to support communities through the Shared Prosperity Fund. In response, the Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism, advised that the suggestion could be investigated together with purchasing stock options. She highlighted that various options would also be considered as part of any new tender.

In response to a Member’s request for information on the ‘One Million Trees Initiative’, which included the potential for an evergreen tree to be planted in neighbourhood locations and used at Christmas time, the Senior Manager advised that an update would be provided in due course.

In relation to Christmas activity programming at 2RA (2 Royal Avenue), a Member suggested that it be considered within the context of any future use of the ground floor.

In response to a Member’s request for an update on the forthcoming Oireachtas na Samhna 2025, the Senior Manager indicated that the site visits by officers with partners would be undertaken to this year’s event and that an update would be provided in due course.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to:

- note the contents of the report;
- approve the attendance of the Lord Mayor and senior officials at the 2025 US Comhaltas Convention and the early release of budget to Ards CCE to allow early booking of flights and accommodation; and

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- note that officers would investigate funding options and support for Christmas lighting of arterial routes for future years and as part of the new tender.

International Relations – Future Approach

The Senior Manager, Economy, provided an update in relation to the Council's international relations approach. She reminded the Committee that, at its meeting in September, it had noted that a review would be undertaken of international opportunities and potential objectives and areas of interest aligned to city priorities and had agreed to receive a future report to consider how targeted international engagement activity could support and advance the Council's key ambitions.

The Senior Manger advised Members that, as a first step in this work, it had been agreed that officers would bring back a series of high-level considerations to shape the work and that, subject to agreement on the outline approach, a more detailed report setting out the framework would be brought back to a future meeting.

She stated that, in undertaking the initial review, officers had reflected on the previous International Relations Framework which had expired in 2021 and that the purpose set out in that framework remained broadly valid, namely: *"to ensure that Belfast is optimally positioned on the international stage to realise our ambitions, and that our resources and priorities are aligned with the overarching strategic vision for the city"*. It had noted that the Council's approach should consider a wider international engagement approach at a regional level – as articulated through the Programme for Government, which was current subject to consultation.

The aforementioned Programme for Government comprised of three key missions, one of which was *"Prosperity"*. One of the critical areas of action had been identified as *"building on our international relationships to advance our economic development and attract new investment opportunities"*. It was understood that a new International Relations Strategy for Northern Ireland was currently being developed and would be presented to the Northern Ireland Assembly, which would reflect the approach set out above – and identify the opportunity to leverage the Executive's networks and resources to support the Council's international engagement work.

She highlighted that the previous International Framework had identified a number of priority areas of focus. These were broadly termed: Promoting trade and investment; and Attracting visitors and students.

She advised that these areas of focus should remain a priority in any new approach, however, taking account of changes in the operating environment since the original framework, the view on how this work may evolve included:

- **Promoting trade and investment:** likely to remain a top priority but balance of effort to move towards supporting local businesses to explore international markets rather than FDI (although the Council should continue to support Invest NI in this work). Another significant change since the last framework was our strong capital investment

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proposition and – in particular – the need to identify and access international financing and profiling opportunities to bring forward critical development schemes;

- **Attracting visitors and students:** Tourism numbers had rallied significantly over the last year and were now back near pre-Covid numbers. The sector remained a key employer in the city and planned investments such as Belfast Stories and key international event opportunities such as Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann would increase the number of out-of-state visitors. The Council would need to work closely with Tourism Ireland through its international office network to tailor messaging and maximise coverage, in line with wider campaigns. Given the recent investment in culture through interventions such as Belfast 2024, it was likely that the cultural dimension of the tourism messaging would be profiled more significantly in the future. Increased investment in local tourism product should ensure a more authentic and unique local offer and would provide the opportunity for learning from international city partners and developing cultural relationships;
- **Supporting our universities and colleges to attract international students** was likely to remain an important part of the work given the significant ambitions in this field. Another aspect of this support to universities and colleges that had grown in recent years, was making connections and introductions for our Academic Institutions with respect to teacher/staff exchange and joint research partnerships; and
- **Supporting the work of Invest NI “attracting in” talent** to address some of the skills gaps in our growth sectors – potentially utilising the international students as part of our talent pool. This would obviously need to consider visa regulations and stipulations at the time and would complement rather than replace existing proposals to help Belfast residents into new or better jobs.

