

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 20th September, 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, Nelson and Whyte.

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;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
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 16th and 23rd August 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, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McDonough-Brown declared an interest in item 2c - Update on Hardship Programme in that his partner worked for Save the Children which was in receipt of funding.

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in item 2c - Update on Hardship Programme in that her employer was in receipt of funding.

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Councillor Brennan declared an interest in item 2c - Update on Hardship Programme declared an interest in item 2c - Update on Hardship Programme in that her employer was in receipt of funding.

Councillor RM Donnelly declared an interest in item 6b – Shared City Partnership in that her employer was being invited into the next meeting.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following five 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 and
Medium-Term Financial Planning**

The Director of Finance submitted for the Committee’s consideration a report which provided an assessment of the key issues which would influence the rate setting process for 2025/26 and the development of the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan for 2025/26 - 2028/29.

The Committee noted the challenges to be taken into consideration as part of the annual and medium-term rate setting and that a further report on progress would be brought to the Committee in October.

Targeted Acquisition

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted a report which sought approval for the targeted acquisition of a strategic property in Belfast city centre and provided Members with background to a potential Placemaking Pilot in the wider area.

The Committee:

- I. agreed that the conditional without prejudice offer made to acquire the property referenced in the report be progressed on the basis as outlined in the report and, subject to Council ratification and to the offer being accepted by the vendor, to acquire the property on terms to be agreed by the City Solicitor and the Director of City Regeneration and Development;

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and noted that completion of the acquisition would be subject to title/legal due diligence; and

- II. noted the update on the potential Placemaking Pilot, with further detail to be brought back to the City Growth and Regeneration and Strategic Policy and Resources Committee(s) in due course.

Update on Hardship Programme 2024/25

The Committee considered a report which provided an update to Members on the current position regarding the development 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 (£100,773) in relation to the development and delivery of a hardship programme in 2024/25;
- ii. noted that if any further funding was secured that options would be brought back to the Members' Cost-of-Living Working Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee;
- iii. agreed that the matter would be raised in the meetings between Party Groups and the Director of Finance to explore what further funding might be available;
- iv. noted that an All-Party delegation was scheduled to meet with the Minister for Communities and that funding for hardship would be discussed;
- v. noted the planned stakeholder support networking event to be held in City Hall on Tuesday 29 October 2024 and that invites would be issued to Party Group Leaders and the Members' Cost-of-Living Working Group; and
- vi. that a letter be forwarded to the Minister for Communities requesting that further funding be made available.

Assets Management

The Committee:

- i) Cromac Street Car Park – Licence renewal**
 - approved the renewal of a Licence agreement from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to the Council in relation to the Council operated off-street Car Park at Cromac Street.
- ii) Ormeau Park – Land Reinstatement**
 - noted the reinstatement of lands at Ormeau Park following completion of works associated with the Flood Alleviation Project.

iii) North Foreshore Film Studios – Phase 2a Lease Boundary Adjustments

- approved adjustments to the site to be demised to Belfast Harbour Commissioners for Phase 2A of their Film Studio extension at the North Foreshore.

Belfast Bikes Scheme - Operating Model and Revenue Structure

The Committee approved the new operating model and revenue structure for the Belfast Bikes Scheme.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Safe Leave Consultation

The Director of Human Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To present a draft Council response to the Department for the Economy's consultation document on the provision of Safe Leave.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Review and agree the Council's response to the Department for the Economy's consultation document on the provision of Safe Leave. The response will be submitted subject to ratification at the October Council meeting.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 Domestic abuse is a traumatic and horrendous experience for those subjected to it. It occurs amongst people of all genders, ethnicities, sexualities, ages, disabilities, immigration status, religions or beliefs, and socio-economic backgrounds.

- 3.2 Employers are increasingly recognising the importance of supporting employees who are experiencing domestic abuse and members will be aware that the Council has had in place for some years a policy to provide support for employees who are affected by domestic violence. The policy encourages managers and supervisors to provide a sympathetic response to requests for special paid or unpaid leave; flexible working and other work-life balance arrangements as a result of

domestic violence and abuse for example flexibility in working hours or time off when required to enable the employee to seek protection, go to court, look for new housing, enter counselling, arrange childcare etc.

- 3.3 Having access to safe leave can give employees the chance to seek support and space to deal with issues related to domestic abuse. Having access to paid leave means that employees are not at a financial detriment when they need to be away from work for this purpose.

