

# Public Document Pack

**Democratic Services Section  
Legal and Civic Services Department  
Belfast City Council  
City Hall  
Belfast  
BT1 5GS**

18<sup>th</sup> June, 2025

## **MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

I enclose a copies of the reports for the following items to be considered at the meeting to be held at 9.30 am on Friday, 20th June, 2025.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

### **AGENDA:**

#### **2. Restricted Items**

- (h) New Crematorium Update (Pages 1 - 6)
- (j) Summer Community Diversionary Programme Update (Pages 7 - 8)
- (k) Assets Report - Restricted 20th June 2025 (Pages 9 - 14)

#### **4. Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (e) City Regeneration Members' Working Group (Pages 15 - 18)
- (g) Pilot Sunday City Animation Project (Pages 19 - 102)

#### **5. Physical Programme and Asset Management**

- (b) Asset Management (Pages 103 - 124)

#### **6. Finance, Procurement and Performance**

- (a) Audit and Risk Panel Annual Report to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee including Annual Governance Statement (Pages 125 - 188)

(b) Contracts Update (Pages 189 - 192)

8. **Operational Issues**

(c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Social Policy Working Group 17.06.25 (Pages 193 - 194)

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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<b>Subject:</b>	City Regeneration Members' Working Group
<b>Date:</b>	20th June 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Deirdre Kelly, Programme Manager

## Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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## Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval for the City Regeneration Members' Working Group to be solely utilised as an appropriate forum to engage with Members on the PSP housing led

	regeneration programme in advance of matters being brought back to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agree that the City Regeneration Members' Working Group is solely utilised as an appropriate forum to engage with Members on the PSP housing led regeneration programme in advance of matters being brought back to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>The City Growth and Regeneration Committee at its meeting on 4 June 2025 considered a report updating Members following the appointment of GRAHAM as Council's Private Sector Partner. This included the requirement for Council to interface effectively with GRAHAM through the project governance arrangements and utilising existing Council structures.</p>
3.2	<p>It was highlighted to the Committee that in endorsing the procurement of a PSP there was a strong emphasis from Elected Members on the need for engagement with them throughout delivery of this housing led regeneration programme and they requested that consideration be given to the best mechanism for such engagement. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the City Regeneration Members' Working Group be solely utilised as an appropriate forum to engage with Members on the PSP housing led regeneration programme in advance of matters being brought back to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.</p>
3.3	<p>A revised draft Terms of Reference for this Members City Regeneration (PSP Housing Led Regeneration) Working Group are enclosed.</p>
	<b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b>
3.4	<p>None associated with this report.</p>
	<b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b>
3.5	<p>None associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	<p>None.</p>



## **City Regeneration Members' Working Group (Private Sector Partner Housing Led Regeneration Programme)**

### **1. Purpose**

The City Regeneration Members' Working Group will be utilised as an appropriate forum to engage with Members on the Private Sector Partner Housing Led Regeneration Programme in advance of matters being brought back to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval

This relates to the Strategic Partnership Agreement between the Council and GRAHAM with the objective of bringing forward residential-led, mixed-use developments on council (and other lands as appropriate) across the city. This initial partnership phase leverages strategic Council-owned city centre 'seed' sites. Given the significance of the Partnership there is a need to ensure that Elected Members have an appropriate forum to interface with the work of the Partnership, provide input to emerging proposals, keep abreast of the key programme milestones and ensure line of sight to provide sufficient assurance that Council's corporate and strategic aspirations are embedded prior to proposals being brought via City Growth & Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee for decision.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The overarching role for the City Regeneration Members' Working Group will be a cross party strategic advisory and discussion group. This will provide an engagement mechanism between officers and representatives from the Partnership (as appropriate) and Elected Members on the PSP projects. The Forum will be utilised to ensure Elected Members can discuss PSP project proposals, progress etc in advance of any formal Committee reporting and required decision making, to ensure the delivery of the Council's corporate aspirations as set out in the Corporate Plan and Belfast Agenda are derived from the Partnership.

### **2. Terms of Reference**

Specifically, the Private Sector Partner Councillor Forum will:

- Act as a dedicated panel for liaison between the Partnership Operational Group /JV Board and Elected Members on all matters relating to the PSP.
- Advise and discuss PSP related matters with officers /Partnership representatives, as appropriate.
- Consider and influence workstreams in the context of Council's corporate and strategic aspirations.

- Consider development / project site specific proposals in the context of the Council's wider strategic and corporate ambitions to maximise outcomes and benefits for the city.
- Receive updates on the Strategic Partnership Agreement plans and progress of the PSP projects, prior decision making through Committee and Council.
- Provide a forum to introduce any "Additional Opportunity Sites" that may, at a future point, be considered to bring into the scope of the Partnership prior to decision making through committee and Council.
- Whilst not having a decision-making function, it will make recommendations and report to the City Growth & Regeneration Committee, and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on a regular basis.

### **3. Membership**

The Working Group will comprise of Party Leaders or their nominees.

### **4. Chairperson**

The Chair shall be appointed by the Members at the first meeting. A Chairperson be appointed on an annual basis. This item of business will be placed on the agenda for the first meeting of each Working Group following the Annual Council meeting each year.

### **5. Reporting Mechanism**

In keeping with its advisory role, the Forum will provide recommendations to committees on relevant items.

### **6. Frequency of meetings**

The Private Sector Partner Councillor Forum will meet on a quarterly basis. The Forum, in conjunction with the PSP Operational Group/JV Board, should determine if frequency of meetings should increase at intervals, based on progress towards milestones and key decision points for the relevant Council Committee.



<b>Subject:</b>	Pilot Sunday City Animation Project
<b>Date:</b>	20 June 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal & Civic Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control

## Restricted Reports

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Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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## Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The report sets out the results of recent engagement on a proposed Sunday Trading and animation pilot in the city centre and proposes an amended approach to undertaking the pilot for Summer 2025.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>Members are asked to note the contents of the report and the results of the recent engagement and either:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree to a Sunday trading and animation pilot in Summer 2025 by designating the city centre (as defined in draft BMAP) as a Holiday Resort under paragraph (9) of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and agree that a review of the pilot will inform a decision in early 2026 whether to continue the Holiday Resort designation, extend the Holiday resort designation or revoke the designation, or</li> <li>2. Agree not to run a pilot in Summer 2025 but to undertake further consultation and engagement specifically on Holiday Resort designation to inform a decision in early 2026 on whether to designate the City Centre or other areas of the city as a Holiday Resort on an ongoing basis and agree that the proposed animation set out in the report can be run in Summer 2025.</li> </ol>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <p>At its meeting in April 2025, Members agreed that officers should look to engage with the BIDS and Belfast Chamber to ascertain whether there is an appetite for the pilot Sunday trading and animation project and the timescales for implementation.</p>
3.2	Since April, there have been a number of discussions with key stakeholders in relation to the pilot including management at Victoria Square, Castle Court and the Kennedy Centre, Belfast One, Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter BIDs, Belfast Chamber, Retail NI, NI Hotel Federation, Visit Belfast, Translink, USDAW and the Department for Communities.
3.3	<p>Shopping Centre management teams were generally supportive of any proposal to extend hours of opening on Sundays, suggesting that retailer buy-in to the proposal shouldn't be an issue. Views were expressed that flexibility was key for retailers and their workers and that most would probably want to open from 11am onwards rather than anything earlier. Concerns were expressed around the timing of a pilot over summer and the ability to get a proposal in place within weeks of the decision and be able to communicate and promote that consistently.</p>
3.4	The BIDS were also all generally supportive of the proposal for longer opening on Sundays with strong indication that it would be preferable to move towards Holiday Resort status to give more certainty for retailers over the proposals. There would be significant input from the BIDS in relation to the animation proposed in the City over the summer and it was felt that the longer opening hours would support this. Concern was also expressed by the BIDs in relation to the ability to put a proposal in place quickly and promote it.
3.5	Belfast Chamber were also supportive of the proposal for longer opening on Sundays and indicated that it would be preferable to move towards holiday resort status, but if a pilot was to be undertaken then it should be longer than six weeks. This reflects concerns around the required lead in time for a pilot and to be able to engage with staff and communicate and promote the proposals consistently. The need to have an appropriate mechanism in place to evaluate the impact of the pilot /designation was also highlighted.
3.6	Hotel Federation & Visit Belfast were both supportive of the proposal and considered that animation in the city would be significantly different without a retail offering. Figures have

	shown that overnight trips may be reducing, and with competition for overnight stays elsewhere in the UK and Europe, it was considered that Belfast should do all it can to attract visitors and with earlier Sunday opening commonplace across many cities, it is expected when people visit. Over the summer months, there are expected to be 330,000 cruise ship visitors with 21 ships and 54,000 people docking in Belfast on Sundays over the summer.
3.7	Retail NI & USDAW wrote to all members and made a deputation to the Council in May 2025 outlining their opposition to any pilot, and discussions covered many of the topics set out in the deputation, which largely mirrored previous representations on this issue. Figures were provided from surveys undertaken when hours were extended in 2012 which showed: 33% of stores were almost empty, 32% were quiet, 30% had the same number of customers as usual on a Sunday and only 5% were very busy. The same survey showed that during the 8 weeks of extra opening 23% of stores did not increase staff numbers, 26% of stores used only volunteers to increase staff numbers, in 51% of stores staff were pressured to work extra hours and 56% of reps reported staff were put under pressure work extra hours.
3.8	Translink outlined that further Metro services were introduced on Sunday mornings during covid and remain in place, with rail services providing good frequency on a Sunday morning. It would be challenging to introduce any additional services or increased frequency in time to facilitate a pilot over the summer as advance notice is needed for any timetable changes.
3.9	The Department for Communities were unable to comment in detail on the pilot as a definitive proposal on the details of the pilot had not been submitted. The Department were clear that the Minister would need to consider their view if the Council were to temporarily relax enforcement of the relevant legislation.
3.10	Officers have taken on board the views of DfC and also considered the representations made by Retail NI and USDAW. Officers consider that a further formal consultation is highly unlikely to demonstrate a change in position from those who object to extended Sunday opening hours.
3.11	Therefore, if a pilot is to be run in Summer 2025, officers would strongly recommend that instead of temporarily relaxing the enforcement of the Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 the Council should instead look to designate an appropriate area as a Holiday Resort based on the significant amount of previous consultation undertaken as well as recent engagement. It should be noted that previous engagement on designation as a Holiday Resort was focussed on the City Centre and therefore if any designation is to rely on the previous consultation, it should also be limited to the city centre.
3.12	The designation as a Holiday Resort will be a pilot and the outcomes will be evaluated after the end of September. It is considered that this will allow members to make an informed decision as to whether the designation should continue. As part of that review process, there will be further engagement with stakeholders and possibly some further public consultation to consider the impacts of the pilot. On the basis of that evaluation, the Council could then determine whether to continue to designate the City Centre as a holiday resort, seek to extend the designation to other areas in the city (based on appropriate consultation) or revoke the designation.
3.13	<b><u>Designation as a Holiday Resort</u></b> Under paragraph (9) of the Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 a Council may designate “ <i>any area in its district as a holiday resort</i> ”. Designation means that for 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year (apart from Easter Day) a shop may open on Sundays in accordance with notice given to Council.
3.14	Before making any designation, the Order is clear that a Council should consult those likely to be affected by the proposed designation. The council has consulted on the designation of the city centre as a holiday destination under the legislation on a number of previous

	<p>occasions, most recently in 2019. The terms of reference for the 2019 engagement exercise included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying barriers accessing the city centre on Sundays and engage with partners to collaborate on solutions</li> <li>• Understanding approaches in other cities and learnings relevant to Belfast</li> <li>• Considering the socio-economic impact of city centre animation on Sundays</li> <li>• Considering the impact that change to opening hours may have on the city centre</li> <li>• Considering the investment required to boost visitor numbers to the city on Sundays</li> <li>• Building a business case to lever resources from partner organisations, in the context of city revitalisation.</li> </ul>
3.15	On the previous occasions, there was engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including retailers (small and large); trades unions; statutory bodies; cultural sector; families; young people; tourism and hospitality representatives and transport providers. Previous Committee reports are included in Appendix 1-6.
3.16	The issues behind the proposals to designate the city centre as a holiday resort were similar to the current position: ongoing challenges to city centre viability; a desire to accommodate a growing tourism audience and a recognition that there was limited retail and hospitality provision in the city centre on a Sunday morning, compared to other days of the week.
3.17	The most recent engagement has confirmed that the positions taken, and views expressed in previous consultations remain relevant.
3.18	For the purposes of a pilot, members should note that previous consultation focussed on the City Centre and therefore members should consider designation of the City Centre as defined by draft BMAP and shown in Appendix 7. This is justified by previous consultation and would provide a robust definition for the purposes of the pilot. Should members wish to extend Holiday Resort Status beyond the City Centre, appropriate consultation as set out in the Order would have to be undertaken. This could take place as part of the review of the pilot with the results to be considered in early 2026.
3.19	The 1997 Order sets out in paragraph 10 that any resolution to designate a Holiday Resort can only take effect from a specified date, which must be at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed. Should a decision be taken at this Committee, following due process the specified date on which the decision could take effect would be Sunday 10 August 2025. The Council will also have to publish notice of the designation in such a manner as it considers appropriate. The pilot could therefore run from Sunday 10 August 2025 for 8 weeks until Sunday 28 September.
3.20	These timescales are later in the summer than suggested by some of the shopping centres and BIDS in the recent engagement, but the Holiday Resort designation and timings are set out in legislation and are considered to provide a significantly more robust approach to the pilot for the Council and retailers than relaxation of enforcement. It would also allow a longer period of time to put in place co-ordinated communication around the pilot.
3.21	The Council would be required to keep a register of shops that have given notice of their intention to open which would be available to inspection by members of the public at all reasonable times. Shops wanting to open for longer on Sunday 10 August would need to give notice to the Council by Friday 25 July (14 days before the start of the pilot, unless the Committee agrees that a shorter period is required).
3.22	If it is the intention of the Council to run a Sunday trading and animation pilot. Designation as a Holiday Resort would enable shops to open (subject to appropriate notice being given) on Sundays until the end of September 2025. Following this, officers will review the impact of the pilot, once again engaging with stakeholders and with the potential for public

	<p>consultation. A report would then be brought before this Committee in early 2026 and a decision could be made to either continue with the Holiday Resort Designation on a permanent basis or revoke the designation and return to the current Sunday opening hours.</p> <p><b><u>Animation</u></b></p>
3.23	<p>Officers have identified a number of events and venues that are providing activity across the July &amp; August period and are accessible on Sundays. These are outlined in Appendix 8 and could form the basis of promotional activity to encourage Sunday footfall.</p>
3.24	<p>In addition officers have engaged with the BIDs to understand what would be possible to support additional animation and uplift activity across the summer period with expenditure up to the value of £120,000.</p>
3.25	<p>This would be split across the BIDs to support activity as below, members should note that these are indicative planning assumptions while detailed plans are finalised and are focussed on July and August and may need to be reviewed and aligned with pilot period.</p>
3.26	<p><b>CQ Bid</b> are providing activation each week in July and August to animate Writers Square. With additional support they would look to include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Urban beach</b> at the riverside near the lagan lookout. Sand area for kids to play with seating for parents. This would be available every day in July and August.</li> <li>• <b>Sunday Craft/Art/Makers market</b> along Hill St. Sunday from Am to 3-4pm. Subject to road closures.</li> </ul>
3.27	<p><b>LQ Bid</b> are also providing activation across July and August. With additional support of up to they would look to extend and include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pick up and play pétanque at Blackstaff Square. The sessions will be facilitated by staff on location from Linen Quarter BID, with expert support from Ormeau Pétanque Club.</li> <li>• Musical animation. This will be at high footfall areas – Grand Central Station have agreed four of six Sundays and engagement has occurred with Halt to suggest a collaborative music with street food combination.</li> <li>• Arts Ekta cultural animation. Includes mini-Mela type activities in high footfall locations in the Linen Quarter, probably co-located with other activities – e.g. Blackstaff Square, Grand Central Station, or Halt.</li> </ul>
3.28	<p><b>Bid One</b> have outlined an Animating Sunday's programme for 6/8 weeks, strategically focused on enhancing the vibrancy, dwell time, and visitor experience within Belfast city Centre.</p>
3.29	<p>With additional support they would look to extend and include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Teddy Bear's Picnic</b> at City hall grounds</li> <li>• <b>Belfast One Outdoor Summer Cinema Series</b> at City Hall Grounds (extended by a further two dates)</li> <li>• <b>Street Performers &amp; Roving Acts.</b></li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p>
3.30	<p>The costs of the proposed animation programme for 2025 will be met through existing budgets on a one-off basis.</p>
	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p>
3.31	<p>None associated with this report.</p>

<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 – Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report 16.02.18 Appendix 2 - Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report 20.04.18 Appendix 3 - Strategic Policy and Resources Committee report 18.05.18 Appendix 4 – City Growth and Regeneration Committee report 11.09.19 Appendix 5 – City Growth and Regeneration Committee report 12.02.20 Appendix 6 – City Growth and Regeneration Committee report 04.03.20 Appendix 7 – Definition of City Centre (draft BMAP) Appendix 8 – Animation proposals





<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Designation of Belfast district (or the city centre) as a 'Holiday Resort'</b> providing large shops with an option to extend Sunday trading hours between the months of March and October
<b>Date:</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> February 2018
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	John Walsh, City Solicitor Donal Durkan, Director of Development

### Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes ☐ No ☒

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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### Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes ☒ No ☐