Other areas of engagement might include:

- **Innovation City and Smart Belfast:** with the appointment of a new Innovation Commissioner and the re-establishment of the Innovation City Belfast Board, there was likely to be an increased focus on promoting the city globally as a beacon for innovation– with a particular focus on inclusive innovation. The vision for ICB was that “Belfast was a place where global excellence in innovation supports inclusive economic growth, delivers more and better jobs, and had a sustainable positive impact on our city, its citizens and the wider region”. International partnerships, collaboration and profiling opportunities would be critical to ensure that this vision was realised;
- **Resilience/net zero:** since the launch of the Resilience Strategy in December 2020, the work to transition Belfast to an inclusive, zero-emissions, climate-resilient economy within a generation had stepped

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up significantly. In this field, global networks were critical for learning and sharing of good practice and the regulatory frameworks often derived from international agreements. There were emerging opportunities for profiling investment opportunities from external markets for the pipeline for priority projects identified through interventions such as the Belfast Local Area Energy Plan; and

- **Supporting sustainable and inclusive growth:** this had been identified as a priority area of work within the Belfast Agenda. It was likely to be an underpinning pillar of engagement activities – and would drive workplans to ensure that sufficient consideration was given to this narrative when exploring investment opportunities.

In addition to matters which the Council should focus on, officers had also considered how this should work. Initial thinking on this included:

- While recognising the need for some flexibility as part of an overall framework, the Council needed to take a strategic approach to opportunity, building on the strengths of our existing city to city relationships. It was reported that the Council had a Sister City status with Nashville, Boston in the USA, and Shenyang in China, as well as the recently secured Memorandum of Understanding with Sejong in South Korea;
- Consider that this approach could be delivered through a multi-annual plan (aligned to the Belfast Agenda timelines) but with an annual action plan and review to take account of learning and new emerging opportunities;
- Need to focus on areas where the Council could add value: this might mean leveraging partner resources to maximise impact and/or taking the decision not to progress with some proposals or areas of work;
- Need to create an overall framework that was fully aligned to and supportive of ambitions and commitments set out in the Belfast Agenda – principally the “Our Economy” and “Our Place” themes – but might also be opportunities under “Our Planet”;
- Need to establish a mechanism for objectively assessing emerging opportunities in order to prioritise resources and focus effort – the Council would not be able to do everything and there were activities that would not advance the city ambitions so the Council should be clear in its analysis of these;
- Need to build on existing linkages – going stronger and deeper rather than spreading resources too thin;
- Need to work through strategic partners – making use of existing resources, and networks rather than duplicating effort;

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- Reciprocity – value of focusing collaboration on willing and engaged partners;
- Need to consider appropriate metrics to assess impact of interventions and engagement, recognising that it could be difficult to directly attribute outputs and outcomes to single interventions and that the international engagement activity should be considered as a value-added element of an overall strategy;
- Need to ensure value for money – in line with all service delivery; and
- Need to keep the approach under review in line with the changing global context and changes in personnel/political mandate/policy within the market.

The Senior Manager advised that, following consideration of feedback from Members, officers planned to undertake a mapping exercise of existing linkages across the Council alongside a series of engagements with external partners to understand the current levels and nature of activity as well as building an understanding of resource commitments and future plans.

This initial review work would be critical in helping the Council to avoid duplication as well as maximise opportunities for synergy with external partners. It would also help consider internal resource allocations as part of the budget setting process. It was proposed that a more detailed framework would be brought back to the Committee in February/March 2025 in order to work towards an agreed approach for the new financial year onwards.

During discussion, the Committee provided the following feedback, that:

- engagement with Invest NI in relation to inward investment and regional balance on investment, for North and West Belfast in particular;
- work with universities and European partners on issues such as Climate and Resilience/Life Sciences, including engaging in activities such as Cities and Regions Week;
- explore opportunities for engagement by Members in the EU Stakeholder / US Stakeholder meetings;
- explore opportunities to build on connections to promote Arts and Culture and grass roots organisations;
- work with other stakeholders to develop and showcase tourism; and
- net zero and international best practice - learn from other organisations to ensure maximum benefit to Belfast.