Key Issues

- 3.4 The Assembly passed the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (NI) in 2022 although this has not yet been implemented. This progressive legislation will give employees and workers who are the victims of domestic abuse up to 10 days paid safe leave for the purpose of dealing with issues related to that abuse.
- 3.5 The Domestic Abuse Safe Leave consultation was launched by the Department for the Economy in July 2024 and seeks to inform the public about the department's intention to introduce regulations, under and in accordance with provisions of the Domestic Abuse (Safe Leave) Act (NI) 2022, to entitle employees and workers, who are victims of domestic abuse, up to 10 days paid safe leave in each leave year for the purpose of dealing with issues related to that abuse.
- 3.6 Many aspects of the safe leave framework have already been determined by the Act. Both employees and workers are entitled to safe leave. They will be able to access the right from their first day of employment. The cost of the paid leave is met by the employer. These are important cornerstones of the framework. There are, however, still some practical and implementation measures that the Department must determine. The consultation invites views on some specific aspects of the regulations so that we can implement the provisions of the Act in a way that provides support for all users of this important new legislation. It is open for responses from 5 July 2024 for a 12 week period.
- 3.7 The draft response to the consultation is attached at Appendix 1. In particular, Members are asked to note the following in the proposed response to the consultation:
- that the right to safe leave should arise following a single incident of domestic abuse

- that the definition of leave year for the purposes of safe leave should align with the existing definition of leave year for annual leave purposes, set out in the Working Time Regulations (NI) 2016, i.e., maps our current leave year
- that employers have the option of seeking notification of the purpose of safe leave (e.g. obtaining legal advice, finding alternative accommodation etc) as part of any notice procedures
- that safe leave should be able to be taken in periods shorter than one day
- that employees should receive their full pay when on a period of safe leave and reflect 'normal pay'

Financial and Resource Implications

Financial

- 3.8 Any additional costs associated with safe paid leave will be met from departmental staffing budgets. Given that the entitlement is for 10 days per annum there will be no backfill requirement.

Human Resources

- 3.9 There are no staffing implications to this consultation. However once introduced there will be a requirement to review the Domestic Violence & Abuse Policy, including consultation with trade unions and there will also be system configuration implications to calculate 'normal pay'.

Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Implications

- 3.10 The Department for Economy has undertaken draft equality and rural needs screening and has been screened out. Currently we do not anticipate the policy to result in any adverse impacts on any of the Section 75 groups or for those who live rurally. The Council will be required to undertake Equality and Rural Needs screening whilst carrying out any review of our own policy."

The Committee agreed the Council's response to the Department for the Economy's consultation document on the provision of Safe Leave [here](#), subject to the amendment of part 7 to clarify that, whilst the Council would prefer guidance, it does not wish to put in additional barriers to requests for safe leave. The Committee noted that the response would be submitted subject to ratification at the October Council meeting.

Good Jobs Bill Consultation Committee Report

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To present a draft Council response to the Department for the Economy’s consultation document on the ‘Good Jobs’ Employment Rights Bill.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Review and agree the Council’s response to the Department for the Economy’s consultation document on the ‘Good Jobs’ Employment Rights Bill. The response will be submitted subject to ratification at the October Council meeting.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 In July 2024, Economy Minister Conor Murphy, released the Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill consultation.

3.2 The consultation is open for responses from 1 July to 30 September 2024.

3.3 The aim of the consultation is to gain an insight into the opinions of the public, stakeholders and other parties involved in various employment rights with a view to enhancing the Employment Law framework in Northern Ireland to ensure it is fit for purpose.

3.4 Key objectives of the Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill consultation include replacing zero-hour contracts with a more flexible option and protecting workers’ rights and removing unfair barriers for trade unions, specifically in low-paying sectors. In addition, the consultation will gather views on a broader range of potential employment law enhancements to boost terms of employment, voice, and representation, pay and benefits, and a healthy work-life balance.

3.5 The consultation seeks views on four aspects of a Good Job, as defined by the Carnegie Trust, namely: Terms of Employment; Pay and Benefits; Voice and Representation; and Work-life Balance. Appendix 1 sets out a brief outline of the topics under consideration.

- 3.6** The consultation responses will be summarised and placed on the Department for the Economy website. This will include a list of organisations that responded but will not include personal data.
- 3.7** In formulating the Council's response to the consultation document, the views of each council department, Legal Services, and Audit Governance and Risk Services have been sought.