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- seek approval from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to further consult the public on their attitudes to Sunday Trading in the city and to gauge public opinion as to whether the Council should designate Belfast as a 'holiday resort' under Article 6 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997</li><li>- A holiday resort designation would provide 'large shops' with an option to extend their Sunday trading hours in the city centre on up to 18 Sundays (other than Easter Sunday) between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year. Such a designation may not come into effect until at least one month after the resolution of the Council.</li><li>- Small shops are already permitted to open at any time on Sunday's throughout the year.</li></ul>

<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• note the contents of the report, including the findings from the original public consultation which concluded on 5th May 2017; and</li> <li>• provide approval for officers to consult the public on their present attitudes to Sunday Trading and to ask the public whether the Council should make a 'holiday resort' designation under Article 6 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>The initial proposal was made in response to a strong lobby within the city to designate Belfast as a 'holiday resort' area in order to improve the tourism offering in Belfast (particularly on a Sunday morning), to boost the local economy and to support the overall regeneration of the city centre. The principle of additional Sunday opening hours for large shops in 'holiday resort' areas was established under Article 6 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (a copy is attached).</p>
3.2	<p>Article 6 was included in the 1997 Order as an additional exemption to allow large shops in tourist areas to avail of the additional tourist trade over the summer months. A range of areas and towns in Northern Ireland have been designated and remain as "holiday resorts" for this purpose including Derry-Londonderry, Newry, Kilkeel, Portrush, Portstewart and Ballycastle. It was felt that Belfast, as a growing tourist destination in both Northern Ireland and wider afield may similarly wish to avail of this exemption.</p>
3.3	<p>There is nothing in this proposal which will result in any change in existing legislation or further 'deregulation' of Sunday trading law.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Requirement to consult</u></p> <p>Any designation as a 'holiday resort' must be done by resolution of the Council. The legislation states that before making a designation the Council must first consult persons likely to be affected by the proposed designation.</p>
3.5	<p>The Council has already consulted widely on this issue during 2017 and the findings from that consultation have been summarised at paragraphs 3.6 – 3.11. It is proposed that the Council undertake an additional 6-week consultation between 16 February and 31 March 2018 on the key questions to allow consultees to further contribute to the existing evidence base and to provide Members with up to date information upon which to make any decision to designate Belfast as a holiday resort or otherwise.</p>

<p>3.6</p> <p>3.7</p> <p>3.8</p> <p>3.9</p> <p>3.10</p>	<p><b>2017 Consultation</b></p> <p>In January / February 2017 the Council undertook a four-week pre-consultation exercise (which included one to one meetings with a range of stakeholders), before commencing a formal public consultation between 10 March and 5 May 2017 on Citizen Space, the Council's online consultation platform. In total, <b>2471</b> people and organisations responded to the consultation.</p> <p><b>Key findings</b></p> <p>With regards to the priority question in the consultation –</p> <p><b>Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?</b></p> <p>Of the total 2471 people and organisations who responded to the consultation:</p> <p><b>1531 answered yes (62%)</b></p> <p>934 answered no (38%)</p> <p>5 did not answer</p> <p>With regards to the second question in the consultation –</p> <p><b>What area should the designation apply to?</b></p> <p>Of the total 1858 people and organisations who responded via the Citizen Space online tool:</p> <p><b>1398 indicated all of the Belfast City Council area (75.2%)</b></p> <p>291 indicated Belfast City Centre only (15.7%)</p> <p>169 did not answer (9.1%)</p> <p>The third question in the consultation asked –</p> <p><b>Do you think Belfast would be more attractive as a tourist and/or shopping and leisure destination if the restrictions on Sunday opening times for larger shops were removed?</b></p> <p>Of the total 1858 people and organisations who responded via the Citizen Space online tool:</p> <p><b>1515 agreed with this statement (81.4%)</b></p> <p>294 disagreed with the statement (15.8%)</p> <p>49 did not answer (2.6%)</p> <p>Consultees were offered the opportunity to provide reasons for their answer.</p> <p>Those agreeing with the statement cited reasons such as this would boost tourism, would provide tourists with an activity to do, the current restrictions are outdated and it would make Belfast feel like a modern international city.</p>
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3.11	<p>The reasons given by respondents who disagreed with the statement included those who felt that there are enough other attractions available for tourists, shopping is not a tourist consideration and the current trading hours are sufficient or changes would be unlikely to have an impact.</p>
3.12	<p><b>Potential Benefits</b></p> <p><b>Tourism</b> - Tourism NI have indicated that they would position Sunday trading within the context of meeting visitor expectations and providing a range of things to do and see. They acknowledge that flexibility around trading hours sits within a broader debate about what other initiatives are required to make our city centres more attractive and vibrant so that they both help position Northern Ireland competitively on the international stage and encourage local residents to come to them.</p>
3.13	<p>Visitor surveys regularly indicate that a lack of range of things to do in the evenings and on Sundays is a weakness with a negative impact on the overall visitor experience. Keeping the issue of flexibility on trading hours to the forefront is important not least for any future major tourism events. Visit Belfast is open from 11am on Sunday and the organisation reports high user numbers from opening time, meaning the tourists are in the City Centre but there is a limited retail offer for them to avail of.</p>
3.14	<p><b>Economy</b> – New footfall statistics from the Belfast one Business Improvement District (BID) demonstrate that the footfall profile on a Monday-Saturday is broadly similar. However, on a Sunday, there is a “lag” in footfall until the opening time of 1pm. This suggests that visitors are currently not coming into the city centre due to the limited retail offering and this could be considered a missed opportunity for retailers that are currently under financial pressure, given the competition from online trading.</p>
3.15	<p>One of main activities available for access on a Sunday morning is St Georges’ Market. Footfall counters at the market indicate that Sunday is regularly the busiest of the three days that the market is opening. Trading is brisk right from opening and this demonstrates the demand from tourists and local users for activities in the city centre earlier on a Sunday.</p>
3.16	<p><b>Next Steps</b></p> <p><b>Six-week Consultation</b></p> <p>It is proposed that the Council go out to consultation for six weeks using the Council consultation hub, Citizen Space to record the public’s current attitudes towards Sunday Trading in order to inform any subsequent decision by the Council as to whether to designate Belfast as a ‘holiday resort’ under the Shops Sunday Trading legislation.</p>

3.17	<p>This follow up consultation would be viewed as a supplementary exercise to the formal consultation which ended in May 2017 and its purpose is to give consultees an opportunity to contribute further to the existing evidence base.</p> <p><b>Making the Designation</b></p>
3.18	<p>Should the Council decide to make the designation, they must do so by resolution of the Council and the designation cannot take effect until at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed. Therefore, if the resolution was passed at the 1 May Council meeting then the designation could take effect from 1 June 2018.</p> <p><b>How would the Exemption be applied?</b></p>
3.19	<p>To make use of the exemption, the occupier or proposed occupier of a large shop must notify the local District Council of the dates of the Sundays involved. The notification does not take effect until 14 days from the date it is given, unless the Council agrees that it should come into effect earlier.</p>
3.20	<p>A Council must maintain a register of shops in its district making use of this exemption and make the register available to the public at all reasonable times.</p>
3.21	<p>The Council may not dictate which Sunday's the large shop may open on (within the designated dates) nor the opening or closing times. Having made the 'holiday resort' designation the council's role according to the legislation will be keep a register of the large shops making use of the exemption in addition to their existing enforcement role in respect of Sunday trading.</p> <p><b>A co-ordinated approach</b></p>
3.22	<p>If the Council decides to proceed with the designation, the Council will work with key partners including the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Belfast One and Visit Belfast to ensure the effective promotion of the additional hours and to consider the potential impact on city animation due to the additional visitors to the city on that day.</p>
3.23	<p>For example, if a major event is taking place in the city over a particular weekend during the summer months, then the Council would aim to ensure that the event would be promoted alongside a programme of supporting activities. The city would effectively be 'open for business' across the entire weekend thereby maximising the tourism offering in the city and providing the option for both small and large retail stores to avail of the additional visitors into the city whilst the event is taking place.</p>

3.24	<p>Likewise, the retail and business partners have been working on the proposals for increased marketing and promotion in order to raise awareness of the change in opening hours, if agreed. It is likely that the majority of retailers will want to open from 11am. The closing hours are likely to remain unchanged.</p> <p><b>Employment provisions</b></p>
3.25	<p>Concerns about the impact of additional Sunday trading on the rights of shop workers was a major issue during the drafting of the original legislation in 1997. To counter these concerns Article 11 and Schedule 2 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 was included to provide employment rights for shop workers, except those contracted to work only on Sundays. They aim to ensure that shop workers are not compelled to work on Sundays against their wishes. The rights apply irrespective of age, length of service or hours of work. The Schedule provides that dismissal of a shop worker (including dismissal for reasons of redundancy) is unfair if the reason for it was the worker's refusal to work on Sundays. It also provides the right not to suffer any other detriment (such as denial of normal promotion or training opportunities, or refusal to pay seniority bonuses, etc.) for refusing to work on Sundays.</p>
3.26	<p>All shop workers who enter into a contract of employment requiring Sunday working are able to 'opt out' of Sunday working subject to giving the employer three months' notice. Enforcement of the employment rights is by way of complaint to an industrial tribunal.</p>
3.27	<p>Before any designation is made the Council will seek assurances from the various retail representative groupings including the Belfast Chamber and Retail NI that their Members (including all large shops wishing to avail of the extended opening hours) are fully aware of their obligations under the legislation to protect the rights of workers. This assurance could take the form of an agreed Charter which all large shops planning on operating extended working hours on designated Sunday's would sign up to.</p> <p><b>Review</b></p>
3.28	<p>It is proposed that any decision to designate Belfast (or the City Centre) as a 'holiday resort' will be subject to a full review at the end of the designated 'holiday resort' period.</p>
3.29	<p>A full and thorough review could therefore be undertaken between 31 September 2018 and March 2019 in order to inform Members of the impacts that the designation has had over the holiday period.</p>

	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>												
3.30	There will be financial and resource implications for both the Development Department and the Planning and Place Department should the Council designate the council area as a holiday resort under Article 6 of the 1997 Order.												
3.31	The Building Control Service currently performs the enforcement role in relation to Sunday trading under the 1997 Order and the designation of the Belfast district as a 'holiday resort' would require an additional level of resource to manage the registration of participating shops and enforcement of same.												
3.32	The Development Department may need to consider how existing resources are re-focused to promote change in opening hours. This may include additional city animation or promotional activities. There may also be a request for additional financial support to supplement planned marketing activity. This will have to be found from existing resources.												
	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p>												
3.33	<p>A draft Equality Screening exercise was undertaken during pre-consultation process. This document was shared on Citizens Space to help elicit views from respondents.</p> <p>The screening exercise highlighted minor impacts on the Religious Beliefs and Dependents categories. As part of the online consultation, respondents were asked if they were aware of any equality and / or good relations implications that should be considered around potentially extending Sunday trading.</p>												
3.34	<p>There were 454 responses to this question via the online consultation. Some respondents made more than one point. The most frequently cited thematic areas are listed below:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Some people can't work on a Sunday due to religious commitments /going to church/family commitments but will feel obliged/pressured to do so if changes are implemented.</td><td>159</td></tr> <tr> <td>Extended Sunday opening during the summer will provide economic opportunities and conveys a positive cosmopolitan image to visitors/tourists.</td><td>97</td></tr> <tr> <td>If implemented, extending Sunday trading hours during summer months will provide additional choice for residents and tourists that want to shop on Sundays, for businesses that wish to open and people that want to work on Sundays.</td><td>70</td></tr> <tr> <td>Religious beliefs/current laws should not restrict those who wish to shop on a Sunday</td><td>51</td></tr> <tr> <td>Family life will be affected if Sunday trading is implemented. There will be a negative impact on retail workers who are carers/have children.</td><td>36</td></tr> <tr> <td>Extended Sunday trading conflicts with personal Christian religious views/faith beliefs</td><td>34</td></tr> </table>	Some people can't work on a Sunday due to religious commitments /going to church/family commitments but will feel obliged/pressured to do so if changes are implemented.	159	Extended Sunday opening during the summer will provide economic opportunities and conveys a positive cosmopolitan image to visitors/tourists.	97	If implemented, extending Sunday trading hours during summer months will provide additional choice for residents and tourists that want to shop on Sundays, for businesses that wish to open and people that want to work on Sundays.	70	Religious beliefs/current laws should not restrict those who wish to shop on a Sunday	51	Family life will be affected if Sunday trading is implemented. There will be a negative impact on retail workers who are carers/have children.	36	Extended Sunday trading conflicts with personal Christian religious views/faith beliefs	34
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Extended Sunday trading conflicts with personal Christian religious views/faith beliefs	34												

3.35	The information obtained during the first consultation will be used to inform and update the Equality Screening document in line with members' decision.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Document attached</b>
	Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997





<b>Subject:</b>	Designation of Belfast district (or the city centre) as a 'holiday resort' providing large shops with an option to extend Sunday trading hours between the months of March and October
<b>Date:</b>	20 April 2018
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	John Walsh, City Solicitor

**Restricted Reports**

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Some time in the future

Never


**Call-in**

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

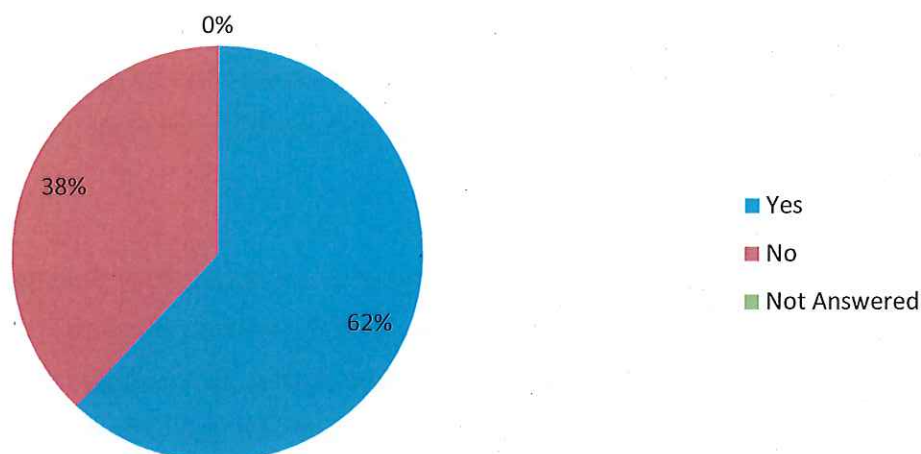
<b>1.0</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT</b>
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- update the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the updated findings from the public consultation as to whether Belfast City Council should designate the Belfast district (or the city centre) as a 'holiday resort' under Article 6 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997</li><li>- to seek a decision from Members on whether to proceed with a 'holiday resort' designation</li></ul> <p>The effect of such a designation would be to provide large shops with an option to extend their Sunday trading hours in the city centre on up to 18 Sundays (other than Easter Sunday) between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year.</p> <p>Such a designation may not come into effect until at least one month after the resolution of the Council.</p>

1.2	<p><b><u>Deputations</u></b></p> <p>Members will wish to note that officers have received requests from both the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw) and the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce to give short presentations to the Committee on this issue. It will be a matter for the Committee to decide at the start of the meeting whether or not to receive the deputations from the aforementioned organisations (or indeed any other organisation who may make a similar request prior to the meeting).</p>
2.0	<p><b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b></p>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) advise whether to receive the deputations indicated at para 1.2</li> <li>(ii) note the contents of the report including the findings from the original public consultation which concluded on 5 May 2017 and the supplementary public consultation which ended on 2 April 2018.</li> <li>(iii) make a decision as to whether to provide approval for the Council to make a 'holiday resort' designation under Article 6 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997</li> <li>(iv) if it is decided to make a designation, to then decide as to whether to apply the designation to either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) the entire Belfast City Council district area, or</li> <li>b) Belfast City Centre only (based on the BMAP definition of the city centre in Appendix 2).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
3.0	<p><b>MAIN REPORT</b></p>
3.1	<p><b><u>Background</u></b></p> <p>The initial proposal was made in response to a strong lobby within the city to designate Belfast as a 'holiday resort' area in order to improve the tourism offering in Belfast (particularly on a Sunday morning), to boost the local economy and to support the overall regeneration of the city centre. The principle of additional Sunday opening hours for large shops in 'holiday resort' areas was established under Article 6 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (copy attached at Appendix 1).</p> <p>Article 6 was included in the 1997 Order as an additional exemption to allow large shops in tourist areas to avail of the additional tourist trade over the summer months. A number of councils in Northern Ireland have by resolution of the council designated cities and towns which receive tourists as holiday resorts including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Derry-Londonderry (Derry City and Strabane District Council)</li> <li>- Newry (Newry, Mourne and Down District Council)</li> <li>- Kilkeel (Newry, Mourne and Down District Council)</li> <li>- Portrush (Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council)</li> <li>- Portstewart (Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council)</li> <li>- Ballycastle (Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council)</li> </ul>



	<p>Belfast, as a growing tourist destination in both Northern Ireland and wider afield may similarly wish to avail of this exemption.</p> <p>It is important to note that any decision to designate as a holiday resort will not result in any change in existing legislation or further 'deregulation' of Sunday trading law.</p> <p><b>Requirement to consult</b></p> <p>Any designation as a 'holiday resort' must be done by resolution of the Council. The legislation states that before making a designation the Council must first consult persons likely to be affected by the proposed designation.</p> <p><b>Previous Consultation 2017</b></p> <p>The Council consulted widely on this issue during 2017 finding that of the total 2471 people and organisations who responded some 1531 answered yes (62%) and 934 answered no (38%) as to whether the council should designate Belfast as a holiday resort. At its meeting on 19 May 2017, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee decided not to designate Belfast as a 'holiday resort'.</p> <p><b>Supplementary Consultation 2018</b></p> <p>At its meeting on 16 February 2018, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed that the Council undertake an additional 6-week consultation between 19 February and 02 April 2018 on the key questions. The purpose of this supplementary consultation was to allow consultees to further contribute to the existing evidence base and to provide Members with up to date information upon which to make any decision to designate Belfast as a holiday resort or otherwise.</p>
3.2	<p><b>Responses to the 2017 Consultation</b></p> <p>A total of 2471 people responded to the initial consultation in 2017. A summary of the responses to the three main questions are included below.</p> <p><b>1. Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1531 answered yes (62%)</li> <li>• 934 answered no (38%)</li> </ul>

**2017 ALL RESPONSES - Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?**



**2. What area should the designation apply to? (Citizen space responses only)**

Of the 2471 responses received, 1689 answered this question:

- 1398 indicated all of the Belfast City Council area (82.8%)
- 291 indicated Belfast City Centre only (17.2%)

**3. Do you think Belfast would be more attractive as a tourist and/or shopping and leisure destination if the restrictions on Sunday opening times for larger shops were removed?**

Of the 2471 responses received, 1816 answered this question:

- 1515 agreed with this statement (83.4%)
- 294 disagreed with the statement (16.2%)
- 7 did not know (0.4%)

3.3

**Responses to the 2018 Consultation**

In total, **5196** people and organisations responded to the supplementary consultation.