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A Member requested that the Committee agree to write to the Executive Office to request an indicative timescale for the introduction of the International Relations Strategy for Northern Ireland.

After discussion, the Committee:

- noted the planned review of international opportunities and potential objectives and areas of interest aligned to city priorities;
- agreed to receive a future report to consider how targeted international engagement activity can support and advance our key ambitions;
- noted that the feedback from the Committee would be considered under the review of the Council's international engagement activity; and
- agreed to write to the Executive Office to request an indicative timescale for the International Relations Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Growing Business and the Economy

Site Visit – Request from Belfast Chamber

The Committee considered a request from Belfast Chamber for a walk around the city centre followed by a brief meeting.

The Committee agreed that the request from Belfast Chamber be referred to the All-Party Working Group on the City Centre for consideration.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Request for Approval for ‘Crafted with Pride’ Markets

The Committee considered a request from organisers of two ‘Crafted with Pride’ proposed markets to take place in 2 Royal Avenue.

The Committee approved the issuing of a market license for Belfast Pride to hold markets on 8th December, 2024 and 20th July, 2025.

Special Committee Meeting Presentations

The Committee considered a request from the Metropolitan Arts Centre (MAC) to present at a future special Committee meeting. The Committee also considered the schedule for presentations at the forthcoming Special Committee meetings.

The Committee:

- Agreed that the MAC would present at a future special Committee meeting;

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- Noted the schedule of presentations for October and November; and
- Noted that any questions/issues for representatives of Translink/the Department for Infrastructure (Roads) be forwarded to Democratic Services for compilation, in advance of the presentations.

Chairperson

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City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 23rd October, 2024

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Nelson (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCormick;
Alderman Lawlor;
Councillors Black, De Faoite, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, F. McAteer, McCabe
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, I. McLaughlin,
McKay, R. McLaughlin, O'Neill and Smyth.
- In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration
and Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy;
Ms. C. Persic, Development Manager;
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following item is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Translink - Belfast Grand Central Update

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. D. McAllister, Head of Belfast Grand Central Station Programme, Mr. D. Curry, General Manager Bus Services, and Ms. L. Shannon, Corporate Communications Manager, representing Translink, to the meeting.

Mr. McAllister provided a progress update of the Belfast Grand Central Station/Weavers Cross Transport Led Regeneration Project which included details of main works, access trail and wayfinding, rail systems, interventions, and social value on the live construction.

Mr. Curry provided a progress update of the bus and rail operations, including timetables, traffic congestion, impact of roadworks, and mitigation plans.

During discussion, the representatives answered a wide range of questions regarding noise levels associated with night-time construction works, Translink's communication with the public in relation to timetable and bus location changes, community engagement, incentives to increase use of public transport, language signage in Belfast Grand Central Station, wayfinding, street works and interventions, bus prioritisation progress of the Eastern Transport Plan, social value of the project for local communities, and air quality. Mr. McAllister provided detail on the continuation of public realm works and future reinstatements, together with pedestrian crossing monitoring.

In response to a Member's question in relation to local residents concerns regarding noise levels associated with night-time construction works, Mr. McAllister advised that, while construction noise levels were monitored to ensure they were within the permitted levels, he assured the Member that the local residents concerns would be raised and addressed with the construction team.

Members highlighted to the representatives the impact to the public in respect of the disruption and changes to bus timetables, routes, and bus stop locations and the need for better communication from Translink in relation to providing regular updates. Ms. Shannon explained further the end terminal design of the Grand Central Station and highlighted that it had impacted some of the train connections for users.

In response to a Member's question in relation to the wider impact that the new schedules had made to the transport connections outside of Belfast, Mr. Curry advised that Belfast had always been seen as the regional hub and he would engage with the Member in relation to specific route issues.

During further discussion, in response to a Member's proposal to write to the Minister for Infrastructure and Translink requesting details of when Translink's late-night services would come into operation over the Christmas period, Ms. Shannon advised the Committee that communication on the routes and schedules would be announced in the week commencing 28th October.