There are a number of sections contained in the consultation document that do not apply to the Council as an employer. Where this is the case, the following sections have not been completed.

- Understanding Employment Status and addressing bogus self employment
 - Employment Agency Inspectorate Information Sharing - Call for Information
 - EAI Enforcement Powers: Labour Market Enforcement Undertakings & Labour Market Enforcement Orders
 - Pay and Benefits
 - Working Time Regulations: Record Keeping Requirements – Call for information
 - Working Time Regulations: Right to Disconnect – Call for information
 - Collective Bargaining: Recognition – Call for Information
 - Information and Consultation Definitions – Call for Information
 - Information and Consultation Thresholds – Call for Information
- 3.8** In addition, the Committee will note that the Council offers favourable terms and conditions of employment and policies and procedures which make it an employer of choice, and which exceed current statutory requirements. That being the case, it should be noted that the consultation document sets out a number of proposals that the Council already applies, for example, neonatal leave, flexible working etc. These arrangements have been subject to consultation with our trade unions in accordance with the Industrial Relations Framework.
- 3.9** The commitment to good jobs and good work is central to the Belfast Agenda's ambition to drive inclusive growth and tackle anti-poverty. Therefore, an overarching civic response is also

attached for submission to the Department along with the detailed Council's response as an employer.

- 3.10 While broadly supporting the four main themes in the drive to create 'good jobs', the covering response recognises the diversity of the business base in Belfast, where 87% of businesses employ fewer than 50 employees and the persistent challenges the local (and regional) economy faces in terms of high levels of economic inactivity, low unemployment and low productivity which make it a challenging economic environment.
- 3.11 As a result, it focuses on the standards and ambition for the city, highlighting some of the initiatives that can support good jobs and create a framework for more inclusive practices across the city, such as the Belfast Business Promise, as well as the role of anchors and the public sector in enacting social value procurement. This also recommends the need for consideration to be given to encouraging the adoption of the Real Living Wage and support to create inclusive pathways to employment.
- 3.12 Council Officers have also made their external networks aware of the consultation period on the Good Jobs Employment Bill.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.13 None

Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Implications

- 3.14 The Department for Economy has undertaken draft equality and rural needs screening and has been screened out. Currently we do not anticipate the policy to result in any adverse impacts on any of the Section 75 groups or for those who live rurally. The Council will be required to undertake Equality & Rural Needs screening whilst carrying out any review of our own policy."

The Committee agreed the Council's response to the Department for the Economy's consultation document on the 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill [here](#), subject to the amendment of the response to provide that the Council is opposed to the use of zero hours contracts.

Planning Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 27th August 2024, it had received an update on Planning Performance. At that meeting and previously, the Committee had sought a regular update on Major applications and applications that had

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been determined by the Planning Committee, especially those where a Decision Notice had yet to be issued.

As set out in the previous report, all Major applications must be determined by the Planning Committee. The Key Performance Indicator (given in weeks) is calculated from when an application is considered to be valid to when the Decision Notice (“Green Form”) is issued. That means that any delays either pre- or post- committee would impact on the KPI. The target for determining a Major application was 30 weeks.

Appendix 1 to the report [here](#) sets out the Major applications that were currently with the Council to determine. Details are given on the location, proposal, the validation date and target date for determination (using the 30-week target set out in the Key Performance Indicator) as well as a status update.

In addition, Appendix 2 [here](#) sets out the applications that had been determined by the Committee since February 2022 which are yet to be issues. For completeness, information was also given on those applications determined by Committee which had had their Decision Notice issued. Details are given on the time taken (in weeks) to bring the applications before Committee and where decisions are yet to be issued, information was given relating to the main reason for the delay.

Reports on Major applications and applications determined by the Planning Committee would be brought to each Planning Committee meeting for information. It was proposed that the same reports would also be brought on a quarterly basis to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. Should members have any questions on Major planning applications in the intervening period, they are able to contact the Director of Planning and Building Control.

The Committee:

1. Noted the report; and
2. Agreed that reports would be brought before the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on a quarterly basis.

Common Purpose – NI Legacy Programme Sponsorship

The Committee was reminded that Common Purpose was a non-for-profit leadership development organisation which supported people and communities from all backgrounds, beliefs and experiences. In recent years (October 2021 and January 2024) the Council had worked with Common Purpose and provided funding to support the delivery of their NI Legacy Programme in Belfast, alongside a range of other organisations, including Allstate Northern Ireland, Belfast Charitable Society, Belfast Met, Halifax Foundation for Northern Ireland and Power NI.