Some **2092** responses were collected via Citizen Space (the council's online consultation tool), with the remaining **3104** responses being comprised mainly of hard copy surveys (**1695**), survey postcards (**1369**) written correspondence (**22**) and emails (**18**).

**1. Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?**

- 2528 answered yes (48.7%)
- 2635 answered no (50.7%)
- 33 did not answer

### Analysis of overall findings (2017 and 2018 combined)

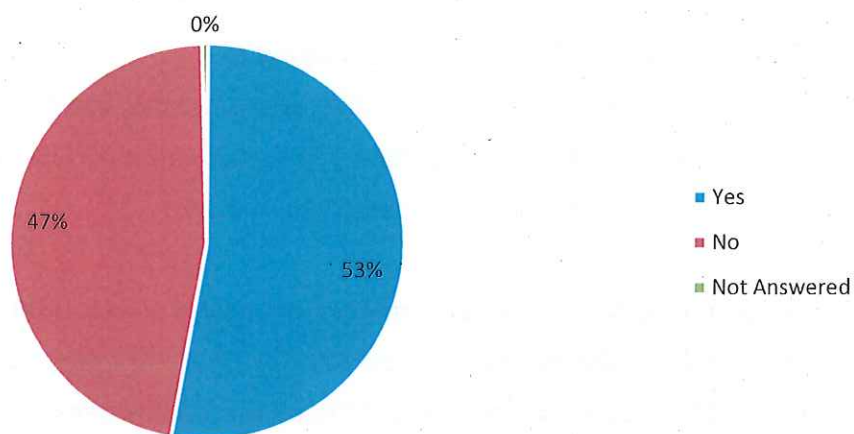
Taking the initial consultation and the supplementary consultation together, some **7667** people and organisations responded to the consultation in total.

With regards to the priority question in the consultation –

#### 1. Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?

- 4049 answered yes (52.8%)
- 3583 answered no (46.7%)
- 35 did not answer

COMBINED - Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?



#### 2. What area should the designation apply to?

Of the 7667 responses received, 4363 answered this question:

- 3742 indicated all of the Belfast City Council area (85.8%)
- 621 indicated Belfast City Centre only (14.2%)

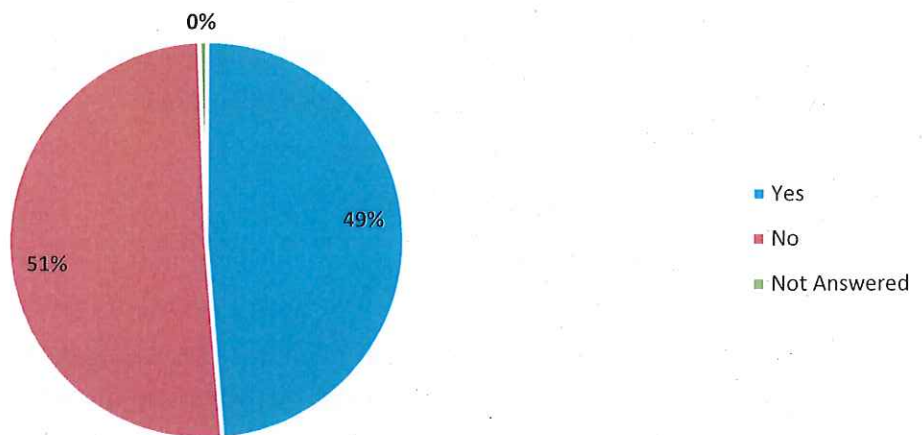
#### 3. Do you think Belfast would be more attractive as a tourist and/or shopping and leisure destination if the restrictions on Sunday opening times for larger shops were removed?

Of the 7667 responses received, 5584 answered this question:

- 4013 agreed with this statement (71.9%)
- 1507 disagreed with the statement (27%)
- 64 did not know (1.1%)



**2018 ALL RESPONSES - Should Belfast be designated as a holiday resort in order to provide large shops with the option to extend Sunday trading hours?**



**2. What area should the designation apply to?**

Of the 5196 responses received, 2674 answered this question:

- 2344 indicated all of the Belfast City Council area (87.7%)
- 330 indicated Belfast City Centre only (12.3%)

**3. Do you think Belfast would be more attractive as a tourist and/or shopping and leisure destination if the restrictions on Sunday opening times for larger shops were removed?**

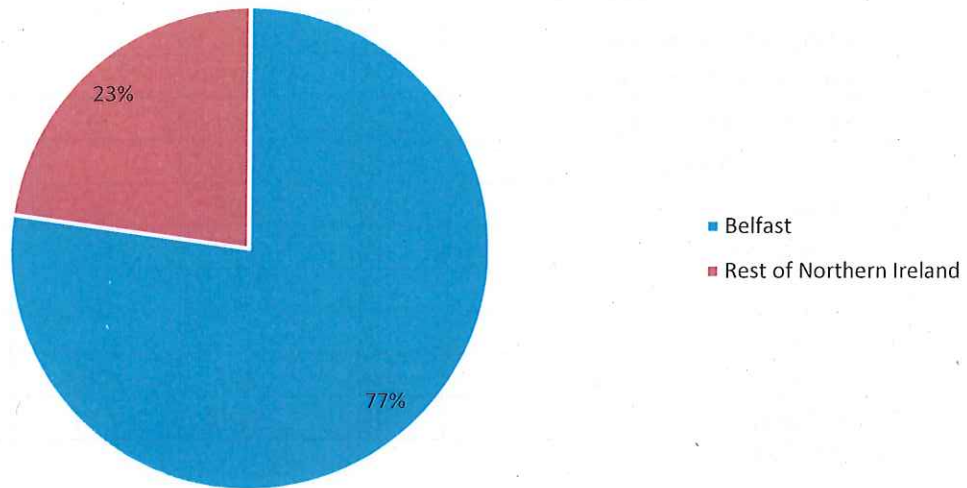
Of the 5196 responses received, 3768 answered this question:

- 2498 agreed with this statement (66.3%)
- 1213 disagreed with the statement (32.2%)
- 57 did not know (1.5%)

**Postcode Analysis (2017 and 2018 Combined)**

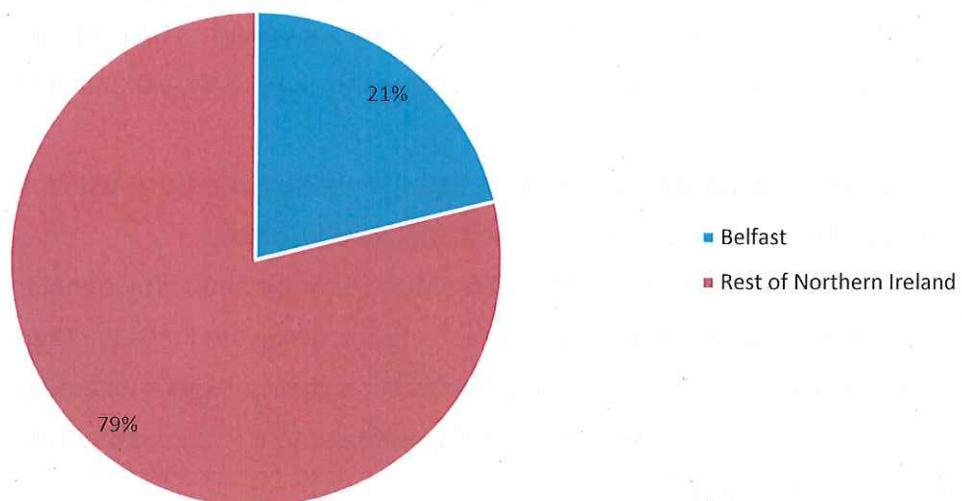
An analysis of the postcodes of the respondents (7667 responses received, 7196 answered this question) who provided this information reveals that of approx. 80% of the “yes” responses were from postcodes within the Belfast District.

COMBINED - Yes responses to designation by location



Similarly, approx. 80% of the “no” responses were from outside Belfast.

COMBINED - No responses to designation by location



<b>Respondents location</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Not answered</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Antrim and Newtownabbey	191	197		388	5.1%
Ards and North Down	108	235	4	347	4.5%
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	45	260		305	4.0%
<b>Belfast</b>	<b>2476</b>	<b>594</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3081</b>	<b>40.2%</b>
Causeway Coast and Glens	12	141	1	154	2.0%
Derry City and Strabane	3	70		73	1.0%
Fermanagh and Omagh	8	245		253	3.3%
Lisburn and Castlereagh	238	281	6	525	6.8%
Mid and East Antrim	50	283		333	4.3%
Mid Ulster	14	368	4	386	5.0%
Newry, Mourne and Down	62	127		189	2.5%
UK	12	1		13	0.2%
International	3	1		4	0.1%
Council Area/ Location Unknown	840	331	445	1616	21.1%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4062</b>	<b>3134</b>	<b>471</b>	<b>7667</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

3.6	<p><b>NEXT STEPS</b></p> <p><b>Making the Designation</b></p> <p>Should the Council decide to make the designation, they must do so by resolution of the Council and the designation cannot take effect until at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed.</p> <p>Therefore, if the council made a resolution at the 1 May Council meeting then the designation could not take effect until 1 June 2018.</p>
3.8	<p><b>How would the Exemption be Applied</b></p> <p>To make use of the exemption, the occupier or proposed occupier of a large shop must notify the local District Council of the dates of the Sundays involved. The notification does not take effect until 14 days from the date it is given, unless the Council agrees that it should come into effect earlier.</p> <p>A Council must maintain a register of shops in its district making use of this exemption and make the register available to the public at all reasonable times.</p> <p>The Council may not dictate which Sunday's the large shop may open on (within the designated dates) nor the opening or closing times. Having made the 'holiday resort' designation the council's role according to the legislation will be keep a register of the large shops making use of the exemption in addition to their existing enforcement role in respect of Sunday trading.</p>
3.9	<p><b>A co-ordinated approach</b></p> <p>If the Council decides to proceed with the designation, the Council will work with key partners including the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Belfast One and Visit Belfast to ensure</p>



	<p>the effective promotion of the additional hours and to consider the potential impact on city animation due to the additional visitors to the city on that day.</p> <p>For example, if a major event is taking place in the city over a particular weekend during the summer months, the Council would aim to ensure that the event would be promoted alongside a programme of supporting activities. The city would effectively be 'open for business' across the entire weekend thereby maximising the tourism offering in the city and providing the option for both small and large retail stores to avail of the additional visitors into the city whilst the event is taking place. Likewise, the retail and business partners have been working on the proposals for increased marketing and promotion in order to raise awareness of the change in opening hours, if agreed. It is likely that the majority of retailers will want to open from 11am. The closing hours are likely to remain unchanged.</p>
3.10	<p><b>Employment provisions</b></p> <p>Concerns about the impact of additional Sunday trading on the rights of shop workers was a major issue during the drafting of the original legislation in 1997. To counter these concerns Article 11 and Schedule 2 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 was included to provide employment rights for shop workers, except those contracted to work only on Sundays. They aim to ensure that shop workers are not compelled to work on Sundays against their wishes. The rights apply irrespective of age, length of service or hours of work.</p> <p>The Schedule provides that dismissal of a shop worker (including dismissal for reasons of redundancy) is unfair if the reason for it was the worker's refusal to work on Sundays. It also provides the right not to suffer any other detriment (such as denial of normal promotion or training opportunities, or refusal to pay seniority bonuses etc.) for refusing to work on Sundays. All shop workers who enter into a contract of employment requiring Sunday working are able to 'opt out' of Sunday working subject to giving the employer three months' notice. Enforcement of the employment rights is by way of complaint to an industrial tribunal.</p> <p><b>Charter on extended working hours</b></p> <p>Before any designation is made the Council will seek assurances from the various retail representative groupings including the Belfast Chamber and Retail NI that their Members (including all large shops wishing to avail of the extended opening hours) are fully aware of their obligations under the legislation to protect the rights of workers. This assurance could take the form of an agreed Charter which all large shops planning on operating extended working hours on designated Sunday's would sign up to.</p>
3.11	<p><b>Review of Holiday Resort Designation</b></p> <p>It is proposed that any decision to designate Belfast (or the City Centre) as a 'holiday resort' will be subject to a full review at the end of the designated 'holiday resort' period.</p>

	<p>To inform such a review the Council will carry out continuous monitoring and evaluation throughout the designation period with a view to bringing a report back to Members in April 2019 outlining the impact that the designation has had over the holiday period.</p>
3.12	<p><b>FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b></p> <p>There will be financial and resource implications for both the Development Department and the Planning and Place Department should the Council designate the council area as a holiday resort under Article 6 of the 1997 Order.</p> <p>The Building Control Service currently perform the enforcement role in relation to Sunday trading under the 1997 Order and the designation of the Belfast district as a 'holiday resort' would require an additional level of resource to manage the registration of participating shops and enforcement of same.</p> <p>The Development Department may need to consider how existing resources are re-focused to promote change in opening hours. This may include additional city animation or promotional activities. There may also be a request for additional financial support to supplement planned marketing activity. This will have to be found from existing resources.</p>
3.13	<p><b>EQUALITY OR GOOD RELATIONS IMPLICATIONS</b></p> <p>A draft Equality Screening exercise was undertaken. Information elicited from the first consultation was used to inform and update the Equality Screening document.</p> <p>The Equality Screening document was shared with respondents to the online survey and hard copy questionnaire survey to help elicit their views. As part of the consultation, respondents were asked if they were aware of any equality and / or good relations implications that should be considered around potentially extending Sunday trading.</p> <p>There were 144 responses made to this question via the online consultation and in hard copy questionnaire format. Some respondents made more than one point. For comparison purposes to the previous consultation, the same thematic areas were applied. Respondents said:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Some people can't work on a Sunday due to religious commitments /going to church/family commitments but will feel obliged/pressured to do so if changes are implemented. (44)</li> <li>2. Extended Sunday opening during the summer will provide economic opportunities and conveys a positive cosmopolitan image to visitors/tourists. (17)</li> <li>3. If implemented, extending Sunday trading hours during summer months will provide additional choice for residents and tourists that want to shop on Sundays, for businesses that wish to open and people that want to work on Sundays. (2)</li> <li>4. Religious beliefs/current laws should not restrict those who wish to shop on a Sunday (1)</li> <li>5. Family life will be affected if Sunday trading is implemented. There will be a negative impact on retail workers who are carers/have children. (51)</li> <li>6. Extended Sunday trading conflicts with personal Christian religious views/faith beliefs (70)</li> </ol>



	Information elicited from the consultation will be used to inform and update the Equality Screening document in line with members' decision.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents attached</b>
	Appendix 1 – Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 Appendix 2 – BMAP definition of city centre area Appendix 3 – list of those organisations making written submissions



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STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS

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**1997 No. 2779 (N.I. 20)**

**NORTHERN IRELAND**

**The Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997**

*Made* - - - - 26th November 1997

*Coming into operation* 4th December 1997

At the Court at Buckingham Palace, the 26th day of November 1997

Present,

The Queen's Most Excellent Majesty in Council

Whereas a draft of this Order has been approved by a resolution of each House of Parliament:

Now, therefore, Her Majesty, in exercise of the powers conferred by paragraph 1 of Schedule 1 to the Northern Ireland Act 1974 and of all other powers enabling Her in that behalf, is pleased, by and with the advice of Her Privy Council, to order, and it is hereby ordered, as follows:—

*Introductory*

**Title and commencement**

1. This Order may be cited as the Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and shall come into operation on the expiration of 7 days from the day on which it is made.

**Interpretation**

2.—(1) Subject to Article 9(2), the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 shall apply to Article 1 and the following provisions of this Order as it applies to a Measure of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

(2) In this Order—

“the commencement date” means the day on which this Order comes into operation;

“the Department” means the Department of Health and Social Services;

“intoxicating liquor” has the same meaning as in the Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996;

“large shop” means a shop which has a relevant floor area exceeding 280 square metres;

“relevant floor area”, in relation to a shop, means the internal floor area of so much of the shop as consists of or is comprised in a building, but excluding any part of the shop which,

throughout the week ending with the Sunday in question, is used neither for the serving of customers in connection with the sale of goods nor for the display of goods;

“retail customer” means a person who purchases goods retail;

“retail sale” means any sale other than a sale for use or resale in the course of a trade or business, and references to retail purchase shall be construed accordingly;

“sale of goods” does not include—

- (a) the sale of meals, refreshments or intoxicating liquor for consumption on the premises on which they are sold; or
- (b) the sale of meals or refreshments prepared to order for immediate consumption off those premises;

“shop” (except in Schedule 2) means any premises where there is carried on a trade or business consisting wholly or mainly of the sale of goods.