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Proposal

Moved by Councillor De Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to write to the Minister for Infrastructure requesting that consideration be given to the reduction of public transport fares over the Christmas period, as an incentive to increase the use of public transport.

Mr. Curry highlighted that any changes to the cost of public transport fares would be a decision for the Minister for Infrastructure.

In response to Members questions in relation to language signage in Belfast Grand Central Station, Ms. Shannon advised that Translink had taken steps to include language signage. Furthermore, she highlighted that there had been lengthy engagement with a wide range of stakeholders on this matter. She advised that engagement would continue with key stakeholders, including with the Irish Language Commissioner and the Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and Ulster British Tradition once they were appointed.

The Members drew the attention of the representatives from Translink to a number of additional matters, which the representatives advised would be investigated and a further update submitted to the Committee in due course:

- detailed figures on the Social Value Outcomes delivered directly within the two adjoining neighbourhoods of Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road;
- data in relation to the impact of the proposed pilot scheme, announced by the Minister for Infrastructure, permitting Class A and Class C taxis to use certain bus lanes in the vicinity of the road works associated with Belfast Grand Central Station; and
- information on Air quality modelling and monitoring.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee:

- I. noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, Translink would provide further information on the issues raised;
- II. noted that, in response to the Committees request to write to the Minister for Infrastructure and Translink requesting details of when Translink's late night services would come into operation over the Christmas period, Translink would provide details of its Christmas late night services in an announcement on 28th October; and

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- III. agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to request that consideration be given to the reduction of public transport fares over the Christmas period, as an incentive to increase the use of public transport.

Chairperson

Licensing Committee

Wednesday, 16th October, 2024

MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM

Members present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson);
Alderman McCullough;
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bradley,
T. Brooks, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, Doran,
D. Douglas, Kelly, F. McAteer, McCann,
McDowell, McKay, McKeown, Ó Néill
and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. S. Hewitt, Building Control Manager;
Mr. C. McLaughlin, Solicitor;
Ms. C. Naylor, HMO Assistant Manager; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st August, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 2nd September, 2024, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Delegated Matters

THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN PURSUANCE OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT UNDER STANDING ORDER 37(d)

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee was advised that officers had withdrawn this item due to an administrative issue.

Noted.

Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee noted a list of applications for licences which had, since its last meeting, been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

Application for the Variation of 7-Day Annual Entertainments Licence for The Flint Hotel

The Building Control Manager outlined that the Hotel was currently licensed to provide indoor entertainment and the maximum occupancy was in "Amelia Hall" (445 persons).

He outlined that the days and hours during which entertainment may be provided within Amelia Hall, under the terms of its current Entertainments Licence, were:

Monday – Saturday 11.30 am to 1.00am the following morning
Sunday 12.30 pm to 12.00 midnight.

The Committee was advised that the application related to a proposed extension to the hours during which entertainment could be provided to 2.00 am the following morning, every night of the week.

The applicant had stated that the extension was sought to allow more flexibility to provide late night music entertainment and that it would be used in conjunction with the Article 44a extension to Liquor Licensing hours.

The Building Control Manager outlined that public notice of the application had been placed in a newspaper and no written representations had been received. He also confirmed that the Police and the Fire and Rescue Services of Northern Ireland had been consulted and they had no objection to the variation application.

The Committee was also advised that no noise complaints had been received in respect of the premises to date.

The Committee approved the application for the extension of the 7-Day Annual Entertainments Licence to vary the hours during which entertainment could be provided until 2.00am the following morning, every night of the week.

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for 6 Rugby Parade

The Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Assistant Manager presented the details of the application to the Committee.

The Committee was advised that the property had had the benefit of an HMO licence issued to the previous owner, by the Housing Executive, which had expired on 24th December, 2022. Reminder letters had been sent to the licence holder on 25th July, 2022, and 14th November, 2022, informing them of the need to renew the HMO licence

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before the expiry of the existing licence. However, it had subsequently transpired that ownership had transferred to the applicant in February 2019.

On 7th March, 2023, an application for a Temporary Exemption Notice (TEN) was received and was subsequently approved on 15th March, 2023. An extension to the TEN was approved on 15th June, 2023, which expired on 15th September, 2023. No further extensions were permitted under the 2016 Act.