The most recent NI Legacy Programme which was delivered in January 2024 attracted 77 participants aged 18-25 from across Northern Ireland. The two-day programme encouraged young people to think bigger, get new perspectives, be challenged to think differently to shape the future of Northern Ireland. The Council hosted

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day 2 of the programme at the City Hall and also directly supported the delivery of the programme with The Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Ryan Murphy, delivering a keynote speech and facilitating a Q&A session with participants. Other activity included immersion visits with local organisations, including Another World Belfast, Translink and NOW Group to name a few. Café conversations were also facilitated by senior leaders across the city and the participants were challenged to deliver presentations to a panel of experts which enabled young people to reflect on their key priorities for change in Northern Ireland.

The programme delivered considerable impact for those involved with the majority of participants reflecting positive change as summarised below:

- 92% have greater confidence in their role as a leader
- 96% feel better prepared to work with people who are different from them
- 89% feel better able to make a positive impact
- 96% will be more open to diverse perspectives
- 86% feel more willing and able to impact their city's future

Common Purpose produced a video which summarises the 2024 NI Legacy Programme [here](#).

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised the Committee that, following the success of the previous two programmes in 2021 and 2024, Common Purpose planned to bring forward a further programme to deliver in Belfast in January 2025. The new programme would engage new participants aged 18-25 with a renewed focus on engaging young people within inclusive growth cohorts across the city.

He reported that Common Purpose had approached the Council and other partners across the city to seek sponsorship of £10,000 to support the delivery of the programme. Funding would help to support the organisation to offer the programme free of charge to young people across the city and engage up to 100 participants. This would help also to remove barriers to participation and ensure that all those who wish to participate can do so.

The programme would bring together a diverse group of young people: some in employment, some not; some studying, some volunteering whilst some would be passionate activists and others would be finding their own causes. It would focus on supporting the human capital, social capital and civic capital for those involved:

- Human capital - individual learning outcomes for participants as they grow and develop their cultural intelligence.
- Social capital - creating valuable connections between peers and generations across the city.
- Civic capital – identifying the tangible actions and outcomes to support young people to make a difference in their local areas.

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As a potential sponsor, the Council would have the opportunity to:

- Secure 20 places for our younger members of staff and/or young people from across the city to enable them to benefit from the learning, impact, inclusion, and networks that the programme provides. We would intend to liaise with community partners and members to raise awareness of this opportunity.
- Engage and speak on the programme and to listen to and gain new perspectives from, the diverse eyes of the young leaders.
- Include our branding on all marketing materials and related social media posts to further raise the profile of Council with young people.

A further update will be provided to members upon Common Purpose securing the required funding to deliver the programme.

The Committee approved the request for funding received to sponsor the delivery of the Common Purpose NI Legacy Programme (2025) to a value of £10,000.

The Committee agreed also that a report be submitted to a future meeting on the impact of previous years' programmes.

Eurocities Culture Forum 2024

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 Eurocities Culture Forum is taking place in Belfast 24-28 September 2024. We are expecting around 120 participants. The programme will be centred around showcasing our cultural strategy, local cultural sector and projects such as 2 Royal Avenue, Vacant to Vibrant, Hub-In, Belfast Stories and the Belfast 2024 programme. We are working with ten partner cities to include their case studies in the programme.

1.2 The four day programme will include one official dinner, and one welcome reception, both of which exceed the limits for small scale hospitality due to the number of delegates, and therefore require committee approval.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Approve hospitality spend above small scale hospitality threshold: Welcome Reception £1,200 and Official Dinner £3,848.**

3.0 Main Report

Context

- 3.1 At City Growth & Regeneration Committee meeting on 9 August 2023 Members were given an update on key Eurocities membership activity, including Belfast hosting Eurocities Culture Forum in September 2024.**
- 3.2 At City Growth & Regeneration Committee on 8 May 2024 members were presented with a further update on the Eurocities Culture Forum 24-28 September 2024 including an outline of the programme.**
- 3.3 Being chosen to host the event recognises the value of Belfast as a cultural capital and presents an opportunity to position and promote the city during Belfast 2024. This presents a great opportunity to shine a light on the city and on the rich cultural and artistic talent, and responds to *A City Imagining* cultural strategy and Belfast Agenda ambitions to showcase our city to the world.**
- 3.4 For Eurocities Culture Forum 2024, 120 delegates are now registered from over 70 cities across Europe and the UK.**