#### *Opening of large shops on Sunday*

#### **Large shops not to open on Sunday except in accordance with Articles 4,5 and 6**

3.—(1) Subject to Articles 4, 5 and 6, a large shop shall not be open on Sunday for the serving of retail customers.

(2) If paragraph (1) is contravened in relation to a shop, the occupier of the shop shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding £50,000.

(3) Where a person is charged with having contravened paragraph (1), in relation to a large shop which was permitted by virtue of the exemption conferred by paragraph (1) of Article 5 to be open for the serving of retail customers on the Sunday in question during the hours mentioned in that paragraph, by reason of his having served a retail customer after the end of those hours, it shall be a defence to prove that the customer was in the shop before that time and left not later than half an hour after that time.

#### **Exemption for certain kinds of large shop**

4.—(1) Article 3(1) does not apply in relation to—

- (a) any shop which is at a farm and where the trade or business carried on consists wholly or mainly of the sale of produce from that farm;
- (b) any shop where the trade or business carried on consists wholly or mainly of the sale of intoxicating liquor;
- (c) any shop where the trade or business carried on consists wholly or mainly of the sale of any one or more of the following—
  - (i) motor supplies and accessories; and
  - (ii) cycle supplies and accessories;
- (d) any shop which—
  - (i) is a registered pharmacy; and
  - (ii) is not open for the retail sale of any goods other than medicinal products and medical and surgical appliances;
- (e) any shop which—
  - (i) is at an airport; and



- (ii) is situated in a part of the airport ordinarily used by persons travelling by air to or from the airport;
  - (f) any shop in a railway station or bus station;
  - (g) any shop at a service area within the meaning of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993;
  - (h) any petrol filling station;
  - (i) any shop which is not open for the retail sale of any goods other than food, stores or other necessities required by any person for a vessel or aircraft on its arrival at, or immediately before its departure from, a port, harbour or airport; and
  - (j) any stand used for the retail sale of goods during the course of an exhibition.
- (2) In determining whether a shop falls within paragraph (1)(a), (b) or (c), regard shall be had to the nature of the trade or business carried on there on weekdays as well as to the nature of the trade or business carried on there on Sunday.
- (3) In this Article—
- “medicinal product” and “registered pharmacy” have the same meaning as in the Medicines Act 1968; and
- “Stand”, in relation to an exhibition, means any platform, structure, space or other area provided for exhibition purposes.

#### **Permitted Sunday opening hours for large shops**

- 5.—(1) Article 3(1) does not apply in relation to a shop during the period between 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. on a Sunday.
- (2) The exemption conferred by paragraph (1) does not apply where the Sunday is Easter Day or Christmas Day.

#### **Additional permitted Sunday opening for large shops in holiday resorts**

- 6.—(1) Where a notice under this Article has effect in relation to a shop, Article 3(1) does not apply in relation to the shop on any Sunday specified in the notice; and any exemption conferred by this paragraph is in addition to (and not in substitution for) the exemption conferred by Article 5(1).
- (2) A person who is, or proposes to become, the occupier of a large shop situated in an area designated under paragraph (9) as a holiday resort may as respects any calendar year give notice to the district council for the district in which the shop is situated specifying (subject to paragraph (3)) the Sundays in that year on which Article 3(1) is not to apply in relation to the shop.
- (3) A notice under this Article shall not specify—
- (a) a Sunday occurring before 1st March or after 30th September in any calendar year;
  - (b) Easter Day; or
  - (c) more than 18 Sundays in any calendar year.
- (4) The occupier of a shop in respect of which notice has been given under this Article may, by a subsequent notice—
- (a) specify (subject to paragraph (3)) Sundays different to those specified in the earlier notice; or
  - (b) cancel the earlier notice.
- (5) A notice under this Article—

- (a) shall not take effect until the end of the period of 14 days beginning with the day on which it is given, unless the district council agrees that it is to take effect at the end of a shorter period;
  - (b) shall cease to have effect when superseded by a subsequent notice as mentioned in paragraph (4)(a) or cancelled as mentioned in paragraph (4)(b).
- (6) Every district council shall keep a register of shops in its district in respect of which a notice under this Article has effect.
- (7) In relation to every such shop, the register shall contain particulars of—
- (a) the name (if any) and address of the shop; and
  - (b) the Sundays specified in the notice under this Article.
- (8) Any register kept under this Article—
- (a) shall be open to inspection by members of the public at all reasonable times; and
  - (b) may be kept by means of a computer.
- (9) For the purposes of this Article, a district council may by resolution—
- (a) designate any area in its district as a holiday resort;
  - (b) revoke any designation made by it under sub-paragraph (a).
- (10) Any resolution passed by a district council under paragraph (9) shall take effect from a date specified in the resolution which must be a date at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed.
- (11) Before making or revoking any designation under paragraph (9), a district council shall consult persons appearing to the council to be likely to be affected by the proposed designation or revocation (whether as the occupiers of shops or as local residents) or persons appearing to the council to represent such persons.
- (12) Where a district council makes or revokes a designation under paragraph (9), it shall publish notice of the designation or revocation in such manner as it considers appropriate.

#### **Loading and unloading at large shops on Sunday morning**

- 7.—(1) A district council may by resolution designate its district as a loading control district for the purposes of this Article with effect from a date specified in the resolution, which must be a date at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed.
- (2) A district council may by resolution revoke any designation made by it under this Article.
- (3) Before making or revoking any designation under this Article, a district council shall consult persons appearing to the council to be likely to be affected by the proposed designation or revocation (whether as the occupiers of shops or as local residents) or persons appearing to the council to represent such persons.
- (4) Where a district council makes or revokes a designation under this Article, it shall publish notice of the designation or revocation in such manner as it considers appropriate.
- (5) Schedule 1 (which imposes restrictions on loading and unloading on Sunday before 9 a.m. at large shops in loading control districts) shall have effect.

#### **Enforcement**

- 8.—(1) It shall be the duty of every district council to enforce within its district the preceding provisions of this Order.
- (2) For the purposes of its duty under paragraph (1), a district council shall appoint inspectors.



(3) An inspector appointed by a district council under paragraph (2) shall, on producing if so required some duly authenticated document showing his authority, have a right at all reasonable hours—

- (a) to enter any premises within the district of the council, with or without a constable, for the purpose of ascertaining whether there is or has been on the premises any contravention of the preceding provisions of this Order;
- (b) to require the production of, inspect and take copies of any records (in whatever form they are held) relating to any trade or business carried on on the premises which appear to him to be relevant for the purpose mentioned in sub-paragraph (a);
- (c) where those records are kept by means of a computer, to require the records to be produced in a form in which they may be taken away; and
- (d) to take such measurements and photographs as he considers necessary for the purpose mentioned in sub-paragraph (a).

(4) Any person who intentionally obstructs an inspector appointed under paragraph (2) acting in the execution of his duty shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

#### Offences

9.—(1) Where the commission by any person of an offence under this Order is due to the act or default of some other person, that other person shall be guilty of the offence, and a person may be charged with and convicted of the offence by virtue of this paragraph whether or not proceedings are taken against the first-mentioned person,

(2) For the purposes of this Order, section 20(2) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 applies with the omission of the words “the liability of whose members is limited” and, where the affairs of a body corporate are managed by its members, applies in relation to the acts and defaults of a member in connection with his functions of management as if he were a director of the body corporate.

(3) In any proceedings for an offence under this Order it shall, subject to paragraph (4), be a defence for the person charged to prove that he took all reasonable precautions and exercised all due diligence to avoid the commission of the offence by himself or by a person under his control.

(4) If in any case the defence provided by paragraph (3) involves the allegation that the commission of the offence was due to the act or default of another person, the person charged shall not, without leave of the court, be entitled to rely on that defence unless, at least 7 days before the hearing, he has served on the prosecutor a notice in writing giving such information identifying or assisting in the identification of that other person as was then in his possession.

#### *Other provisions relating to Sunday trading*

#### Construction of certain leases and agreements

10.—(1) Where any lease or agreement (however worded) entered into before the commencement date has the effect of requiring the occupier of a shop to keep the shop open for the serving of retail customers—

- (a) during normal business hours; or
- (b) during hours to be determined otherwise than by or with the consent of the occupier,

that lease or agreement shall not be regarded as requiring, or as enabling any person to require, the occupier to open the shop on Sunday for the serving of retail customers.

(2) Paragraph (1) shall not affect any lease or agreement—

- (a) to the extent that it relates specifically to Sunday and would (apart from this Article) have the effect of requiring Sunday trading of a kind which before the commencement date would have been lawful by virtue of any provision of Part I of the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946; or
- (b) to the extent that it is varied by agreement after the commencement date.

**Rights of shop workers as respects Sunday working**

11. Schedule 2 (rights of shop workers as respects Sunday working) shall have effect.

**Exclusion of Sunday Observance Act (Ireland) 1695**

12. The Sunday Observance Act (Ireland) 1695 does not apply to any person—
- (a) by reason of his being the occupier of, or a person employed to work in or about, a shop which is open on Sunday for the serving of retail customers; or
  - (b) by reason of his otherwise being, or doing anything, in or about a shop which is open on Sunday for the serving of retail customers.

*Repeal of provisions of the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946*

**Repeal of provisions of the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946**

13. In the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946 the following provisions, namely—
- (a) sections 1 to 5 (closing hours of shops); and
  - (b) Part II (conditions of employment),
- shall cease to have effect.

*Supplementary*

**Amendments and repeals**

- 14.—(1) The statutory provisions mentioned in Schedule 3 are hereby repealed to the extent specified in the third column of that Schedule.
- (2) The Department may by order subject to negative resolution—
- (a) repeal any provision of a local Act passed before the commencement date if it appears to the Department that the provision is inconsistent with, or has become unnecessary in consequence of, any provision of this Order; and
  - (b) amend any provision of such a local Act if it appears to the Department that the provision requires amendment in consequence of any provision of this Order or any repeal made by virtue of sub-paragraph (a).
- (3) Before making an order under paragraph (2) repealing or amending any provision of a local Act, the Department shall consult each district council which it considers would be affected by the repeal or amendment of that provision.

N.H. Nicholls  
Clerk of the Privy Council



## SCHEDULES

### SCHEDULE 1

Article 7(5).

#### LOADING AND UNLOADING AT LARGE SHOPS ON SUNDAY MORNING

##### *Shops to which Schedule applies*

1.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), this Schedule applies to any large shop situated in a district designated as a loading control district under Article 7.

(2) This Schedule does not apply to a shop in relation to which Article 3(1) does not apply by virtue of an exemption conferred by Article 4(1).

##### *Consent required for early Sunday loading and unloading*

2. The occupier of a shop to which this Schedule applies shall not load or unload, or permit any other person to load or unload, goods from a vehicle at the shop before 9 a.m. on Sunday in connection with the trade or business carried on in the shop, unless the loading or unloading is carried on—

- (a) with the consent of the district council for the district in which the shop is situated granted under this Schedule; and
- (b) in accordance with any conditions subject to which that consent is granted.

3.—(1) A consent under this Schedule may be granted subject to such conditions as the district council considers appropriate.

(2) The district council may at any time vary the conditions subject to which a consent is granted, and shall give notice of the variation to the person to whom the consent was granted.

##### *Application for consent*

4. An application for a consent under this Schedule shall be made in writing and shall contain such information as the district council may reasonably require.

5. An applicant for a consent under this Schedule shall pay such reasonable fee in respect of his application as the district council may determine.

6.—(1) Where an application is duly made to the district council for a consent under this Schedule, the council shall grant the consent unless it is satisfied that the loading or unloading of goods from vehicles before 9 a.m. on Sunday at the shop to which the application relates, in connection with the trade or business carried on at the shop, has caused, or would be likely to cause, undue annoyance to local residents.

(2) The council shall determine the application and notify the applicant in writing of its decision within the period of 21 days beginning with the day on which the application is received by the council.

(3) In a case where a consent is granted, the notification under sub-paragraph (2) shall specify the conditions, if any, subject to which the consent is granted.

*Revocation of consent*

## 7. Where—

- (a) the occupier of a shop in respect of which a consent under this Schedule is in force is convicted of an offence under paragraph 9 by reason of his failure to comply with the conditions subject to which the consent was granted; or
- (b) the district council is satisfied that the loading or unloading authorised by virtue of a consent under this Schedule has caused undue annoyance to local residents,

the council may revoke the consent.

*Publication of consent*

8. Where a district council grants a consent under this Schedule, the council may cause a notice giving details of that consent to be published in a local newspaper circulating in its district.

*Offence*

9. A person who contravenes paragraph 2 shall be guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.

## SCHEDULE 2

Article 11

## RIGHTS OF SHOP WORKERS AS RESPECTS SUNDAY WORKING

*Interpretation*

1.—(1) In this Schedule “shop worker” means an employee who, under his contract of employment, is or may be required to do shop work.

(2) In this Schedule “shop work” means work in or about a shop on a day on which the shop is open for the serving of customers.

(3) Subject to sub-paragraph (4), in this Schedule “shop” includes any premises where any retail trade or business is carried on.

(4) Where premises are used mainly for purposes other than those of retail trade or business and would not (apart from sub-paragraph (3)) be regarded as a shop, only such part of the premises as—

- (a) is used wholly or mainly for the purposes of retail trade or business; or
- (b) is used both for the purposes of retail trade or business and for the purposes of wholesale trade and is used wholly or mainly for those two purposes considered together,

is to be regarded as a shop for the purposes of this Schedule.

(5) In sub-paragraph (4)(b) “wholesale trade” means the sale of goods for use or resale in the course of a business or the hire of goods for use in the course of a business.

(6) In this paragraph “retail trade or business” includes—

- (a) the business of a barber or hairdresser;
- (b) the business of hiring goods otherwise than for use in the course of a trade or business; and
- (c) retail sales by auction,

but does not include catering business or the sale at theatres and places of amusement of programmes, catalogues and similar items.



- (7) In sub-paragraph (6) “catering business” means—
- (a) the sale of meals, refreshments or intoxicating liquor for consumption on the premises on which they are sold; or
  - (b) the sale of meals or refreshments prepared to order for immediate consumption off the premises.
- (8) In this Schedule—
- “notice period”, in relation to an opted-out shop worker, has the meaning given by paragraph 7(3);
- “opted-out”, in relation to a shop worker, shall be construed in accordance with paragraph 7(1) and (2);
- “opting-in notice”, in relation to a shop worker, has the meaning given by paragraph 2(6);
- “opting-out notice”, in relation to a shop worker, has the meaning given by paragraph 6(2); and
- “protected”, in relation to a shop worker, shall be construed in accordance with paragraph 2(1) to (5).
- (9) This Schedule shall be construed as one with the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996, referred to in this Schedule as “the Employment Rights Order”.
- (10) Chapter III of Part I of the Employment Rights Order (computation of period of continuous employment) shall have effect for the purposes of this Schedule as it has effect for the purposes of that Order.
- (11) Where Article 128 of the Employment Rights Order (failure to permit woman to return to work after childbirth treated as dismissal) applies to an employee who was employed as a shop worker under her contract of employment on the last day of her maternity leave period, she shall be treated for the purposes of this Schedule as if she had been employed as a shop worker on the day with effect from which she is treated as dismissed under that Article.
- (12) Where an employee is taken to be dismissed for the purposes of Part XI of the Employment Rights Order by virtue of Article 128 of that Order, references in paragraphs 11 and 12 to the effective date of termination are to the notified day of return.

*Protected shop workers*

- 2.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (5), a shop worker is to be regarded as “protected” for the purposes of any provision of this Schedule if (and only if) sub-paragraph (2) or (3) applies to him.
- (2) This sub-paragraph applies to a shop worker if—
- (a) on the day before the commencement date, he was employed as a shop worker, but not to work only on Sunday;
  - (b) he has been continuously employed during the period beginning with that day and ending with the day which, in relation to the provision concerned, is the appropriate date; and
  - (c) throughout that period, or throughout every part of it during which his relations with his employer were governed by a contract of employment, he was a shop worker.
- (3) This sub-paragraph applies to any shop worker whose contract of employment is such that under it he—
- (a) is not, and may not be, required to work on Sunday; and
  - (b) could not be so required even if the provisions of this Schedule were disregarded.
- (4) Where on the day before the commencement date an employee’s relations with his employer have ceased to be governed by a contract of employment, he shall be regarded as satisfying sub-paragraph (2)(a) if—

- (a) that day fell in a week which counts as a period of employment with that employer under Article 8(2) or (3) of the Employment Rights Order or under regulations under Article 15 of that Order; and
  - (b) on the last day before the commencement date on which his relations with his employer were governed by a contract of employment, the employee was employed as a shop worker, but not to work only on Sunday.
- (5) A shop worker is not a protected shop worker if—
- (a) he has given his employer an opting-in notice on or after the commencement date; and
  - (b) after giving the notice, he has expressly agreed with his employer to do shop work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday.
- (6) In this Schedule “opting-in notice”, in relation to a shop worker, means written notice, signed and dated by the shop worker, in which the shop worker expressly states that he wishes to work on Sunday or that he does not object to Sunday working.