On 25th May, 2023, an HMO Licence application was received from the owner of the accommodation, which was rejected on 2nd June, 2023, for a breach of planning control. A further application was received on 7th July, 2024.

The HMO Assistant Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory;
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and—
 - i. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
 - ii. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

The Committee was advised that, as it was a new application, the Council's Planning Service was consulted. It had confirmed that a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use of Development "CLEUD" was granted on 18th June, 2024.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with the Environmental Protection Unit in relation to daytime noise; the Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years. The applicant had confirmed that they had not been convicted of any relevant offences under the 2016 Act.

For the purpose of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Area (HMA) "2/22 Botanic, Holylands, Rugby" as defined in the document Council's Local Development Plan Strategy, which was formally adopted on 2nd May, 2023. It was reported that Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement in section 8 of the 2016 Act upon the Council to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision.

The officers had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and

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- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that “Nurturing sustainable and balanced communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP’s housing policies.” In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

“Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA.”

The Committee was advised that, on the date of assessment, 18th September 2024, 88% of all dwelling units in policy area HMA 2/22 were made up of HMOs and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit as set out in Policy HOU10. There were 1131 (46%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 4784 persons in that HMA.

It was outlined that there were a total of 2476 dwelling units in HMA 2/22. The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The HMO Assistant Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low income households and, more recently, migrant workers and asylum seekers.

She explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

The Committee was advised that no objections had been received in relation to the application. It was also reported that the accommodation had been inspected by a technical officer from the NIHMO service, on 11th July, 2024, at which time it was established that additional ventilation was required to the living room and, if a licence was granted, officers would propose that that would be a condition to be attached.

On 18th September, 2024, pursuant to Paragraph 9 of Schedule 2 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, officers had issued a Notice of Proposed Decision to the Applicant advising that it was proposing to refuse the licence on the grounds of overprovision.

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The Chairperson advised the Committee that the applicant, Mr. P. Stewart, was in attendance to address the Committee and he was welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. Stewart advised the Committee that he felt that he had been misled by Council officers in respect of applying for an HMO licence, in that an officer had advised him that they saw no reason why he wouldn't get a licence for the property. He outlined that he had had to apply twice and that he had spent over £2,500 in fees as part of his application. He stated that he had forgotten to apply for a new HMO licence before the deadline but that he had been a fit and proper landlord and that he had a good relationship with the neighbouring properties. He also highlighted that, as demonstrated within the report, there was a high demand for HMO properties within the area. He reiterated that he felt that Council officers should have advised him early on in the process that his application was unlikely to be approved due to an overprovision of HMOs in the area.

During discussion, a number of Members sought clarity from the Assistant HMO Manager as to what conversations had taken place and what advice had been given by Council officers to the applicant. She confirmed to the Members that HMO officers could not make a pre-determination on an application.

A Member stated that the overprovision of HMOs in the Holylands/Rugby area was well documented within the press and through the work of the Licensing Committee.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Kelly,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refuse the application as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it was satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

Non-Delegated Matters

Notices of Motion - Annual Update

The Building Control Manager provided an annual update on the motions which the Licensing Committee was responsible for, in line with the agreement of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that all standing committees would receive regular updates.

He outlined that, as agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committees, motions could be closed for one of two reasons:

- **Category 1 – Notice of Motion contained an action that has been completed.**

All Notices of Motion within this category contained a specific task

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that has since been complete. It is worth noting that, when Committee agree to action a Notice of Motion, there are sometimes additional actions agreed alongside the Motion. As these are not technically part of the Notice of Motion, they are taken forward through normal committee decision making processes. The Notice of Motion can therefore be closed, but additional actions related to it will continue to be progressed and reported to the committee.

- **Category 2 - Notice of Motion has become Council policy or absorbed into a strategic programme of work.**

These Notices of Motion did not contain a specific task that could be complete but rather they are more strategic in nature and require changes in Council policy and/ or strategy for long term outcomes. Those listed within this category have all been agreed by Committee and are now either Council policy or are currently being implemented through a Council strategy that is managed by a Standing Committee through the corporate planning process.

The Members were advised that there were four Motions and Issues Raised in Advance for which the Licensing Committee was responsible.

