

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 10th February, 2026

MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Cobain (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland;
Councillors Abernethy, Black, Bower, Bradley,
R. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Collins, de Faoite,
M. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, Flynn,
Garrett, Magee, Maghie, Murray and Verner.
- In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Open Spaces,
Resources, Fleet and Transport;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

There were no apologies received.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th January 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 February.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Murray and Bunting declared interests under the item 'Lagan Valley Regional Park' in that they were Council appointees to the board of that organisation. Since that organisation was a constituted charity, the Members, in accordance with the Code of Conduct, were not required to leave the meeting whilst the matter was under discussion.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following two items were 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 Committee was advised that the content of the 'restricted' reports and any associated discussion must be treated as 'confidential information' and that such information could not be disclosed as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Bryson Recycling

At its meeting on 13th January, the Committee had agreed that an invitation be extended to representatives of Bryson Recycling to attend its meeting in February to discuss recent delays which had been encountered in the provision of collection services across Belfast. Accordingly, Ms. K. Fulton, Director of Recycling, was welcomed by the Chairperson and she proceeded to provide an overview of several resource and operational issues which had impacted upon collection services over the Christmas period. She outlined the steps which had been taken to address the issues and also the adjustments which had been put in place to ensure that services would be maintained should similar circumstances reoccur.

Noted.

St. Patrick's Day Off-Street Parking

The Committee was reminded that, at its previous meeting, it had deferred consideration of a proposal that the Council would provide free parking in its off-street carparks on St. Patrick's Day, 2026. That issue had arisen due to the fact that, on 17th March, 2025, forty-seven fines had been issued to individuals for parking in Council-managed car parks, despite the fact that the day was a bank holiday. It was pointed out that the Department for Infrastructure had exercised discretion and opted not to enforce parking penalties on individuals fined for parking in its on-street carparks on that date. The Committee, in January, had agreed to defer consideration of the proposal since, if approved, it would result in a loss of operating Income to the department, the extent of which was unclear.

Accordingly, the Committee considered a further report which outlined several options, including how any loss of income might be offset from within a departmental underspend.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Murray and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that there be no change to the Council's off-street car parking charging arrangements on St. Patrick's Day, 2026, given the impact that the waiving of fees and charges would have on the Council's operating income and in accordance with the corporate policy of promoting active travel.

The Committee agreed also that the Council would consider allocating St. Patrick's Day as one of the 'designated days' available for the promotional use of Belfast Bikes.

Houses in Multiple Occupation - Review of Licence Scheme Changes

The Committee noted a decision of the Licensing Committee of 21st January in respect of the above-mentioned matter and noted further that the decision had been adopted by the Council at its meeting the previous evening.

Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Working Group

The Committee approved the minutes of the above-mentioned working group of 14th January and adopted a recommendation to permit the Commonwealth War Graves Commission to mark a further twelve graves within the Council's cemeteries.

Resources and Fleet – Christmas Period Update

(Mr. B. Murray and Mr. P. Doyle, Waste Management Service, attended in connection with this item).

At its meeting on 13th January, the Committee had agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting that would outline the reasons for a number of missed bin collections which had been reported over the Christmas period, particularly within the north and west of the City. Accordingly, the Committee considered a report in this regard.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and officers noted a range of Members' comments in relation thereto.

Lagan Valley Regional Park

The Committee noted correspondence which had been received on behalf of the Board of Lagan Valley Regional Park, together with correspondence from the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, which related to the Board's correspondence. In addition, the Committee endorsed a course of action that would be undertaken by Council officers in addressing the matters raised.

Notice of Motion

Provision of Sustainable Burials

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 2nd December, 2025, it had adopted the undernoted motion, which had been moved originally by Councillor Abernethy and seconded by Councillor T. Brooks:

“That this Council recognises the significant environmental impact of traditional burial and cremation practices, including high carbon emissions, chemical pollution, and long-term land use challenges, as highlighted in the All-Party Group on Climate Action's briefing paper 'Beyond Burial and Cremation'.

This Council further acknowledges the growing public interest in more sustainable, dignified, and low-carbon alternatives to conventional practices – such as natural (green) burials, tree pod interment, and other emerging end-of-life methods.

Natural burial, which involves the use of biodegradable materials, avoids embalming, and often takes place in woodland or meadow settings with minimal ongoing maintenance, has already been successfully implemented elsewhere as a simple and ecologically restorative option.

Accordingly, the Council agrees to:

1. explore the feasibility of providing sustainable burial options within existing or new cemeteries, including the designation of natural burial grounds or woodland burial areas within our district; and
2. provide an updated report on any identified legislative, planning, infrastructural, or regulatory barriers that may impact the delivery of these sustainable end-of-life options locally.”

The Director of City Services presented a report which reminded the Committee that the former Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting on 5th November, 2010, had considered a report regarding the provision of sustainable burial alternatives within Roselawn Cemetery, and had authorised the undertaking of feasibility work, including a hydrogeological survey. However, no further work had been carried out at a site deemed suitable within Roselawn since it lay within a footprint of land identified for a new crematorium.