#### *Contractual requirements relating to Sunday work*

- 3.—(1) Any contract of employment under which a shop worker who satisfies paragraph 2(2)(a) was employed on the day before the commencement date is unenforceable to the extent that it—
- (a) requires the shop worker to do shop work on Sunday on or after that date, or
  - (b) requires the employer to provide the shop worker with shop work on Sunday on or after that date.
- (2) Subject to paragraph (3), any agreement entered into after the commencement date between a protected shop worker and his employer is unenforceable to the extent that it—
- (a) requires the shop worker to do shop work on Sunday, or
  - (b) requires the employer to provide the shop worker with shop work on Sunday.
- (3) Where, after giving an opting-in notice, a protected shop worker expressly agrees with his employer to do shop work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday (and so ceases to be protected), his contract of employment shall be taken to be varied to the extent necessary to give effect to the terms of the agreement.
- (4) The reference in sub-paragraph (2) to a protected shop worker includes a reference to an employee who although not a protected shop worker at the time when the agreement is entered into is a protected shop worker on the day on which she returns to work in accordance with Article 111 of the Employment Rights Order, or in pursuance of an offer made in the circumstances described in Article 128(3) of that Order, after a period of absence from work occasioned wholly or partly by pregnancy or childbirth.
- (5) For the purposes of paragraph 2(2)(b), the appropriate date—
- (a) in relation to sub-paragraphs (2) and (3), is the day on which the agreement is entered into; and
  - (b) in relation to sub-paragraph (4), is the day on which the employee returns to work.

#### *Contracts with guaranteed hours*

- 4.—(1) This paragraph applies where—
- (a) under the contract of employment under which a shop worker who satisfies paragraph 2(2) (a) was employed on the day before the commencement date, the employer is, or may be, required to provide him with shop work for a specified number of hours each week;



- (b) under the contract the shop worker was, or might have been, required to work on Sunday before the commencement date; and
- (c) the shop worker has done shop work on Sunday in that employment (whether or not before the commencement date) but has, on or after that date ceased to do so.

(2) So long as the shop worker remains a protected shop worker, the contract shall not be regarded as requiring the employer to provide him with shop work on weekdays in excess of the hours normally worked by the shop worker on weekdays before he ceased to do shop work on Sunday.

(3) For the purposes of paragraph 2(2)(b), the appropriate date in relation to this paragraph is any time in relation to which the contract is to be enforced.

*Reduction of pay, etc.*

5.—(1) This paragraph applies where—

- (a) under the contract of employment under which a shop worker who satisfies paragraph 2(2)
  - (a) was employed on the day before the commencement date, the shop worker was, or might have been, required to work on Sunday before the commencement date;
- (b) the shop worker has done shop work on Sunday in that employment (whether or not before the commencement date) but has, on or after that date, ceased to do so; and
- (c) it is not apparent from the contract what part of the remuneration payable, or of any other benefit accruing, to the shop worker was intended to be attributable to shop work on Sunday.

(2) So long as the shop worker remains a protected shop worker, the contract shall be regarded as enabling the employer to reduce the amount of remuneration paid, or the extent of the other benefit provided, to the shop worker in respect of any period by the relevant proportion.

(3) In sub-paragraph (2) “the relevant proportion” means the proportion which the hours of shop work which (apart from this Schedule) the shop worker could have been required to do on Sunday in the period (“the contractual Sunday hours”) bears to the aggregate of those hours and the hours of work actually done by the shop worker in the period.

(4) Where, under the contract of employment, the hours of work actually done on weekdays in any period would be taken into account in determining the contractual Sunday hours, they shall be taken into account in determining the contractual Sunday hours for the purposes of sub-paragraph (3).

(5) For the purposes of paragraph 2(2)(b), the appropriate date in relation to this paragraph is the end of the period in respect of which the remuneration is paid or the benefit accrues.

*Notice of objection to Sunday working*

6.—(1) A shop worker to whom this paragraph applies may at any time give his employer written notice, signed and dated by the shop worker, to the effect that he objects to Sunday working.

(2) In this Schedule “opting-out notice” means a notice given under sub-paragraph (1) by a shop worker to whom this paragraph applies.

(3) This paragraph applies to any shop worker who under his contract of employment—

- (a) is or may be required to work on Sunday (whether or not as a result of previously giving an opting-in notice); but
- (b) is not employed to work only on Sunday.

*Meaning of "opted-out shop worker"*

7.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (2), a shop worker is to be regarded as "opted-out" for the purposes of this Schedule if (and only if,)—

- (a) he has given his employer an opting-out notice;
- (b) he has been continuously employed during the period beginning with the day on which the notice was given and ending with the day which, in relation to the provision concerned, is the appropriate date; and
- (c) throughout that period, or throughout every part of it during which his relations with his employer were governed by a contract of employment, he was a shop worker.

(2) A shop worker is not an opted-out shop worker if—

- (a) after giving the opting-out notice concerned, he has given his employer an opting-in notice; and
- (b) after giving the opting-in notice, he has expressly agreed with his employer to do shop work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday.

(3) In this Schedule "notice period", in relation to an opted-out shop worker, means, subject to paragraph 8(2), the period of three months beginning with the day on which the opting-out notice concerned was given.

*Explanatory statement*

8.—(1) Where a person becomes a shop worker to whom paragraph 6 applies, his employer shall, before the end of the period of two months beginning with the day on which that person becomes such a worker, give him a written statement in the prescribed form.

(2) If—

- (a) an employer fails to comply with sub-paragraph (1) in relation to any shop worker; and
- (b) the shop worker, on giving the employer an opting-out notice, becomes an opted-out shop worker,

paragraph 7(3) has effect in relation to the shop worker with the substitution for "three months" of "one month".

(3) An employer shall not be regarded as failing to comply with sub-paragraph (1) in any case where, before the end of the period referred to in that sub-paragraph, the shop worker has given him an opting-out notice.

(4) Subject to sub-paragraph (5), the prescribed form is as follows—

**"STATUTORY RIGHTS IN RELATION TO SUNDAY SHOP WORK"**

You have become employed as a shop worker and are or can be required under your contract of employment to do the Sunday work your contract provides for.

However, if you wish, you can give a notice, as described in the next paragraph, to your employer and you will then have the right not to work in or about a shop on any Sunday on which the shop is open once three months have passed from the date on which you gave the notice.

Your notice must—

- be in writing;
- be signed and dated by you;
- say that you object to Sunday working.



68, 69 or 70 of that Order) shall have effect as if the reference in Article 71 to those Articles included a reference to this paragraph.

(12) Article 20 of the Industrial Tribunals (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (conciliation) has effect in relation to industrial tribunal proceedings, or claims which could be the subject of tribunal proceedings, arising out of a contravention or alleged contravention of this paragraph.

(13) The remedy of an employee for infringement of the right conferred by this paragraph is by way of proceedings as mentioned in sub-paragraph (11) and not otherwise.

(14) This paragraph does not apply to employment where under the employee's contract of employment he ordinarily works outside Northern Ireland; and paragraph (5) of Article 239 of the Employment Rights Order applies for the purposes of this sub-paragraph as it applies for the purposes of paragraph (2) of that Article.

(15) Articles 248 and 249 of the Employment Rights Order (death of employee or employer) applies in relation to this paragraph as they apply in relation to provisions of the Employment Rights Order listed in Article 248(2) of that Order.

*Right not to be dismissed for refusing Sunday work*

11.—(1) Where an employee who is a protected shop worker or an opted-out shop worker is dismissed, he shall be regarded for the purposes of Part XI of the Employment Rights Order as unfairly dismissed if the reason (or, if more than one, the principal reason) for the dismissal is that he refused, or proposed to refuse, to do shop work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply in relation to an opted-out shop worker where the reason (or principal reason) for the dismissal is that he refused, or proposed to refuse, to do shop work on any Sunday or Sundays falling before the end of the notice period.

(3) A shop worker who is dismissed shall be regarded for the purposes of Part XI of the Employment Rights Order as unfairly dismissed if the reason (or, if more than one, the principal reason) for the dismissal is that the shop worker gave, or proposed to give, an opting-out notice to the employer.

(4) For the purposes of paragraph 2(2)(b) or 7(1)(b), the appropriate date in relation to this paragraph is the effective date of termination.

(5) Article 240(1) of the Employment Rights Order (contracts for a fixed term) does not prevent Part XI of that Order from applying if the dismissal is regarded as unfair by virtue of this paragraph.

12.—(1) An employee who is dismissed shall be regarded for the purposes of Part XI of the Employment Rights Order as unfairly dismissed if—

- (a) the reason (or, if more than one, the principal reason) for the dismissal is that the employee was redundant;
- (b) it is shown that the circumstances constituting the redundancy applied equally to one or more other employees in the same undertaking who held positions similar to that held by the employee and who have not been dismissed by the employer; and
- (c) it is shown that sub-paragraph (2) applies.

(2) This sub-paragraph applies if either—

- (a) the employee was a protected shop worker or an opted-out shop worker and the reason (or, if more than one, the principal reason) for which the employee was selected for dismissal was that specified in sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 11 (read with sub-paragraph (2) of that paragraph); or

- (b) the employee was a shop worker and the reason (or, if more than one, the principal reason) for which the employee was selected for dismissal was that specified in sub-paragraph (3) of that paragraph.

(3) For the purposes of paragraph 2(2)(b) or 7(1)(b), the appropriate date in relation to this paragraph is the effective date of termination.

13. Articles 140 and 141 of the Employment Rights Order (qualifying period of employment and upper age limit) and Article 142(1) of that Order (dismissal procedures agreements) do not apply if—

- (a) sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 11 (read with sub-paragraph (2) of that paragraph) or sub-paragraph (3) of that paragraph applies; or
- (b) paragraph 12 applies.

#### *Restrictions on contracting out of Schedule*

14.—(1) Any provision in an agreement (whether a contract of employment or not) shall be void in so far as it purports—

- (a) to exclude or limit the operation of any provision of this Schedule; or
- (b) to preclude any person from presenting a complaint to an industrial tribunal by virtue of any provision of this Schedule.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply to an agreement to refrain from presenting or continuing with a complaint where—

- (a) the Agency has taken action under Article 20 of the Industrial Tribunals (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (conciliation); or
- (b) the conditions regulating compromise agreements (as set out in Article 245(3) of the Employment Rights Order) are satisfied in relation to the agreement.

#### *Dismissal on grounds of assertion of statutory right*

15. In Article 135 of the Employment Rights Order (dismissal on grounds of assertion of statutory right) in paragraph (4)(a) after “this Order” insert “or Schedule 2 to the Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997”.

### SCHEDULE 3

Article 14(1).

#### REPEALS

Chapter or Number	Short title	Extent of repeal
1946 c. 7 (N.I.).	The Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946.	The whole Act.
1955 c. 29 (N.I.).	The Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Fees, etc.) Act (Northern Ireland) 1955.	In Schedule 2, the entry relating to the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946.
1969 c. 48.	The Post Office Act 1969.	In Schedule 4, paragraph 41.



For three months after you give the notice, your employer can still require you to do all the Sunday work your contract provides for. After the three month period has ended, you have the right to complain to an industrial tribunal if, because of your refusal to work on Sundays on which the shop is open, your employer—

dismisses you, or

does something else detrimental to you, for example, failing to promote you.

Once you have the rights described, you can surrender them only by giving your employer a further notice, signed and dated by you, saying that you wish to work on Sunday or that you do not object to Sunday working and then agreeing with your employer to work on Sundays or on a particular Sunday.”

(5) The Department of Economic Development may by order subject to negative resolution amend the prescribed form set out in sub-paragraph (4).

*Contractual requirements relating to Sunday work*

9.—(1) Where a shop worker gives his employer an opting-out notice, the contract of employment under which he was employed immediately before he gave that notice becomes unenforceable to the extent that it—

- (a) requires the shop worker to do shop work on Sunday after the end of the notice period; or
- (b) requires the employer to provide the shop worker with shop work on Sunday after the end of that period.

(2) Subject to sub-paragraph (3), any agreement entered into between an opted-out shop worker and his employer is unenforceable to the extent that it—

- (a) requires the shop worker to do shop work on Sunday after the end of the notice period; or
- (b) requires the employer to provide the shop worker with shop work on Sunday after the end of that period.

(3) Where, after giving an opting-in notice, an opted-out shop worker expressly agrees with his employer to do shop work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday (and so ceases to be opted-out), his contract of employment shall be taken to be varied to the extent necessary to give effect to the terms of the agreement.

(4) The reference in sub-paragraph (2) to an opted-out shop worker includes a reference to an employee who although not an opted-out shop worker at the time when the agreement is entered into—

- (a) had given her employer an opting-out notice before that time; and
  - (b) is an opted-out shop worker on the day on which she returns to work in accordance with Article 111 of the Employment Rights Order, or in pursuance of an offer made in the circumstances described in Article 128(3) of that Order, after a period of absence from work occasioned wholly or partly by pregnancy or childbirth.
- (5) For the purposes of paragraph 7(1)(b), the appropriate date—
- (a) in relation to sub-paragraphs (2) and (3), is the day on which the agreement is entered into; and
  - (b) in relation to sub-paragraph (4), is the day on which the employee returns to work.

*Right not to suffer detriment for refusing Sunday work*

10.—(1) An employee who is a protected shop worker or an opted-out shop worker has the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer done on the ground that the employee refused (or proposed to refuse) to do shop work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday.

(2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply to anything done in relation to an opted-out shop worker on the ground that he refused (or proposed to refuse) to do shoe work on any Sunday or Sundays falling before the end of the notice period.

(3) An employee who is a shop worker has the right not to be subjected to any detriment by any act, or any deliberate failure to act, by his employer done on the ground that the employee gave (or proposed to give) an opting-out notice to his employer.

(4) Sub-paragraphs (1) and (3) do not apply where the detriment in question amounts to dismissal (within the meaning of Part XI of the Employment Rights Order).

(5) For the purposes of this paragraph a shop worker who does not work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday is not to be regarded as having been subjected to any detriment by—

- (a) a failure to pay remuneration in respect of shop work on a Sunday which he has not done,
- (b) a failure to provide him with any other benefit, where that failure results from the application (in relation to a Sunday on which the employee has not done shop work) of a contractual term under which the extent of that benefit varies according to the number of hours worked by the employee or the remuneration of the employee; or
- (c) a failure to provide him with any work, remuneration or other benefit which by virtue of paragraph 4 or 5 the employer is not obliged to provide.

(6) Where an employer offers to pay a sum specified in the offer to any one or more employees—

- (a) who are protected shop workers or opted-out shop workers; or
- (b) who under their contracts of employment are not obliged to do shop work on Sunday,

if they agree to do shop work on Sunday or on a particular Sunday sub-paragraphs (7) and (8) apply.

(7) An employee to whom the offer is not made is not to be regarded for the purposes of this paragraph as having been subjected to any detriment by any failure to make the offer to him or to pay him the sum specified in the offer.

(8) An employee who does not accept the offer is not to be regarded for the purposes of this paragraph as having been subjected to any detriment by any failure to pay him the sum specified in the offer.

(9) For the purposes of paragraph 2(2)(b) or 7(1)(b), the appropriate date in relation to this paragraph is the date of the act or failure to act.

(10) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (9)—

- (a) where an act extends over a period, the “date of the act” means the first day of that period, and
- (b) a deliberate failure to act shall be treated as done when it was decided on;

and, in the absence of evidence establishing the contrary, an employer shall be taken to decide on a failure to act when he does an act inconsistent with doing the failed act or, if he has done no such inconsistent act, when the period expires within which he might reasonably have been expected to do the failed act if it was to be done.

(11) Articles 71 and 72 of the Employment Rights Order (which relate to proceedings brought by an employee on the ground that he has been subjected to a detriment in contravention of Article

Chapter or Number	Short title	Extent of repeal
1976 NI 14.	The Births and Deaths Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 1976.	In Schedule 1, the entry relating to the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946.
1978 NI 28.	The Shops (Northern Ireland) Order 1978.	The whole Order.
1982 NI 6.	The Departments (Northern Ireland) Order 1982.	In Part III of Schedule 1, the entry relating to the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946.
1985 NI 15.	The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1985.	In Schedule 3, paragraphs 6 to 10.
1990 NI 2.	The Employment (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990.	In Part I of Schedule 3, the entry relating to the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946.

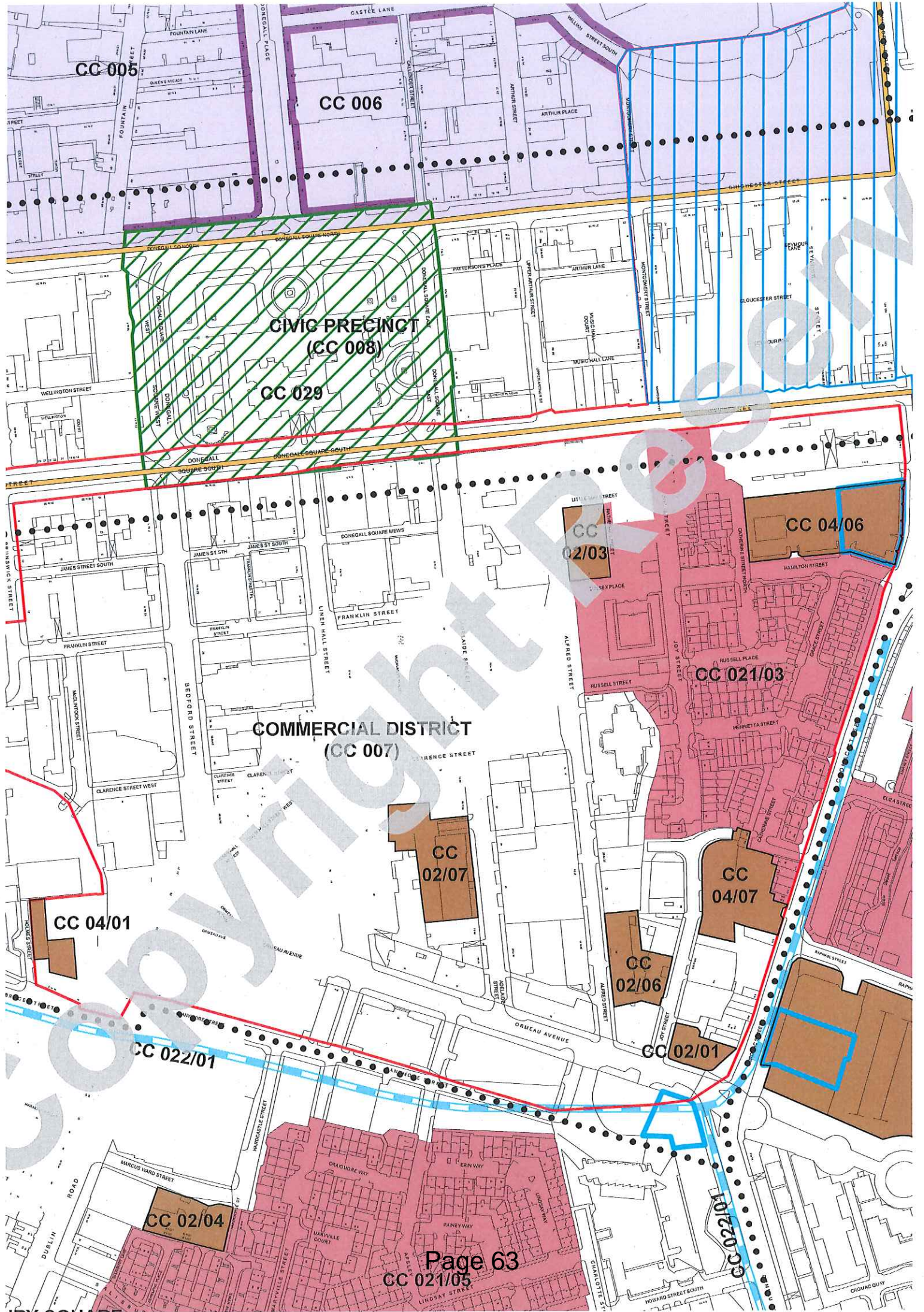
#### EXPLANATORY NOTE

*(This note is not part of the Order)*

This Order reforms the law relating to Sunday trading, provides for the rights of shop workers in relation to Sunday working and repeals the Shops Act (Northern Ireland) 1946.