Proposal

Welcome Reception

- 3.5 Cost to host the welcome reception at 2 Royal Avenue on Wednesday 25 September is using Yallaa (a community interest company based at 2 Royal Avenue) is estimated at £1,200. High Sheriff will undertake civic dignitary role to welcome the delegates to Belfast.**

Official Dinner

- 3.6 Cost to host the official dinner at The Academy training restaurant (part of Ulster University) is at an agreed rate of £35 per head for set menu designed by UU students, (total estimated cost £3,848).**

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.7 Approval is requested for hospitality for the events noted above, taking place during Eurocities Culture Forum. Costs to deliver the overall Forum event are within existing budgets.**

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.8 There are no equality or good relations implications.”

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendation as set out in paragraph 2.1 of the report.

On a vote, twelve Members voted for the proposal and none against, with eight no votes, and it was declared carried.

Shared Prosperity Fund

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on a funding opportunity through the UK Government’s Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and to get agreement on a number of priority activities for inclusion in the funding application.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the proposal by UK Government to make an allocation of £9.85million to councils under the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), for spend to take place by 31 March 2025**
- **Note that there will be a ring-fenced allocation of £1,787,615 for Belfast City Council**
- **Agree the indicative list of priority activities for inclusion in the funding application.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 In 2022, the UK Government’s DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) confirmed that Shared Prosperity Fund resources of around £127million would be available in Northern Ireland over the financial years 2022/23; 2023/24 and 2024/25). The funding was structured around three priority areas, namely:

- Supporting Local Business – funding stream under which the Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service “Go Succeed” is funded – (£17million budget) as well as targeted support for key growth sectors and female enterprise to be led by Invest NI
- People and Skills – funding allocated via an open call for projects, with 18 projects receiving funding totalling £58million as well as additional funding for numeracy skills (“Multiply”) of around £6million to be distributed through the Labour Market Partnerships
- Communities and Place – initial funding of £1million allocated to 11 councils for expenditure by March 2023.

3.2 At the April meeting of the Northern Ireland SPF Partnership Group (the overall steering group for the SPF funding), DLUHC advised that they were considering plans for the allocation of remaining funding of £9.85million and sought views on a number of options. Their preferred option was to allocate all resources to councils under the “Communities and Place” theme via a ring-fenced call for projects.

3.3 Following that meeting, DLUHC officials presented this advice to Ministers. However given the election announcement at the end of May, this proposal was not signed off for some time. On 23 August 2024, all councils received correspondence confirming the UK Government’s intention to proceed with the ring-fenced call for funding, open to the 11 local authorities.

3.4 Subsequently, information on the proposed approach, timelines and level of funding available under the fund have been shared. Funding has been allocated on a per capita basis. For Belfast, this means that there is a budget of £1,787,615. SPF runs until end March 2025 so all expenditure must be incurred by this point. However the SPF management team have advised that they will accept eligible expenditure from 1 April 2024 – meaning that we can use this funding for activities that are already under way (and therefore use council resources on other schemes). Eligible activities can include:

- Funding for improvements to town centres and high streets, including improved accessibility for those with disabilities
- Funding for new, or improvements to existing, community and neighbourhood infrastructure projects
- Creation of and improvements to local green spaces and community gardens
- Enhanced support for existing cultural, historic and heritage organisations that make up the local cultural

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heritage offer/support for local arts, cultural heritage and creative activities

- Support for active travel measures
- Funding for development and promotion of wider campaigns which encourage people to visit and explore the local area.

3.5 Following the formal confirmation of the fund, officers have been working to identify relevant projects for inclusion as part of the Belfast City Council application. We have undertaken a review of programmes and engaged with teams across the council to identify projects that can meet the eligibility criteria. Following a preliminary round of engagement, we have worked at speed through a long list to a short list of projects that:

- Might allow us to free up resources for other activity
- Are under way and will comfortably meet spend timeframes
- Have not yet started but have approvals/routes to market that will ensure spend by end March 2025
- Enable us to bring forward work that had been identified as priority but did not have dedicated resources assigned.