After discussion the Committee agreed that the following two motions be closed:

- Request to receive a delegation re: the new Pavement Cafe Guidelines (ID = 382); and
- Street Closures (ID = 398)

The Committee also noted the status updates for the remaining two motions which remained open, namely, Drink Spike Testing Kits in Licensed Premises and AirBnB Accommodation.

Road Closures - Oral update

The Building Control Manager advised the Committee that, due to staff illness, an update on Road Closures would be provided in due course.

Chairperson

Planning Committee

Tuesday, 15th October, 2024

MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Carson (Chairperson);
Aldermen McCullough and Rodgers;
Councillors Abernethy, Bell, Brennan,
T. Brooks, Doran, S. Douglas, Ferguson, Garrett,
Groogan, Magee, McCann and Murphy.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning);
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager;
Mr. D. O’Kane, Acting Planning Manager (Plans and Policy);
Ms. C. Reville, Principal Planning Officer;
Mr. M. McErlean, Senior Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 17th September, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 1st October, 2024, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Withdrawn Item

The Committee noted that the following item had been withdrawn from the agenda:

- LA04/2024/0393/F - Proposed 5 storey extension to the East of the ECIT Building (Institute of Electronics, Communications and Information Technology), and 3 storey extension to the West, to provide additional research and development space with associated landscaping and site works - ECIT Building Queen's Road, Queen's Island.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 15th October, 2024**

Committee Site Visits

The Committee noted the site visits and agreed to undertake three pre-emptive site visits in relation to the following applications:

- LA04/2024/0664/F - Demolition of existing Fanum House and Norwood House and erection of a new 17 storey building comprised of 594-bed Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation (comprising a mix of clusters and studios) including landscaped roof terraces, and all other site and access works. - Lands comprising existing Fanum House, Norwood House and adjacent lands, No's 96-110 Great Victoria Street;
- LA04/2024/0369/F - Proposed Specialist Nursing and Residential Care Facility comprising approximately 158 no. beds, day/dining rooms, treatment rooms, staff rooms, office/store rooms, including car parking provision, cycle parking, refuse storage, landscaping, and associated site and access works. - Lands at Former Monarch Laundry site, and Broadway Hall Site, No's 451 - 457 Donegall Road; and
- LA04/2024/1385/F - Amendment to planning permission Z/2013/0931/F to permit occupation for either Class B1(a) office or Class B1(c) research and development. - Olympic House, Titanic Quarter, 5 Queens Road.

**Notification of Provision/Removal
of Accessible Parking Bay**

The Committee noted the notifications regarding accessible parking bays at the following locations:

- Provision at 6 Cavendish Square;
- Provision at 21 Eliza Street Close;
- Removal at 28 Reid Street;
- Provision at 63 North Parade;
- Provision at 74 Colinmill;
- Provision at 109 Ormeau Road; and
- Provision at 5 Thorndale Avenue.

Planning Appeals Notified

The Committee noted the appeals decisions.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 15th October, 2024**

Planning Decisions Issued

The Committee noted the planning decisions issued in September, 2024.

Live Applications for Major Development

The Committee noted the list of live applications for major development.

Committee Decisions that have yet to issue

The Committee noted the list of Committee decisions which had not yet been issued.

Miscellaneous Reports

**Housing Land Monitor 2023/2024 and
Employment Land Monitor 2023/2024**

The Development Planning and Policy Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's Housing Land Availability Summary Report and the Employment Land Monitor (ELM) for the 2023/24 monitoring period.

The Committee noted the outcomes of the annual Housing Monitor report and the Employment Land Monitor for 2023/24, and the intention to publish the summary documents and accompanying online map portals on the Council's website.

LDP Engagement Strategy

The Development Planning and Policy Manager reported that the Council had commenced work on the second part of the two-stage LDP, the draft Local Policies Plan.

He provided an update on the ongoing review and refresh of the LDP Engagement and Communications Strategy and the LDP Engagement and Communications Plan for the LPP.

The Committee noted the update.

**Delegation of Local Applications
with NI Water Objections**

The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control, those local planning applications to which NI Water had objected to.