**List of organisations making written submissions**

Belfast and District Trade Union

Belfast Chamber of Commerce

Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (Usdaw)

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Retail NI and the Association of Corner Shops (ACS)

Christian Action Research and Education (CARE)

Visit Belfast

NI Hotels Federation





<b>Subject:</b>	Supplementary Report - Designation of Belfast district (or the city centre) as a 'holiday resort' providing large shops with an option to extend Sunday trading hours between the months of March and October
<b>Date:</b>	18 May 2018
<b>Reporting Officer</b>	Suzanne Wylie, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	John Walsh, City Solicitor John Greer, Director of Economic Development

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b> <b>After Council Decision</b> <b>Some time in the future</b> <b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	<b>Yes</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>PURPOSE OF THE SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT</b>
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provide the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee with supplementary information (to the original reports of 20 April and 27 April 2018) to inform any decision by the Council as to whether Belfast City Council should designate the Belfast district (or the city centre) as a 'holiday resort' under Article 6 of the Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997</li> <li>- to seek a decision from Members on whether to proceed with a 'holiday resort' designation.</li> </ul>
1.2	<p><b><u>Deputations</u></b></p> <p>Members will wish to note that officers have received a request from Michala Lafferty, Usdaw to make a further oral submission to the Committee on this issue. It will be a matter for the Committee to decide at the start of the meeting whether or not to receive the deputation from</p>

	Usdaw (or indeed any other organisation who may make a similar request prior to the meeting).
<b>2.0</b>	<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) advise whether to receive the deputation(s) indicated at para 1.2</li> <li>(ii) refer to the original SP&amp;R reports dated 20 April 2018 and 27 April 2018 which include the findings from the original public consultation which concluded on 5 May 2017 and the supplementary public consultation which ended on 2 April 2018 (Appendix 1), as well as the additional briefing report on a range of issues which was provided to Committee on 27 April 2018 (Appendix 2)</li> <li>(iii) note the independent chairperson's brief prepared by Richard O'Rawe following the summit held with a range of stakeholders on 10 May 2018 in Belfast (Appendix 3).</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>MAIN REPORT</b>
3.1	<p>At its meeting on 20 April 2018 the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed to defer a decision in order to receive additional information.</p> <p>At its meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> April the Committee agreed to once again to defer a decision to enable a Summit to be hosted by the Council that would include key stakeholders such as the Trade Unions, business organisations such as the Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce, Retail NI and the tourism sector and representatives of those shops who wish to have extended Sunday opening.</p>
3.2	<p>Following ratification of the SP&amp;R minutes at the full Council on 1 May, officers issued an invitation to the key stakeholders outlined above to attend a summit meeting on Thursday 10 May in the council offices at 9 Adelaide.</p> <p>The council secured the services of an independent chairperson, Richard O'Rawe, to facilitate the summit meeting. A copy of the Chairperson's brief prepared after the summit meeting is attached at Appendix 3.</p>
3.3	<p>The main summary points from the Chairperson's brief are as follows:</p> <p><b>Areas of Agreement</b></p> <p>All parties agreed that they want to support the creation of a more vibrant city centre to attract visitors and residents on a Sunday morning. They agreed that a programme of animation and promotional activity should be developed in order to enhance vibrancy and increase footfall in the city.</p> <p><b>On Extended Sunday Trading</b></p> <p>Most of the organisations in the room were in favour of additional hours for large retailers on a Sunday. In order to test the impact of the scheme and to review and address any issues arising, they noted that they would be open to considering a pilot scheme running to the end of September 2018. They viewed the benefits as being both social (Sunday morning recreation) and</p>

	<p>economic (increasing visitor spend and more viable trading environment).</p> <p>Those in favour point to the extended trading hours as being optional and suggest that this will provide a choice that extends to shops, workers and customers.</p> <p>The Trade Unions and Retail NI are opposed to the proposal on the grounds that they believe it will take trade from smaller independent retailers and it will be detrimental to workers and their families. Both the Unions and Retail NI would support a campaign to encourage small retailers to open additional hours on a Sunday and would be keen to package this up by ensuring that a programme of animation activity and promotion was put in place as well.</p> <p>Those against extended hours are not convinced by the economic argument and believe that a “Small Shop Sunday” programme would bring greater overall economic benefit.</p> <p>There was a view in the room that the disagreement on the economic value arising from extended Sunday trading hours will be tested if the pilot is approved.</p> <p><b>On the Charter</b></p> <p>Most of those in attendance were in favour of having an explicit commitment to reinforce the protection of workers’ rights. Those in favour of a charter noted that all of the commitments are already enshrined in law. They felt that the charter offered a vehicle for retailers to make a public statement of their commitment to ensure that workers’ rights are protected in line with the existing legislation, and also to ensure that there is a regular forum for raising any issues related to the implementation.</p> <p>The Trade Unions feel that the charter is meaningless as it has no legislative effect. They also would have wanted to ensure that the draft text was agreed with them.</p>
3.4	<p><b>Economic evidence</b></p> <p>In previous reports, a series of research pieces to support the demand for the proposed extension were undertaken. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 21 cruise ships will arrive in Belfast on a Sunday (across the key Summer months). 20 of these ships will be in port by 09.30am. These 21 ships will bring more than 36,000 passengers and staff</li> <li>- Visit Belfast research (April 2018) into the GB market (which accounts for 41% of overnight stays) found that 60% of potential visitors expected to be able to shop on a Sunday morning and 93% expected shops to open earlier than 1pm. Retail is an important element of a vibrant city: 42% of GB visitor spend is on shopping</li> <li>- Hotel occupancy rates on a Saturday evening over the Summer period in 2017 averaged at 91.7% - with the highest levels of occupancy on Saturdays in August (97.2%). Based on these figures, there could be up to 10,000 people in the city on a Sunday</li> <li>- Tourism NI confirmed that Belfast plays an important role as the gateway to NI, with 30% of all tourism spend in Belfast. With over 1,000 new hotel rooms to open in 2018 and a similar number to become available in 2019 – there will be an increased demand to provide a range</li> </ul>

	<p>of options, in line with visitor expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Retailers argue that the sector is under pressure and that they have to adapt and try all possible avenues open to them in order to attract new business. A report from Springboard (14 May 2018) demonstrated a 7.3% drop in footfall in retail across Northern Ireland in April 2018 – with a number of High Street stores closing or under significant pressure.</li> <li>- USDAW do not believe that there is evidence of economic benefit from extended trading hours. Those supporting the proposal consider that the pilot phase will allow for data to be collected which will provide specific detail on the impact of the extended opening hours.</li> </ul>
3.5	<p><b>FINANCIAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b></p> <p>See original report dated 20 April 2018</p>
3.6	<p><b>EQUALITY OR GOOD RELATIONS IMPLICATIONS</b></p> <p>See original report dated 20 April 2018</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<p><b>Appendices - Documents attached</b></p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – SP&amp;R Report dated 20 April 2018</p> <p>Appendix 2 – SP&amp;R Report dated 27 April 2018</p> <p>Appendix 3 –Independent Chairperson's brief from summit meeting held on 10 May 2018</p>



Subject:	<b>City Centre Revitalisation Programme/Sundays in the City Initiative</b>
Date:	11th September, 2019
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager: Economy

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on the City Revitalisation programme that has been developed to support city centre animation and vitality and to seek approval to proceed with an engagement and consultation exercise focusing on Sundays in the city.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the report and agree the proposed approach to moving forward with the research, engagement and consultation work on “Sundays in the City”, as set out in sections 3.6-3.10 below.

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	Members will be aware that, following the fire at the Bank Buildings in August 2018, the Council as well as a range of public and private partner organisations invested in a programme of activities to support city centre development. Following on from an initial response focusing on “City Centre Recovery”, the programme has now moved to focus on “City Centre Revitalisation”. This reflects the need for a longer-term approach to investment, taking account of all the possible functions of the city centre. It reflects a wider approach to city centre regeneration, including issues such as retail offer and mix, accessibility, cultural development, family spaces, residential investment and tourism development.
3.2	Members will also be aware that the issue of Sunday trading hours and, in particular, the proposed designation of Belfast as a “holiday resort” has been discussed by the Council on a number of occasions in the past. The effect of this designation would provide large shops (above 280sqm in size) with an option to extend their Sunday trading hours on up to 18 Sundays (other than Easter Sunday) between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year. At present, all units below this size can operate without any trading restrictions (apart from relevant licensing restrictions etc.).
3.3	<p>At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 5 June 2019, as part of a discussion on the Revitalisation Programme, it was agreed that:</p> <p>“a report be submitted to a future meeting setting out the Terms of Reference to progress proposals for designating the city centre as a ‘Holiday Resort’, taking into account issues beyond opening hours and outlining the extent of the associated consultation process”.</p>
3.4	As noted above, the conversation with partner organisations now covers a range of issues associated with developing a mixed-use economy to support city centre viability and to encourage sustainability. The City Revitalisation Programme is set within the context of a wider regeneration strategy and action plan for the city centre, based on the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy. The City Centre Regeneration Task Force (involving the Head of the Civil Service and Permanent Secretaries from relevant government departments, working alongside senior Council officers) aims to support a collaborative public sector response to drive and resource the city centre revitalisation efforts in the long-term. The priority areas of focus emerging from the City Centre Joint Regeneration



	<p>Taskforce mirror the themes identified by businesses and the representative organisations within the city and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City Resilience – a medium to long term city centre recovery plan involving various stakeholders and the continued need to drive forward and support the retail, office, tourist and city centre living product</li> <li>• Re-imagining and Diversification – recognising the need to diversify the city centre, including provision of family centric activities, enhanced tourist and cultural offering, city centre living, enhancing the evening economy etc.</li> <li>• Infrastructure and Connectivity – enhance public realm and open space ensure permeability and connections through the city, transport and car parking issues etc.</li> </ul>
3.5	<p>At the 22nd February 2019 meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, members agreed that the broad objectives of the Revitalisation Programme should be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating an enhanced city centre offering to drive footfall across all sectors</li> <li>• Improve attractiveness and vibrancy</li> <li>• Enhance connectivity and permeability</li> <li>• Maximise tourism and cultural opportunities and attract visitors</li> <li>• Encourage more families and young people to use the city centre</li> <li>• Support existing businesses and augment and promote ongoing programmes of activity.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>Updates on the City Revitalisation programme have been brought to this Committee on a regular basis. There is a significant programme of work already under way with ongoing commitments from public and private partners. However one of the issues that has been raised by a number of these organisations – and reflected in the Committee decision of June 2019 – is the need to consider specific interventions that will animate and activate the city centre on a Sunday. This will need to consider issues such as opening hours, public sector transport provision, city marketing, investment in animation and licensing issues.</p>
3.7	<p>The rationale for treating Sunday as distinct from other days is that the current usage levels and patterns on a Sunday are very different from other days of the week. This is not only because of opening hours but also because of issues such as a significant volume of cruise visitors coming to the city on a Sunday (up 46% on figures from last year, with 144 ships now expected into Belfast with an estimated 276,000 passengers and crew – 20 ships and 45,000</p>

	<p>passengers and crew on Sunday visits) and an increased appetite from the hospitality sector to programme activity on a Sunday to meet user demands (e.g. the growing popularity of the “Sunday brunch” among hospitality providers). Hotel occupancy figures also suggest that Saturday continues to be the busiest evening for hoteliers, with average occupancy levels across the city in excess of 84% throughout the year – and higher in the summer season (source: STR). At present, St George’s Market is one of the only city centre attractions that is open on a Sunday morning and footfall figures indicate that this is the busiest opening day of the market, and that the 10am-2pm period is the busiest time of the day.</p>
3.8	<p>In order to inform any future approach to specific proposals for investment in the city centre on a Sunday, it is proposed that a focused research, engagement and consultation exercise is undertaken. The terms of reference for this piece of work will include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To develop an informed understanding of the current usage levels and types (user profile (resident/visitor); time spent; activities undertaken; economic impact) in the city centre on a Sunday</li> <li>• To explore opportunities to drive additional footfall and spend by attracting new visitors to the city on a Sunday</li> <li>• To identify barriers to accessing the city centre on a Sunday (for those that wish to do so) and to engage with partners to develop collaborative solutions to address these barriers</li> <li>• To build an understanding of approaches in other cities and to develop learning that may be relevant for the Belfast context</li> <li>• To understand the socio-economic impact of any additional city centre animation activities on a Sunday</li> <li>• To understand the impact that any change to opening hours may have on the city centre</li> <li>• To understand the investment required to encourage the additional visitor numbers to the city on a Sunday and to build a business case to lever resources from partner organisations, in the context of the City Revitalisation proposals.</li> </ul>
3.9	<p>It is proposed that the methodology for this work will include a mixture of primary research, a structured engagement process involving key individuals and specific organisations and a wider public consultation piece to maximise the reach and explore a breadth of views. Consideration will also be given to creative mechanisms for engagement and information</p>

3.10	<p>gathering, building on the learning from the recent engagement exercise on the new Cultural Strategy. The primary research is likely to focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building an understanding of what the future city centre demographic looks like, to include population projections for city centre living, hotel occupancy trends, number of cruise ships arriving and tourists visiting the city centre</li> <li>• Building an understanding of the evidence base from a tourism perspective, to include the profile of tourists to the city and a better understanding of what the tourist expects from a destination like Belfast</li> <li>• Benchmarking Belfast against other cities to include Sunday animation and licensing issues</li> <li>• Review of approaches in other successful city centres, accessing research from credible independent experts such as the Institute for Place Management (<a href="http://www.placemanagement.org/">www.placemanagement.org/</a>)</li> <li>• Building an understanding of the physical makeup of the city centre and the potential impact that extending opening hours may or may not have, including the number of businesses and employees that may be affected if opening hours were extended</li> <li>• Consideration of the impact on workers of additional activity in the city centre.</li> </ul> <p>In addition to the research activity, it is proposed that an extensive engagement process is undertaken to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One to one engagement with stakeholders including BCTC, BIDs, Visit Belfast, The Hotel Federation, Hospitality Ulster, Tourism NI, Retail NI, Parenting NI, Trades Unions to understand current position, including accessing any available research and exploring opportunities for developing collaborative approaches (if appropriate)</li> <li>• One to one engagement with city centre small businesses (those that can currently open and do so; those that can open and choose not to do so)</li> <li>• One to one engagement with larger retailers that cannot currently open to understand current trading patterns on a Sunday – particularly looking at how Belfast fares alongside comparator cities</li> <li>• One to one engagement with cultural organisations to understand current Sunday activities and explore opportunities for programming, in line with visitor/user trends and demands and</li> <li>• One to one engagement with workers potentially affected by any change to opening hours of cultural or retail facilities.</li> </ul>
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3.11	<p>It may also be appropriate to undertake a public consultation on this matter. This will seek to understand if and how people use the city centre on a Sunday; what might encourage them to do so if they don't already and what they would like to do in the city. In order to ensure compliance with legislation, an Equality Screening will also be required. This can be done in parallel with the consultation exercise.</p> <p><u>Timeframe and Work Programme</u></p>												
3.12	<p>Subject to Committee endorsement of this approach, it is proposed that the timetable for this work will be:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Action</th><th>Milestone</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Consultation period (8-12 weeks)</td><td>October-December 2019</td></tr> <tr> <td>Undertaking research and engagement activity</td><td>September-December 2019</td></tr> <tr> <td>Analysis of consultation and findings</td><td>December 2019-January 2020</td></tr> <tr> <td>Committee decision re: budget implications and any policy change e.g. Holiday Status designation</td><td>February 2020</td></tr> <tr> <td>Operational programme of activity</td><td>April 2020 onwards</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>	Action	Milestone	Consultation period (8-12 weeks)	October-December 2019	Undertaking research and engagement activity	September-December 2019	Analysis of consultation and findings	December 2019-January 2020	Committee decision re: budget implications and any policy change e.g. Holiday Status designation	February 2020	Operational programme of activity	April 2020 onwards
Action	Milestone												
Consultation period (8-12 weeks)	October-December 2019												
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Analysis of consultation and findings	December 2019-January 2020												
Committee decision re: budget implications and any policy change e.g. Holiday Status designation	February 2020												
Operational programme of activity	April 2020 onwards												
3.13	<p>If approved by Committee, a designated officer team will lead on the development of the evidence gathering and engagement activity.</p>												
3.14	<p>The resource implications associated with any additional activity as part of the City Revitalisation Programme will be brought back to the Committee for information and approval.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>												
3.15	<p>An equality screening will be carried out as part of this process. A rural needs assessment will also be undertaken at that time.</p>												
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>												
4.1	None												