3.6 As a result of this exercise, the following projects are being proposed for submission:

| Project | Indicative budget |
|---|--------------------------|
| Pitch improvements work | £460,000 |
| Playgrounds improvement work | £660,000 |
| Vacant to Vibrant scheme | £200,000 |
| Feasibility studies for key city centre sites and assets | £200,000 |
| Programme of animation, lighting enhancements and marketing linked to key city events (e.g. Halloween, Christmas) | £260,000 |

3.7 Given the late confirmation of funding, the SPF team has requested that councils submit funding applications by 19 September and have confirmed their intention to proceed with project assessments by early October, with funding to follow shortly afterwards. They are aware that some councils may require formal endorsement of their final funding application so they are prepared to work with councils in the knowledge that funding packages are in principle only until there is appropriate council sign-off.

- 3.8 While SPF funding is only guaranteed until 31 March 2025, it is understood that the UK Government is currently working on options for what happens next, following this date. One option under discussion is an extension of activity for one year i.e. from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. This would allow for some development work by the new government to consider what an appropriate replacement to Levelling Up might look like. If this was the case, it may mean that a further allocation of funding might be made available for eligible activity in 2025/26 financial year – although this is not currently guaranteed.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.9 A financial allocation of £1,787,615 will be provided to Belfast City Council to undertake an agreed programme of work. This can be managed within existing staff resources.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.10 All proposed activities will be or have been equality screened.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Corporate Performance Improvement Update

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 provide members with an update on the work undertaken in regard to Corporate Performance Improvement and to present the draft Performance Improvement Self-Assessment 2023-24 for Committee approval and publication.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. approve the draft Performance Improvement Self-Assessment 2023-24 (Appendix 1) and;
- ii. authorise its publication on the council’s website by the statutory deadline of 30 September 2024, subject to formal ratification by the full council on the 1 October 2024.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act requires councils to agree improvement objectives on an annual basis and publish these in the form of a Performance Improvement Plan, to be published by 30 June. The Act also requires that progress is regularly monitored against the improvement objectives and reported in an annual Self-Assessment of performance, to be published by 30 September.

In 2021-22, the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) recommended that we should consider ways to ensure that 'Self-Assessment reports' provide a comprehensive and useful overview of how the council has performed across its wider corporate activities'.

3.2 Performance Improvement Self-Assessment 2023-24

Committee will note that Appendix 1 fulfils both requirements above providing a holistic review of performance and assessing the council's performance against five agreed performance improvement objectives. A series of improvement milestones and indicators had been set out against each objective to enable success to be measured. A summary of the assessment is set out below.

- All 5 improvement objectives have been achieved.
- Milestones – all 66 milestones have either been achieved (85%) or partially achieved (15%).
- In total there are 28 performance indicators – 8 statutory and 20 self-imposed indicators.
- Of the 28 performance indicators:
 - 75% (21) of performance indicators were on target or exceeded target (within 1% or better);
 - 7% (2) were slightly adrift of target (between 1% and 5%) and these are:
 - Number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school); and
 - Amount (tonnage) of council collected municipal waste arisings (reduce).
 - 18% (5) were adrift of target (5% or more) and these are:

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- Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe;
 - Number of participants or businesses supported;
 - One Million Trees Programme - number of trees planted per annum;
 - Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications; and
 - Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications.
- Of the 28 performance indicators:
 - 57% (16) showed a positive change from previous years.
 - 25% (7) showed no significant change or maintained a similar level of performance as previous years, and these are:
 - Number of parks and green spaces with green flag accreditation;
 - Number of jobs promoted through the 'Go For It' programme [statutory performance indicator];
 - Number of participants or businesses supported;
 - Carbon disclosure project (CDP) score;
 - Northern Ireland environmental benchmarking survey rating;
 - % of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use) (increase); and
 - Number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme.
 - 18% (5) showed a negative change from previous years and these are:
 - Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe;
 - One Million Trees Programme - number of trees planted per annum;
 - Amount (tonnage) of council collected municipal waste arisings;
 - Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications; and
 - Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications.

A rationale has been provided within Appendix 1 where targets have not been met or there has been limited or no improvement. Key factors impacting on the delivery of targets include regional issues and delays, council resource constraints as well as dependency on external factors including market forces and regulatory changes. Where targets have not been achieved or there has been no improvement, where relevant these have been carried forward to the 2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan.