Public Consultation on Validation Checklist

The Planning Manager explained that the Planning service intended to prepare and publicly consult on its validation checklist. He outlined the purpose of the report and outlined the current information requirements, new legislation and the proposed public consultation.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 15th October, 2024**

He stated that, as part of the consultation process, the Committee would be asked whether it would require specific Member engagement, such as a workshop.

He explained that the outcome of the consultation and proposed final validation checklist would be reported back to the Planning Committee for feedback before referral to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Committee noted the report and agreed that Members would engage with the consultation process via a future Planning Committee Workshop.

**Casement Park - Application
for a Non-Material Change**

The Director of Planning and Building Control updated the Committee on an application for a non-material change on the Casement Park planning permission, whereby the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) had been dealing with the permission as the relevant planning authority and had been discharging conditions on that permission.

She explained that the applicable legislation did not permit DfI to deal with non-material changes, and, therefore, an application had been made to the Council with regard to the Construction Environment Management Plan, that proposed the plan be provided on a phase-by-phase basis rather than a single document provided prior to commencement of work on site.

She reported that the application was based on the timing and provision of information rather than the level or nature of that information, and that officers had been dealing with the application under the Council's Scheme of Delegation, however DfI would continue in its role as the planning authority to discharge the conditions.

The Committee noted the update.

Planning Applications

LA04/2024/0483/F and LA04/2024/0480/DCA - Proposed change of use from Office (B1) and restaurant (Sui Generis) to Hotel comprising of 88 no. bedrooms, two storey rooftop extension, restaurant and bar offerings, gym facilities, including new dormer windows on roof, internal and external refurbishment and alterations, and all associated site works. - 34-44 Bedford Street and 6 Clarence Street

The Senior Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and highlighted the following key areas for consideration:

- Principle of development;
- Impact on the character and appearance of the Linen Conservation Area;
- Impact on Built Heritage and Archaeology;
- Design and placemaking;
- Climate change Page 177;
- Access and transport;
- Health impacts;
- Environmental protection;
- Flood risk and drainage;
- Waste-water infrastructure;
- Waste management;
- Natural heritage;
- Employability and Skills;
- Section 76 planning agreement; and
- Pre-application Community Consultation.

He explained that, since the publication of the report, an informal re-consultation response had been received from the Conservation Team on amended ground floor details which objected to the loss of the Harlem Café shopfront, that a new shopfront with sub fascia transom would be preferable and that any mullions on the frontage, previously occupied by Deane's, be retained.

He reported that the opinion of officers remained that, on balance, the resultant redevelopment would enhance the conservation area, as required by legislation, and that the avoidance of symmetry was reflective of the existing eclectic character of the ground floor frontage.

He stated that it was recommended that the application and accompanying Conservation Area Consent would be granted, subject to conditions and a Section 76 agreement.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 15th October, 2024**

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. D. Broderick and Mr. T. Stokes from TSA Planning, and Mr. S. Lennon, TODD Architects, to the meeting, who attended to answer any questions from the Committee.

In response to a question from a Member with regard to the Harlem Café shopfront, Mr. Lennon explained that the façade was not considered to be of historical value and that the glazing and doors dated from the 1990s, however, the applicant was willing to work with officers to find a solution, if retention would be required.

The Committee granted planning permission and Conservation Area Consent, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided that they were not substantive,

LA04/2023/3649/F - New 2 storey regional radiopharmaceutical facility, with associated single storey ancillary services accommodation, bin store, and emergency generator and oil tank storage. Amendment to existing car parking layout. - Royal Victoria Hospital, 274 Grosvenor Road

The Principal Planning Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the application, and referred to the following key issues:

- Principle of the proposal;
- Flood Risk;
- Design, Massing and Scale;
- Impact on the Listed Building;
- Impact on Amenity;
- Environmental Protection;
- Climate change; and
- Pre Application Community Consultation.

She explained that the proposed site was situated in an existing car park within the Royal Victoria Hospital Complex, within a flood plain, however, the proposal had been deemed an exception, given that it was replacing a demolished building and was of regional economic importance. She stated that a flood risk assessment had been submitted and that DfI Rivers had offered no objection.