Subject:	<b>City Revitalisation – Sundays in the City</b>
Date:	12th February, 2020
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager - Economy

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to feed back to Members on the outcomes of a programme of engagement which was undertaken as a result of the Committee's decisions of 6th June and 11th September relating to Sunday opening and a range of associated issues.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. note the engagement process undertaken, in line with the Committee decision of 11th September 2019, as amended by the Council on 1st October;</li> <li>ii. note the issues and viewpoints expressed in the course of the engagement process, as set out in sections 3.8-3.12; and</li> </ul>



	<p>iii. note the options presented in section 3.13 and advise which they wish officers to take forward. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Option 1: Agree to designate the city centre as a holiday resort, with an agreement with local retailers and that affected retailers will open between 11am – 6pm on 18 consecutive Sundays in the summer in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and develop and support a programme of cultural animation and associated marketing. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this committee.</li> <li>○ Option 2: Agree to designate the city centre as a holiday resort, with an agreement with local retailers and that affected retailers will open between 12pm – 6pm on 18 consecutive Sundays in the summer in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and develop and support a programme of cultural animation and associated marketing. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this committee;</li> <li>○ Option 3: Do not support the designation of the city centre as a holiday resort, in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 but develop a programme of cultural animation and an associated marketing programme. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this committee.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>Members will recall that, at the Committee meeting on 5th June 2019, it was agreed that: “a report be submitted to a future meeting setting out the Terms of Reference to progress proposals for designating the city centre as a “Holiday Resort”, taking into account issues beyond opening hours and outlining the extent of the associated consultation process”.</p>

3.2	<p>The terms of reference were presented and approved at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 11th September 2019. Following discussion at the October Council meeting, the final terms of reference agreed were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to explore opportunities to drive additional footfall and spend by attracting new visitors to the city on Sundays;</li> <li>• to identify barriers to accessing the city centre on Sundays (for those that wish to do so) and to engage with partners to develop collaborative solutions to address these barriers;</li> <li>• to build an understanding of approaches in other cities and to develop learning that may be relevant for the Belfast context;</li> <li>• to understand the socio-economic impact of any additional city centre animation activities on Sundays;</li> <li>• to understand the impact that any change to opening hours may have on the city centre in terms of small and independent retailers, workers' rights and the effect on women and childcare, and footfall; and</li> <li>• to understand the investment required to encourage the additional visitor numbers to the city on Sundays and to build a business case to lever resources from partner organisations, in the context of the city revitalisation.</li> </ul>
3.3	<p>Members may be aware that the “holiday resort” designation is set out in legislation under The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The current Sunday opening hours for retailers with a sales footprint of 280 sqm or more are 1 pm to 6 pm on Sunday. The holiday resort designation is not about de-regulation of Sunday opening hours. Instead, it permits those larger retailers to open on up to 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September (excluding Easter Sunday). The Council is responsible for designating the area to be covered by the “holiday resort” status and maintaining a register of shops proposing to open. During earlier engagement with traders, some businesses had indicated that they would be keen to open at the earlier time. However the council has the authority to agree any revision to the opening times.</p>
3.4	<p>The need for a targeted and focused approach to driving the economic, social and cultural regeneration of Belfast City Centre was recognised through the Belfast Investment and Regeneration strategy, developed and adopted by the council and other partners in 2015. Subsequently, work has been ongoing to move forward on the eight themes and priorities</p>

	<p>outlined in the strategy. Within the council, the structural changes – bringing together a range of complementary disciplines with the Place and Economy department – have brought a focus to that work. Officers have developed a programme of work called the “Future City Centre” programme which aims to create a dynamic and experiential destination for shoppers and bolster Belfast as the dominant retail and leisure destination in Northern Ireland.</p>
3.5	<p>The engagement exercise for the “Sundays in the City” programme clearly acknowledged that it would require more than single, stand-alone interventions to increase the usage of the city centre on a Sunday. Based on the agreed terms of reference, the engagement programme – which took place between October 2019 and January 2020 – included the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online public consultation – this involved using the council’s online engagement portal (Citizenspace). The consultation was open for eight weeks and closed on 17 January 2020. It attracted 1440 responses, more than 70% of which came from Belfast residents</li> <li>• Market research – we engaged in a series of survey-based market research exercises targeting users of the city (including workers), NI residents and out of state visitors to Belfast</li> <li>• Focus groups: we held focus groups with a number of key demographic and target groups including old people, young people, disabled individuals, family groups and city centre businesses</li> <li>• One to one meetings: senior officers held a series of one to one meetings with key statutory partners (DfC; Tourism NI; PSNI), business organisations (including Retail NI; NI Retail Consortium; Belfast Chamber; Hospitality Ulster; NI Hotels Federation), trades unions (USDAW and Prospect) and other interested partners including the Interfaith Forum.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>In terms of who currently uses the city centre on a Sunday, the research drew out a range of key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently on a Sunday, an average of 50,000 visitors come to the city centre. This is less than 50% of the user numbers that access the city on a Saturday and is in line with the volume of day trips on a Monday to Friday (excluding workers)</li> <li>• Those coming to the city on a Sunday do so mainly in order to shop, to eat out and to socialise with friends. Residents and visitors from NI typically spend an average of £135 per visiting party or group, while those from ROI and other out of state visitors</li> </ul>

	<p>spend around £200 per visiting group. This means that Sundays in Belfast city centre generate an annual economic return in the region of £188million</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of those using the city centre on a Sunday visit monthly or less often. However young people are likely to be more regular visitors, with 61% of those aged 34 and under coming into Belfast at least once a month. This is generally in keeping with the user profile of the city centre which appears to decrease with age</li> <li>• Most visitors will spend between two and four hours in the city centre on a Sunday. More than half of them arrive between noon and 2pm. This footfall pattern is clearly linked to the current 1pm opening time for the large retailers. It is different from all other days of the week, where footfall tends to broadly follow a similar pattern of a gradually increasing profile up to a peak period of 12pm to 3pm and then tapering off.</li> </ul>
3.7	<p>In line with the terms of reference, some of the key issues emerging from the consultation exercise include:</p> <p><u>Opportunities to drive additional footfall and spend by attracting new visitors to the city on Sundays</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Across all of the market research work and the online consultation, the main reasons why people currently visit the city centre on a Sunday are to shop, to eat and drink and to socialise with friends</li> <li>• When asked what would attract new visitors to the city, there was a broad range of suggestions including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extending the retail opening hours</li> <li>• Providing more cultural activities</li> <li>• Extending opening hours for cultural facilities</li> <li>• Providing more family-friendly activities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There was a general consensus that there was no one single factor that could act as a catalyst for increasing usage levels in the city centre on a Sunday. Rather, the range of views expressed suggested that any interventions need to be multi-faceted, taking account of the interests and needs of the range of users</li> <li>• Those interested in extending retailing hours were keen that this would involve not only the major retailers (i.e. those that can only open 1pm-6pm currently) but also the smaller companies. While many of these can open, only around 30% choose to do so at present, suggesting that the large retailers remain the key drivers of footfall on a Sunday</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St George's Market is the biggest draw after the major retail offer: many respondents supported more market-based activity across the city</li> <li>• There is already a significant number of visitors staying overnight in the city's hotels (average 6000 visitors on a Sunday evening). Many respondents felt that there were opportunities to attract additional spend on local hospitality and food offer, given that many stay on a room-only basis</li> <li>• Many respondents supported additional investment in cultural activity – including events – in order to drive additional footfall. However there was some concern among the cultural sector in particular at the view that additional cultural programming alone can deliver the desired increase in footfall and spend. They considered that this piecemeal approach would not be sustainable</li> <li>• There was also a consistent view that there needed to be a more coordinated approach to marketing, taking account of the key audiences. Many felt that there was already a significant range of activities taking place in the city centre but that, for a number of factors, the communication around these activities could be enhanced</li> <li>• While many families do visit the city on a Sunday, factors such as lack of play facilities/open space, expensive/irregular public transport schedules and presence of too many cars were all cited as deterrents. Families did welcome initiatives such as our engagement hub which was organised to support the Christmas campaign – and attracted more than 5,000 visitors over the month-long programme.</li> </ul>
3.8	<p><u>Barriers to access</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There do not appear to be any specific structural barriers preventing people accessing the city centre on a Sunday. Rather those who do not come in on a regular basis say that the reason for this is that there is nothing in the city centre to attract them or that the range of activities on offer is inadequate. When asked what else they do, many note that they are simply busy doing other things</li> <li>• Many people expressed some concern around the public transport provision on a Sunday and noted that this was a factor in their decision not to visit the city. Families, in particular, noted that one of the key reasons why they did not come into the city centre was because of their concerns about the volume of cars on the road. This is reflected in the figures suggesting that most people access the city by car on a Sunday</li> <li>• There was considerable interest in exploring opportunities for pedestrianisation – or at least temporary closure of some roads – in order to facilities access for activities such as sporting events and additional markets</li> </ul>



- Many people noted that they simply were not aware of what was on offer so they did not consider visiting the city on a Sunday.

### 3.9 Learning from other Cities

Our research into approaches in other cities identified a range of initiatives that were being undertaken in order to driven spend and footfall on a Sunday. However it is important to note that these cities operate within a different licensing and regulatory environment. As such, it is not simply about organising activities or programming – it is important to understand the role of licensing and also to take account of different cultural practices in other locations. Innovative ideas that may work in the Belfast context include:

- Dublin: The Business Improvement District (BID) in Dublin has been proactively working to compete with the out-of-town shopping centres. To do so, it has developed a number of tactical interventions focusing, in particular, on the family market. This has included subsidies on public transport (family day travel pass for €10), kids activities in public spaces, pop up cinemas and collaboration with restaurants and entertainment venues to develop new promotional activity and special Sunday deals
- Manchester: Manchester has previously celebrated an “In Town Without My Car” Day. Conducted on a Sunday, parts of the city centre were closed to motor traffic. The aim of the event was to encourage people to consider more environmentally friendly methods of travel, such as public transport, walking or cycling. The traffic was replaced by the bustle of an arts and crafts market, live music, street theatre and roving entertainers. The approach combined entertainment to drive city centre footfall on a Sunday with social issues around civic responsibility. This approach has been tried in Belfast through the Ciclovía event which is scheduled to take place on 29 March 2020 and which will end up in the city centre
- Preston: a new monthly street market is now staged in Preston city centre as part of a major drive to bring in more visitors to the city, with key thoroughfares being closed to traffic. The market feature unique creators, makers, designers, producers, bakers, musicians and artists, and Preston producers and local market traders are invited to take part. The council has also revised licensing hours for some activities to extend these to later in the evening – particularly for live music and dance performances.

### 3.10 Understanding the socio-economic impact of additional activity on Sunday

- Our research suggests that Sundays in the city are currently worth around £15.6million a month in terms of spend on goods, services and activities consumed in the city centre
- Large and small businesses felt that opening earlier would provide them with more opportunities to generate sales, target new customers, visitors and tourists as well as enabling staff to access more flexible working hours. It has not been possible to quantify the additional economic impact that this would generate at this point and, in line with the wider engagement, it is clear that those wishing to come into the city consider that it should not be additional retail alone that will drive additional footfall
- Clearly the opening hours of the large retailers (as set out in the legislation) has an impact on footfall levels in the city centre and also drive the behaviour of small businesses (that could open earlier if they wanted to do so)
- Numbers using the city centre on a Sunday are currently less than half those coming into Belfast on a Sunday. Examples from the other locations suggest that the variation (between Saturday and Sunday) is less significant than in Belfast
- While many people support additional cultural activity in the city centre on a Sunday, the majority of the cultural institutions are not currently open on a Sunday. This is due to having to manage very tight budgets. However institutions such as the Ulster Museum have changed their opening hours, opening on a Sunday and closing on a Monday, in line with consumer demands, and this is reflected in very strong user numbers on a Sunday
- With regard to city centre workers, twice as many see extended trading hours as a positive rather than a negative (45% versus 22%), with 30% foreseeing no impact at all, according to our survey. Members will be aware of recent press coverage from USDAW regarding a survey of their members which suggests that 92% do not support any extension of Sunday trading hours
- The spend by out of state visitors is significantly higher than that for Belfast and NI visitors - £200 per party versus £135 per party. Given that Saturday night is already the busiest night of the week in the city's hotels, the importance of the visitor economy to the city centre's success cannot be underestimated. Feedback from visitors to the city suggests that the lack of things to do on a Sunday is a negative point regarding the city's offer to tourists.

3.11	<p><u>Understanding the impact that any change to opening hours may have on the city centre in terms of small and independent retailers, workers' rights and the effect on women and childcare, and footfall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, only 30% of businesses that can open on a Sunday in the city centre (those in specific categories or with a footprint of 280 sqm or less) do so. The majority of those that do open align their opening hours with the 1pm opening of the larger stores</li> <li>• Only 2% of businesses felt that they would be negatively affected by a change in opening hours; 30% felt that they would be very positively impacted</li> <li>• As detailed above, twice as many city centre workers see extended trading hours as a positive rather than a negative (45% versus 22%), with 30% foreseeing no impact at all</li> <li>• Younger respondents and males were less likely to perceive any negative impacts associated with working on a Sunday: 30% of females interviewed saw this as a positive; 39% considered there would be no impact and 31% felt that this would have a negative impact on them</li> <li>• The footfall profile confirms that there is a significant increase in footfall between 12 and 2pm, in line with the current opening hours. Traders also confirm that the period between 1 and 2 is generally one of the busiest of the Sunday trading period, given that many people come to town for the purpose of shopping.</li> </ul>
3.12	<p>Taking account of the commentary gathered as a result of the engagement exercise, there are a number of options for members to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Option 1: Agree to designate the city centre as a holiday resort, in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. This will enable larger retail stores with a retail footprint in excess of 280 sqm wishing to do so to open on up to 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September, with a recommendation that the earlier opening time of 11am is introduced and the current closing time of 6pm is maintained. In addition to the retail opening, it is proposed that a programme of cultural animation and an associated marketing programme is developed with the aim of driving additional footfall into the city centre. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this committee and engagement will take place with retailers to consider the</li> </ul>

	<p>date from which the designation will take place and secure agreement on opening hours (note: the area cannot be officially designated until one month after the council decision)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Option 2: Agree to designate the city centre as a holiday resort, with an agreement with local retailers and that affected retailers will open between 12pm – 6pm on 18 consecutive Sundays in the summer in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and develop and support a programme of cultural animation and associated marketing. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.</li> <li>Option 3: Do not support the designation of the city centre as a holiday resort, in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 but develop a programme of cultural animation and an associated marketing programme. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p>
3.13	<p>The resource implications of this work will be dependent on the preferred approach agreed by the Committee. Any activity will have to take place in the context of existing council and partner budget commitments.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p>
3.14	<p>An equality screening process has been undertaken as part of the consultation process.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
4.1	None



Subject:	<b>Future City Centre Programme – Sundays in the City</b>
Date:	4th March, 2020
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager - Economy

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with feedback on the outcomes of a programme of engagement undertaken as a result of the Committee's decisions of 6th June and 11th September relating to Sunday opening and a range of associated issues.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. note the engagement process undertaken, in line with the Committee's decision of 11th September 2019, as amended by the Council on 1st October 2019;</li> </ul>



	<p>ii. note the issues and viewpoints expressed in the course of the engagement process, as set out in sections 3.8-3.12; and</p> <p>iii. note the options presented in section 3.13 and advise which they wish officers to take forward. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Option 1:</b> Agree to designate the city centre as a holiday resort, in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and develop and support a programme of cultural animation and associated marketing. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.</li> <li>○ <b>Option 2:</b> Agree to designate the city centre as a holiday resort, with an agreement with local retailers and that affected retailers will open between 12pm – 6pm on 18 consecutive Sundays in the summer in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and develop and support a programme of cultural animation and associated marketing. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee; and</li> <li>○ <b>Option 3:</b> Do not support the designation of the city centre as a holiday resort, in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 but develop a programme of cultural animation and an associated marketing programme. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p>Members will recall that, at the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 5th June 2019, it was agreed that: “a report be submitted to a future meeting setting out the Terms of Reference to progress proposals for designating the city centre as a “Holiday Resort”, taking into account issues beyond opening hours and outlining the extent of the associated consultation process”.</p>