Members will note that the draft Performance Improvement Self-Assessment report 2023-24 attached at Appendix 1 had been considered and endorsed by the Audit and Assurance Panel on 16 September 2024. If the Committee agrees, the intention would be to publish the Self-Assessment on the council website by the statutory deadline of 30 September 2024 albeit subject to formal ratification by the full council on the 1 October 2024.

3.3 Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25

At the June committee, members were presented with a draft Performance Improvement Plan. Following this meeting, the Improvement Plan 2024-25 was:

- formally approved by the full council;
- submitted to the NIAO;
- published on our website prior to the end of June in accordance with Part 12 of the Local Government Act; and
- circulated internally to all responsible and updating officers in July 2024.

Committee will note that following approval of the Corporate Delivery Plan (2024-25) at Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23 August 2024 the target for the % of invoices paid within 30 calendar days has been revised from 95% to 90%. The published web version of the [2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan](#) will be updated accordingly following full council approval.

The first update on progress against the 2024-25 Performance Improvement Objectives will be presented to the Committee in December 2024.

3.4 Financial and Resource Implications

None

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3.5 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

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

Update on Area Working Groups

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of North Area Working Group of 27th August, South Area Working Group of 19th August, Area Working Group of 29th August and East Area Working Group of 5th September 2024; and agreed to the recommendation of the East AWG that the Container Storage Facility (ELIF31), previously agreed for the use of Glentoran Youth Football Club, be reprofiled and allocated for use by Dundela Football Club.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Belfast City Council Statement of Accounts 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted for the Committee’s consideration the undernoted report:

Insert item 5a

The Committee:

- i. approved the Council’s Statement of Accounts and incorporated Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2024; and
- ii. agreed that this paper should not be subject to call-in because it would be in breach of a statutory duty given that the statement of accounts must be published by 30th September 2024.

Contracts

The Committee:

- Approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1);

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- Approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2); and
- Noted the award of retrospective STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as 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 |
|--|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--|
| Bulk LPG – Duncrue Estate | Up to 2 years | £160,000 | S Grimes | Due to declining and variable nature of landfill gas generation and abstraction across the Dargan Industrial Estate, refilling of the bulk LPG tank will be on an as, and when required basis. |
| Folder inserter to support high volume enveloping service for NIHE | Up to 2 years | £110,000 | S McNicholl | A new folder inserter is required to continue to provide SLA (Service Level Agreement) mandated high volume enveloping service for NIHE. The NIHE SLA supports over £2 million of income annually for Digital Services. The impact of not providing this service is that we will be in breach of our SLA agreement with NIHE. |
| Framework for advertising in local newspapers. | Up to 4 years | £800,000 | E McConville | Call off framework to support the placement of advertisements in local newspapers in line with Statutory and Standing Order obligations i.e. tenders, recruitment and public notices. |

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| | | | | |
|---|-----------------|----------|-------------|--|
| Commvault support | Up to 3 years | £60,000 | P Gribben | Support contract for Commvault backup products that protects data on the Council's server infrastructure |
| Telephone service provision - Calls / Lines / Broadband (T2484) | Up to 24 months | £284,687 | S McNicholl | Contract to provide telephony services – calls, lines & broadband Originally approved by SP&R Nov 2023 for 12 months but should have been for 24 months. |
| Resilient internet provision, DNS services, Domain registration and renewal | Up to 5 years | £160,000 | S McNicholl | To maintain our internet connection to allow access to websites and for the provision of our hosted webservices |

Table 2: Modification to Contract

| Title of Contract | Original Contract Duration | Modification required | SRO | Description | Supplier |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|------------|--|-----------------|
| Bobbin Café Franchise | Up to 36 months | A further 6 months (Income based contract) | N Largey | The replacement tender (T2479) is currently being evaluated but additional time is required to complete the evaluation process including negotiations. An extension of up to 6 months is requested to facilitate the evaluation and award process but the full period may not be required if the replacement tender (T2479) can be awarded sooner. | Now Group |

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Table 3: Retrospective Single Tender Actions

| Title of Contract | Duration | Est. Max Contract Value | SRO | Description | Supplier |
|--|---------------|-------------------------|--------------|--|----------|
| Project Management System used within Digital Services | Up to 2 years | £36,000 | P Gribben | The current system delivers functionality which is required by Digital Services for management of all projects. No other suitable supplier is available. This STA is to ensure continuity of service and is for 1 year with option for an additional year. | Concerto |

Falls Park Cyclocross Event – Request for Funding

The Committee was advised that a request for funding for a cyclocross event was considered at the meeting of the People and Communities Committee on 10th September.