The Committee was reminded also that, given the shortage of burial land under the Council’s ownership, no provision existed currently for providing sustainable burial alternatives. The Director pointed out that the Council was seeking to identify a new site for the development of a cemetery. She added that, once that site had been acquired, the inclusion of sustainable burial alternatives, such as natural burial areas or woodland interment, would be thought as part of the overall planning for the site.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed to the closure of the motion.

Notices of Motion - Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on notices of motion or issues raised in advance which had been referred for its consideration. The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reported that, as of the date of the meeting, 54 matters fell within the Committee’s remit, an overview of which was appended to the report. He outlined the specific actions which had been taken by departmental officials to address the issues. Accordingly, he recommended that 17 of the 54 motions/issues raised in advance be closed.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to the closure of 13 of the 17 issues/motions recommended, with the exception of the following, viz., (399) Knockbreda Road Crossing; (443) Council Dog Warden Service; (462) Lagan Gateway Pedestrian Crossing; and (435) ‘FIDO’ Dog Fouling Removal Vehicle/‘SCARABS’. In addition, officers undertook to provide updates in respect of several queries which had been raised by Members.

Operational Issues

Resources and Fleet – Update

The Committee noted the information provided within a report in the above-mentioned matter and officers undertook to provide update on a range of individual Members’ queries and comments in relation thereto.

Requests for the Use of Parks for Events

The Committee granted approval to the holding of the undernoted events, subject to the organisers meeting all of the stipulations as set out within the report:

- CardioSoc Colour Run – Ormeau Park;
- Belfast Photo Festival – Botanic Gardens;
- Belfast Marathon Half & Full – Victoria, Ormeau and Waterworks Park;
- Belfast Barrio Fiesta – Botanic Gardens;
- Bloomfield Gospel Hall Gospel Outreach – Dixon Park Playing Fields; and
- Belfast 24-Hour Run – Victoria Park.

Net Zero Neighbourhood: A Climate Action Plan for Improving Lives

The Director of Open Spaces, Resources, Fleet and Transport reported that the Council had been invited to participate in the above-mentioned project, which would be delivered in conjunction with Eastside Greenways and The Queen's University of Belfast. He reported that Eastside Greenways, as lead partners, had been successful in its application to the 'National Lottery: Climate Action Fund' to manage the project over a five-year period. The Committee was apprised of the aims and objectives of the project and the Council's role in its delivery. That role would see the Council collecting and mapping ecological data; developing toolkits and resources; and oversee work associated with the final evaluation process, in respect of which income in the sum of £130,000 would be received by the Council.

The Committee agreed that the Council would enter into a formal agreement for the delivery of the project and authorised officers to sign the appropriate documentation.

Social Supermarket Fund 2026/28

The Committee noted the contents of the report in respect of the above-mentioned matter and endorsed the arrangements that would be put in place to provide payments in lieu of the receipt of a funding from the Department for Communities for the financial year 2026/27.

Department for Communities Consultation - 'Notice to Quit' Periods

The Committee considered a draft response to a Department for Communities consultation exercise entitled, The Private Tenancies (Notice to Quit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2025. The consultation sought views on a range of proposed new regulations for 'Notice to Quit' periods within the private rented sector, with the proposals suggesting extended notice periods of up to seven months for longer-term tenants, alongside shorter, exception-based notices of two to four weeks for anti-social behaviour or rent arrears.

The Committee adopted the draft response and agreed that it be amended to highlight the following points:

1. That the timescales associated with 'notices to quit' would place a disproportionate burden on tenants, and not landlords. Such 'notices to quit' would affect particularly those tenants who were victims of domestic violence, those suffering from serious and debilitating health

conditions and those required to find alternative housing arrangements through no fault of their own;

2. that the proposed timescales, if included within the regulations, would not take account of the prolonged timescales associated with legal processes and could increase cases of homelessness. Any revised regulations should be drafted within the context of the overall obligations as set out under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998); and
3. that clarity be sought from DfC as to the proposed actual role of the Council in enforcing any revised regulations and how any additional Council staffing resources and administrative support, if required, would be funded by DfC.

Dual Language Street Signs

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at Mill Valley Gardens, Alexandra Gardens, Appleton Park, Lagmore View Crescent, Clifondene Gardens, Bearnagh Drive and Woodland Avenue.

Irish Football Association - Joint Ground Criteria Review

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor R. Brooks reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 5th November, 2024, it had agreed that an invitation be extended to representatives of the Irish Football Association (IFA) to present an overview of its review of grounds' criteria that would be applied to clubs participating in local leagues. In February, 2025, the IFA had indicated that it would not be in a position to attend a meeting until its review had concluded.

Councillor R. Brooks reported that, in January, 2026, a further request had been submitted to the IFA to attend the Committee. However, the organisation had indicated that, since the work associated with the development of the National Conference League had not been concluded, the review of grounds' criteria was ongoing. Therefore, the IFA had advised that it was not in a position to present to the Committee, but that it would continue to work with Council officials in respect of the review.

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor Black and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees that informal contacts between Council officials and the Irish Football Association would cease until the IFA had undertaken to attend the Committee to provide an update on the work associated with its review of grounds' criteria.

Chairperson