

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 25th March, 2026

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor; and
Councillors Black, Bunting, de Faoite,
S. Douglas, Duffy, Groogan, Harvey, Lyons,
McAteer, McCallin, McCormick, McDonough-Brown,
McKay, R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Nelson and Ó Néill.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. L.A. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture And Tourism; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Mrs. Greta Rodgers

The Chairperson referred to the passing of Mrs. Greta Rodgers, wife of Alderman Jim Rodgers. It was agreed that a letter of condolence be forwarded to Alderman Rodgers on behalf of the Committee.

Apologies

There were apologies received.

Declarations of Interest

In respect of the item 'Belfast Harbour Commissioners – Draft Masterplan 2025-50', Councillor R. McLaughlin indicated that he was a Council representative on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. He left the meeting whilst the matter was under consideration. In respect of the same item, Alderman Lawlor, together with Councillors S Douglas, Groogan and Harvey, indicated that they were members of the Council's Planning Committee. Given that several matters relating to the Draft Masterplan would be considered by the Planning Committee in due course, the aforementioned Members retired from the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Presentations

Belfast Harbour Commissioners – Draft Masterplan 2025-50

Further to the Committee's decision of 11th February, the Chairperson welcomed Mr. J O'Neill (Chief Executive), Mr. K. Flanigan (Infrastructure and Capacity Planning Lead) and Ms. N. Sayee (Corporate Affairs and Engagement Director), representing the

Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC), who were in attendance to deliver a presentation on BHC's Draft Masterplan 2025-50.

Mr. O'Neill outlined the principal aspects of the Draft Masterplan which provided a 25-year framework for investment, regeneration and sustainability. He added that the Masterplan sought to enable Belfast and its port to remain competitive, whilst enhancing trade, creating additional jobs, providing cleaner energy and encouraging further innovation. The Masterplan, he indicated, had been formulated over a two-year period during which extensive consultations had been undertaken with key stakeholders, local communities, statutory bodies and elected representatives.

The Committee was informed that the Masterplan reflected BHC's existing plans and addressed its longer-term ambitions. Key to the Masterplan was the concept of flexibility, which would permit BHC to adapt and address changes in economic markets, particularly relating to global shipping and logistics. Mr. O'Neill concluded by requesting that the Council consider the Masterplan and provide its positive support and endorsement for the strategic vision and overarching framework as set out therein.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives of BHC for attending and they left the meeting.

The Committee considered also a report which placed BHC's Draft Masterplan within its wider context, particularly as it related to Council initiatives within the wider harbour area. It was reported that officers would format a draft response for consideration by the Committee at its meeting on 15th April. Such a response would be formulated within the following context:

- That the Council recognised the strategic importance of the harbour to the City's economic growth and regeneration and welcomed the longer-term approach adopted to building the port's capacity, the transition to cleaner energy solutions and the proposed regeneration of the Inner Harbour area in line with the Local Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- That the Council recognised the vital role of the wider Harbour Estate in growing the City's key growth sectors in, for example, film, innovation and tourism, as well as BHC's role in delivering regeneration and sustainable connectivity;
- That the Council recognised and supported the reclassification of 'trust ports' to provide BHC with the ability to increase spending in a prudent manner; a development that had been endorsed by the Committee at its meeting on 12th March, 2025; and
- That the Council recognised the importance of proper engagement and would encourage BHC to continue to ensure that the delivery of the Draft Masterplan would be undertaken in partnership with the City's key stakeholders and communities.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and noted further that officers would prepare a draft response within the context set out.

Northern Ireland Food to Go Association

The Committee was reminded that, in 2025, as part of the development of Grand Central Station, in advance of the introduction of the Department for Communities (DfC) proposed Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road Public Realm Improvement Schemes, DfC had funded 'revitalisation schemes' for Sandy Row and the Grosvenor Road areas. Those schemes had sought to mitigate against the impact caused to local independent businesses by the development work at the new station. At its meeting on 10th September, 2025, the Committee had agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to request that consideration be given to establishing a similar scheme specifically to support independent businesses within the Great Victoria Street area.

Accordingly, at its meeting on 3rd December, it was noted that the Minister had responded to the aforementioned request to advise that such schemes should not be considered as 'compensation schemes', since they were provided in conjunction with Public Realm Improvement Schemes, which aimed specifically to enhance building frontages, support additional cleaning and promote areas as shopping destinations. The Minister had indicated also that the Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5 - Public Realm Improvement Scheme (which included Great Victoria Street) had not, as yet, been programmed for delivery, pending the approval of the Eastern Transport Plan and Belfast Rapid Transport Phase 2. As such, it was the Minister's view that there was no rationale in bringing forward a revitalisation scheme for the Great Victoria Street area at that time.

In noting the response, the Committee had agreed to extend an invitation to the Northern Ireland Food to Go Association, to outline how the work associated with the development of Grand Central Station had impacted upon independent businesses within the Great Victoria Street area, particularly traders operating in 'The Halt' within the former Europa Bus Centre.

In accordance with that decision, the Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Henderson, Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Food to Go Association, who delivered a presentation outlining a range of issues which had - and continued to - impact upon independent business within the Great Victoria Street as a result of the development of Grand Central Station.

Accordingly, it was

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees that letters be forwarded to the Minister for Communities, the Minister for Infrastructure and to Translink to reiterate the Committee's position that consideration be given to providing a revitalisation scheme within the Great Victoria Street area to assist independent businesses impacted upon by the work associated with the development of Grand Central Station.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the reports associated with the following item was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 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.

Cultural Multi-Annual Grants

(Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor, attended in connection with this item).

At its meeting on 11th March, in considering several options for the allocation of Cultural Multi-Annual Grants for 2026-28, the Committee had agreed to adopt an approach outlined in 'option six' of an associated report. The Committee had agreed also that a request be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to consider providing funding towards a discretion transition fund to support organisations which would incur a reduction in funding under the approach adopted. It was reported that the Strategic Policy and Resources had acceded to that request and allocated a sum to enable discretionary transition payments to be made to such organisations.

Accordingly, the Committee considered a report, together with several appendices, which outlined the proposed funding allocations as formulated within the parameters of 'option six' as adopted by the Committee on 11th March.

After discussion, it was

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to proceed with the proposed funding allocations as set out within the report and notes that a further report be submitted, to the meeting scheduled for 15th April, that would outline a range of options as to how the discretionary transition fund might be used to support those organisations which had incurred a net reduction in funding under the terms of the Cultural Multi-Annual Grants 2026-28.

Chairperson