Given that this was a request for financial support and no budget was available, that Committee had agreed to refer this matter to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for its consideration.

The Committee was advised that the request for funding of up to £8,795 for the Falls Park – which would be held on 5th and 6th October - was not included in any revenue budgets and there was no allocation in the People and Communities budget to support ad hoc requests.

Accordingly, the Committee was asked to consider the request.

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In response to a question, the Director of Finance advised the Committee that, if it were minded to support the request, funding could be made available from the current year's underspend.

After discussion, it was

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

That the Committee agrees to accede to the request for funding with a caveat that funding would not be made available by this means in the future but that the organisation would have to make application to the appropriate Council grants schemes which provided funding for such events.

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

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

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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 & 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

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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.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Shared City Partnership 9 September**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 9th September 2024, including:

Presentation from Cross Departmental Working Group

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

Education Authority on School Safety and anti-racist Bullying Prevention

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

Shared City Partnership Workshop and Executive Office MOU re: Refugee Integration.

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

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- notes the contents of the report; and
- agrees the Memorandum of Understanding in respect of Refugee Integration Funding and the approach detailed in the report and grants the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services delegated authority to progress this support initiative.

PEACE IV – Secretariat Update

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

PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan – Update

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

**Equality and Diversity: Annual Report to the
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland 2023-24**

The Committee was advised that the Council was required, under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to provide the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland with an annual report on the progress of the implementation of its Equality Scheme, as well as an update on the delivery of its Disability Action Plan.

Accordingly, the Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services submitted for the Committee's approval the annual report for 2023/24.

The Committee approved the annual report and noted that it would be submitted to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland following Council ratification.

Operational Issues

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 12th September.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Audit and Risk Panel - 16 September**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel of 16th September.

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

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| NAME OF ORGANISATION | FUNCTION DATE | FUNCTION DESCRIPTION | CRITERIA MET | ROOM CHARGE | HOSPITALITY OFFERED |
|--|----------------------|---|---------------------|--|---|
| 2025 Events | | | | | |
| Voice of Young People in Care (VOYPIC) | 21 February 2025 | 10th Annual Care Day: Care Day Awards – Celebration event to honour children in care. Numbers attending – 200 - 300 | C | Current rate free as charity | Yes, Soft Drink reception as significant anniversary |
| Indian Women Association Belfast | 2 March 2025 | International Women’s Day Celebrations - Through a cultural arts program showcasing dance and music, group Discussions and speeches. Numbers attending – 100 | D | Room hire £175 <i>(community group not charity)</i> | Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception as community group |
| Suicide and Awareness Support Group (Falls Road) | 14 June 2025 | Suicide Awareness & Support Group 25th Anniversary - Moving Minds Together – recognise the work and thank the families who set up this organisation; the first in NI to offer support to bereaved families. Numbers attending – 250 | C | Current rate free as charity | Yes, Soft Drink reception as significant anniversary |

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| NAME OF ORGANISATION | FUNCTION DATE | FUNCTION DESCRIPTION | CRITERIA MET | ROOM CHARGE | HOSPITALITY OFFERED |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| Remembering Srebrenica NI | 25 June 2025 | Srebrenica 30th anniversary Northern Ireland commemoration event with reflection, film and reception. Numbers attending – 100 | C | Current rate free as charity | Yes, Soft Drink reception as significant anniversary |
| Belfast Pride | 18 July 2025 | Belfast Pride Launch and Pride Awards – LGBT Community awards ceremony. Drinks reception followed by Awards presentation. Numbers attending – 300 - 350 | D | Current rate free as charity | Yes Reception as charity |

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cost-of-Living Working Group

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Cost-of-Living Working Group of 11th September.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Sunday Trading - Pilot Scheme - Councillor Nelson to raise

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor Nelson proposed:

That a report be submitted to a future meeting outlining how the Council could plan and deliver a pilot Sunday trading scheme that provides earlier Sunday trading hours for a period of six weeks. That the pilot scheme be accompanied by a public awareness campaign and aligned to family friendly town centre animation.

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The proposal was seconded by Councillor Long.

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the proposed and seconder agreed to the inclusion of the following:

That the Council examine how it can emulate projects like Open Botanic in other parts of the city through the Car Free Sunday's model.

On a vote, nineteen Members vote for the proposal and one against and it was declared carried.

Chairperson