She reported that the proposed building would have no impact on residential amenity, was considered to integrate within the existing buildings on site and would not impact the setting of the listed Mullhouse Building. She added that the proposed building was of a high-quality design, the materials were considered acceptable and that there had been no objections from consultees or third parties.

The Principal Planning Officer stated that, having regard to the Development Plan and other material considerations, it was recommended that planning permission be granted.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
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The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other matters that might arise, provided they were not substantive.

**LA04/2023/2861/F - Extension to Class B3 factory
with associated access, servicing, parking and
landscaping - 1 Millennium Way**

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee, which sought planning permission for an extension to an existing Class B2 factory to be used for storage and loading purposes which were ancillary to the existing Class B2 use on site. She explained that the proposal reduced the floorspace from the original submission, from 3094m² to 2595m².

She reported that the site was unzoned within the Belfast Urban Area Plan 2001 and zoned as existing employment/industry in both versions of the draft Belfast Metropolitan Plan 2015.

The Principal Planning Officer stated that, having regard to the development plan, relevant planning policies and consultation responses, it was considered that the variation of condition should be approved.

The Committee agreed to vary the condition and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other matters that might arise and to deal with the outstanding EHO response, provided that they were not substantive.

Chairperson

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Standards and Business Committee

Thursday, 24th October, 2024

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND REMOTELY VIA TEAMS

Members present: Alderman Lawlor (Chairperson);
Aldermen McCullough and Rodgers; and
Councillors Bradley, Carson, D. Douglas,
Groogan, Kelly, Lyons, Magee, Maghie,
F. McAteer, McCormick, McDonough-Brown,
Nic Bhranair and R. McLaughlin.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager, and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

There were no apologies reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd May were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd June.

Declarations of Interest

In respect of item 2(e) viz., 'Notice of Motion re: Special Education Needs – Legal Protection for Young People in NI', Councillor Nic Bhranair declared an interest in that she was employed by The Executive Office. However, since the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the meeting.

Motions

The Committee considered the following five motions which had been received in advance of the Council's meeting on 4th November:

Epilepsy - Education and Training

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Long and seconded by the High Sherriff, Councillor S. Douglas, be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Blood and Bone Marrow Donations

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor T. Brooks, be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

**UK Shared Prosperity Fund –
Future Arrangements**

Moved by Councillor Kelly,
Seconded by Alderman McCullough and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Doran and seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin, be adopted.

The motion is set out hereunder:

"This Council notes the significant role that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) has played in supporting local communities across Belfast. The UKSPF has been instrumental in addressing regional disparities and fostering economic growth, social cohesion and employability.

This Council further notes with concern that the current funding period for the UKSPF is set to conclude in April 2025, with no clear indication of its future beyond this date. The uncertainty surrounding the continuation of this vital funding threatens to disrupt the progress made in addressing the long-standing disparities faced by our communities.

Given the importance of the UKSPF to the continued development and prosperity of our city and its residents, this Council commits to writing to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) & the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to:

- Provide immediate clarity on the future of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund post April 2025.
- Ensure that any future funding arrangements are at least equal to, if not greater than, the current levels of support provided by the UKSPF.
- Engage in meaningful consultation with community partners to ensure that the needs and priorities of our communities are adequately reflected in any future funding frameworks.

This Council also commits to working collaboratively with other local authorities, regional bodies, and stakeholders to advocate for the continuation and enhancement of the UKSPF, ensuring that Belfast continues to thrive and grow."

**Standards and Business Committee,
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NILGOSC - Disposal of Government Bonds

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Whyte and seconded by Councillor Doherty, be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

**Special Education Needs –
Legal Protection for Young People in NI**

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Doherty and seconded by Councillor Whyte, be referred to the Council meeting, with no restrictions on the number of speakers.

Chairperson

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Special Education Needs – Legal Protection for Young People in Northern Ireland

“The Council is concerned that no legislation providing legal protection for young people over the age of 19 with Special Education Needs exists in NI, in contrast with England and Wales.

The Council commends tireless efforts and campaigning of everyone connected with Caleb's Cause.

And will write to Ministers for Communities, Education and Health requesting that the required legislation be enacted to provide legal protection to young people in Northern Ireland.”

Proposer: Councillor Paul Doherty

Seconder: Councillor Carl Whyte

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