3.2	<p>The terms of reference were presented to and approved by the Committee meeting on 11th September 2019. Following discussion at the October Council meeting, the final terms of reference agreed were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To explore opportunities to drive additional footfall and spend by attracting new visitors to the city on Sundays</li> <li>• To identify barriers to accessing the city centre on Sundays (for those that wish to do so) and to engage with partners to develop collaborative solutions to address these barriers</li> <li>• To build an understanding of approaches in other cities and to develop learning that may be relevant for the Belfast context</li> <li>• To understand the socio-economic impact of any additional city centre animation activities on Sundays</li> <li>• To understand the impact that any change to opening hours may have on the city centre in terms of small and independent retailers, workers' rights and the effect on women and childcare, and footfall</li> <li>• To understand the investment required to encourage the additional visitor numbers to the city on Sundays and to build a business case to lever resources from partner organisations, in the context of the city revitalisation.</li> </ul>
3.3	<p>Members will be aware that the "holiday resort" designation is set out in legislation under The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The current Sunday opening hours for retailers with a sales footprint of 280 sqm or more are 1 pm to 6 pm on Sunday. The holiday resort designation is not about de-regulation of Sunday opening hours. Instead, it permits those larger retailers to open on up to 18 Sundays between 1st March and 30th September (excluding Easter Sunday). The Council is responsible for designating the area to be covered by the "holiday resort" status and maintaining a register of shops proposing to open. During earlier engagement with traders, some businesses had indicated that they would be keen to open at the earlier time of 11am. However the council has the authority to agree any revision to the opening times.</p>
3.4	<p>The need for a targeted and focused approach to driving the economic, social and cultural regeneration of Belfast City Centre was recognised through the Belfast Investment and Regeneration strategy, developed and adopted by the council and other partners in 2015. Subsequently, work has been ongoing to move forward on the eight themes and priorities</p>

	<p>outlined in the strategy. Within the council, the structural changes – bringing together a range of complementary disciplines with the Place and Economy department – have brought a focus to that work. Officers have developed a programme of work called the “Future City Centre” programme which aims to create a dynamic and experiential destination for shoppers and bolster Belfast as the dominant retail and leisure destination in Northern Ireland.</p>
3.5	<p>The engagement exercise for the “Sundays in the City” programme clearly acknowledged that it would require more than single, stand-alone interventions to increase the usage of the city centre on a Sunday. Based on the agreed terms of reference, the engagement programme – which took place between October 2019 and January 2020 – included the following elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online public consultation – this involved using the council’s online engagement portal (Citizenspace). The consultation was open for eight weeks and closed on 17 January 2020. It attracted 1440 responses, more than 70% of which came from Belfast residents</li> <li>• Market research – we engaged in a series of survey-based market research exercises targeting users of the city (including workers), NI residents and out of state visitors to Belfast</li> <li>• Focus groups: we held focus groups with a number of key demographic and target groups including old people, young people, disabled individuals, family groups and city centre businesses</li> <li>• One to one meetings: senior officers held a series of one to one meetings with key statutory partners (DfC; Tourism NI; PSNI), business organisations (including Retail NI; NI Retail Consortium; Belfast Chamber; Hospitality Ulster; NI Hotels Federation), trades unions (USDAW and Prospect) and other interested partners including the Interfaith Forum.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p>In terms of who currently uses the city centre on a Sunday, the research drew out a range of key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently on a Sunday, an average of 50,000 visitors come to the city centre. This is less than 50% of the user numbers that access the city on a Saturday and is in line with the volume of day trips on a Monday to Friday (excluding workers)</li> <li>• Those coming to the city on a Sunday do so mainly in order to shop, to eat out and to socialise with friends. Residents and visitors from NI typically spend an average of £135 per visiting party or group, while those from ROI and other out of state visitors</li> </ul>

	<p>spend around £200 per visiting group. This means that Sundays in Belfast city centre generate an annual economic return in the region of £160million</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of those using the city centre on a Sunday visit monthly or less often. However young people are likely to be more regular visitors, with 61% of those aged 34 and under coming into Belfast at least once a month. This is generally in keeping with the user profile of the city centre which appears to decrease with age</li> <li>• Most visitors will spend between two and four hours in the city centre on a Sunday. More than half of them arrive between noon and 2pm. This footfall pattern is clearly linked to the current 1pm opening time for the large retailers. It is different from all other days of the week, where footfall tends to broadly follow a similar pattern of a gradually increasing profile up to a peak period of 12pm to 3pm and then tapering off.</li> </ul>
3.7	In line with the terms of reference, some of the key issues emerging from the consultation exercise include:
3.8	<p><u>Opportunities to drive additional footfall and spend by attracting new visitors to the city on Sundays</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Across all of the market research work and the online consultation, the main reasons why people currently visit the city centre on a Sunday are to shop, to eat and drink and to socialise with friends</li> <li>• When asked what would attract new visitors to the city, there was a broad range of suggestions including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extending the retail opening hours</li> <li>• Providing more cultural activities</li> <li>• Extending opening hours for cultural facilities</li> <li>• Providing more family-friendly activities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• There was a general consensus that there was no one single factor that could act as a catalyst for increasing usage levels in the city centre on a Sunday. Rather, the range of views expressed suggested that any interventions need to be multi-faceted, taking account of the interests and needs of the range of users</li> <li>• Those interested in extending retailing hours were keen that this would involve not only the major retailers (i.e. those that can only open 1pm-6pm currently) but also the smaller companies. While many of these can open, only around 30% choose to do so at present, suggesting that the large retailers remain the key drivers of footfall on a Sunday</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• St George's Market is the biggest draw after the major retail offer: many respondents supported more market-based activity across the city</li> <li>• There is already a significant number of visitors staying overnight in the city's hotels (average 6000 visitors on a Sunday evening). Many respondents felt that there were opportunities to attract additional spend on local hospitality and food offer, given that many stay on a room-only basis</li> <li>• Many respondents supported additional investment in cultural activity – including events – in order to drive additional footfall. However there was some concern among the cultural sector in particular at the view that additional cultural programming alone can deliver the desired increase in footfall and spend. They considered that this piecemeal approach would not be sustainable</li> <li>• There was also a consistent view that there needed to be a more coordinated approach to marketing, taking account of the key audiences. Many felt that there was already a significant range of activities taking place in the city centre but that, for a number of factors, the communication around these activities could be enhanced</li> <li>• While many families do visit the city on a Sunday, factors such as lack of play facilities/open space, expensive/irregular public transport schedules and presence of too many cars were all cited as deterrents. Families did welcome initiatives such as our engagement hub which was organised to support the Christmas campaign – and attracted more than 5,000 visitors over the month-long programme.</li> </ul>
3.9	<p><u>Barriers to access</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There do not appear to be any specific structural barriers preventing people accessing the city centre on a Sunday. Rather those who do not come in on a regular basis say that the reason for this is that there is nothing in the city centre to attract them or that the range of activities on offer is inadequate. When asked what else they do, many note that they are simply busy doing other things</li> <li>• Many people expressed some concern around the public transport provision on a Sunday and noted that this was a factor in their decision not to visit the city. Families, in particular, noted that one of the key reasons why they did not come into the city centre was because of their concerns about the volume of cars on the road. This is reflected in the figures suggesting that most people access the city by car on a Sunday</li> <li>• There was considerable interest in exploring opportunities for pedestrianisation – or at least temporary closure of some roads – in order to facilities access for activities such as sporting events and additional markets</li> </ul>

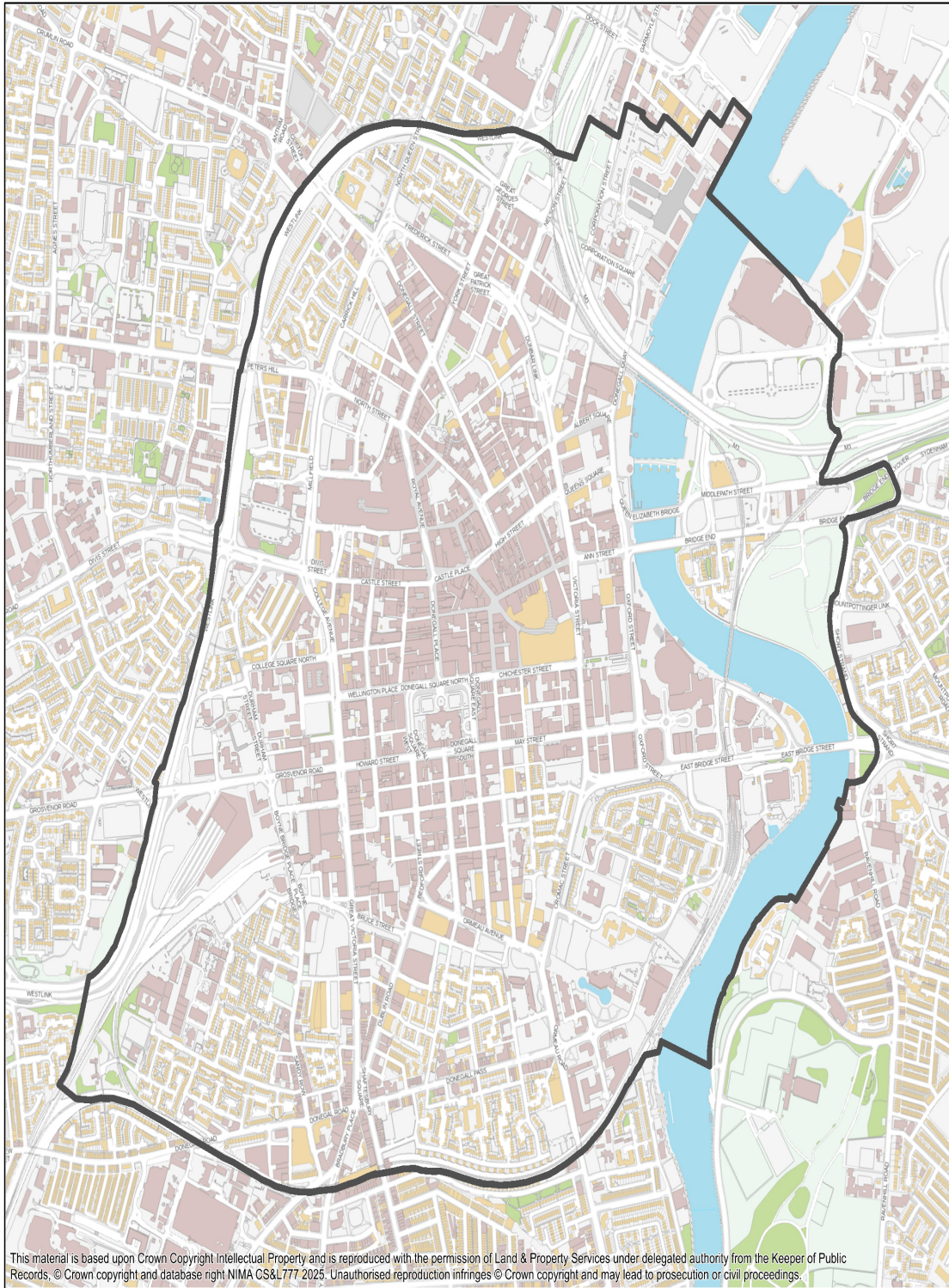


	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many people noted that they simply were not aware of what was on offer so they did not consider visiting the city on a Sunday.</li> </ul>
3.10	<p><u>Learning from other cities</u></p> <p>Our research into approaches in other cities identified a range of initiatives that were being undertaken in order to driven spend and footfall on a Sunday. However it is important to note that these cities operate within a different licensing and regulatory environment. As such, it is not simply about organising activities or programming – it is important to understand the role of licensing and also to take account of different cultural practices in other locations. Innovative ideas that may work in the Belfast context include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dublin: The Business Improvement District (BID) in Dublin has been proactively working to compete with the out-of-town shopping centres. To do so, it has developed a number of tactical interventions focusing, in particular, on the family market. This has included subsidies on public transport (family day travel pass for €10), kids activities in public spaces, pop up cinemas and collaboration with restaurants and entertainment venues to develop new promotional activity and special Sunday deals</li> <li>Manchester: Manchester has previously celebrated an “In Town Without My Car” Day. Conducted on a Sunday, parts of the city centre were closed to motor traffic. The aim of the event was to encourage people to consider more environmentally friendly methods of travel, such as public transport, walking or cycling. The traffic was replaced by the bustle of an arts and crafts market, live music, street theatre and roving entertainers. The approach combined entertainment to drive city centre footfall on a Sunday with social issues around civic responsibility. This approach has been tried in Belfast through the Ciclovía event which is scheduled to take place on 29 March 2020 and which will end up in the city centre</li> <li>Preston: a new monthly street market is now staged in Preston city centre as part of a major drive to bring in more visitors to the city, with key thoroughfares being closed to traffic. The market feature unique creators, makers, designers, producers, bakers, musicians and artists, and Preston producers and local market traders are invited to take part. The council has also revised licensing hours for some activities to extend these to later in the evening – particularly for live music and dance performances.</li> </ul>
3.11	<p><u>Understanding the socio-economic impact of additional activity on Sunday</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our research suggests that Sundays in the city are currently worth around £14million a month in terms of spend on goods, services and activities consumed in the city centre</li> </ul>

3.12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Large and small businesses felt that opening earlier would provide them with more opportunities to generate sales, target new customers, visitors and tourists as well as enabling staff to access more flexible working hours. It has not been possible to quantify the additional economic impact that this would generate at this point and, in line with the wider engagement, it is clear that those wishing to come into the city consider that it should not be additional retail alone that will drive additional footfall</li> <li>• Clearly the opening hours of the large retailers (as set out in the legislation) has an impact on footfall levels in the city centre and also drive the behaviour of small businesses (that could open earlier if they wanted to do so)</li> <li>• Numbers using the city centre on a Sunday are currently less than half those coming into Belfast on a Sunday. Examples from the other locations suggest that the variation (between Saturday and Sunday) is less significant than in Belfast</li> <li>• While many people support additional cultural activity in the city centre on a Sunday, the majority of the cultural institutions are not currently open on a Sunday. This is due to having to manage very tight budgets. However institutions such as the Ulster Museum have changed their opening hours, opening on a Sunday and closing on a Monday, in line with consumer demands, and this is reflected in very strong user numbers on a Sunday</li> <li>• With regard to city centre workers, twice as many see extended trading hours as a positive rather than a negative (45% versus 22%), with 30% foreseeing no impact at all, according to our survey. Members will be aware of recent press coverage from USDAW regarding a survey of their members which suggests that 92% do not support any extension of Sunday trading hours</li> <li>• The spend by out of state visitors is significantly higher than that for Belfast and NI visitors - £200 per party versus £135 per party. Given that Saturday night is already the busiest night of the week in the city's hotels, the importance of the visitor economy to the city centre's success cannot be underestimated. Feedback from visitors to the city suggests that the lack of things to do on a Sunday is a negative point regarding the city's offer to tourists.</li> </ul> <p><u>Understanding the impact that any change to opening hours may have on the city centre in terms of small and independent retailers, workers' rights and the effect on women and childcare, and footfall</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, only 30% of businesses that can open on a Sunday in the city centre (those in specific categories or with a footprint of 280 sqm or less) do so. The majority of those that do open align their opening hours with the 1pm opening of the larger stores</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 2% of businesses felt that they would be negatively affected by a change in opening hours; 30% felt that they would be very positively impacted</li> <li>• As detailed above, twice as many city centre workers see extended trading hours as a positive rather than a negative (45% versus 22%), with 30% foreseeing no impact at all</li> <li>• Younger respondents and males were less likely to perceive any negative impacts associated with working on a Sunday: 30% of females interviewed saw this as a positive; 39% considered there would be no impact and 31% felt that this would have a negative impact on them</li> <li>• The footfall profile confirms that there is a significant increase in footfall between 12 and 2pm, in line with the current opening hours. Traders also confirm that the period between 1 and 2 is generally one of the busiest of the Sunday trading period, given that many people come to town for the purpose of shopping.</li> </ul>
3.13	<p>Taking account of the commentary gathered as a result of the engagement exercise, there are a number of options for Members to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Option 1:</b> Agree to designate the city centre as a holiday resort, in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. This will enable larger retail stores with a retail footprint in excess of 280 sqm wishing to do so to open on up to 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September, with a recommendation that the earlier opening time of 11am is introduced and the current closing time of 6pm is maintained. In addition to the retail opening, it is proposed that a programme of cultural animation and an associated marketing programme is developed with the aim of driving additional footfall into the city centre. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this committee and engagement will take place with retailers to consider the date from which the designation will take place and secure agreement on opening hours (note: the area cannot be officially designated until one month after the council decision)</li> <li>• <b>Option 2:</b> Do not support the designation of the city centre as a holiday resort, in line with the legislation as set out in the The Shops (Sunday Trading &amp;c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. Develop a programme of cultural animation and an associated marketing programme with the aim of driving additional footfall into the city centre. Subject to agreement on this option, a report setting out the proposed animation programme and</li> </ul>

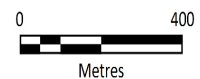
	<p>the associated budgetary implications will be brought back to a future meeting of this Committee.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>3.14 The resource implications of this work will be dependent on the preferred approach agreed by the Committee. Any activity will have to take place in the context of existing council and partner budget commitments.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>3.15 An equality screening process has been undertaken as part of the consultation process.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
4.1	None



**Belfast**  
City Council



City Centre (BMAP 2015 version as published 2014)





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## Summer 2025

Ref	Venue/ Location	Type	Sunday Open Hours	Regular/One off	Details
1	St George's Market	Market	10am - 3pm	Regular	Free access arts and crafts market, open to all Free access; guided tours at 12noon / 2pm / 3pm The Bobbin Coffee Shop 10am - 4.30pm
2	City Hall	Venue	10am - 5pm	Regular	Visitor exhibition 10am - 5pm
3	2RA	Venue	10am - 6pm		Specific Sunday event(s) include: Free 18.05 - 27.07 Sunday Chess  CafeBar 9.30am – 3.30pm; Galleries open from 11am – 5pm; Family Room open from 9am – 5pm Shows, exhibitions, a range of activities, talks, tours and happenings (including exhibition: We Lose Sight of the Night: Aisling O’Beirn + Grenfell)
4	The MAC	Venue	9am - 5pm	Regular	
9	Belfast Street Art Walking Tour	Tour	At 12noon	Regular	Tour happens weekly, on a Sunday [Ticketed] leaving from DoY July 6/20/27 August 3/10/17/24/31 <b>TBC</b> - <a href="https://belfastpride.com/guide/">https://belfastpride.com/guide/</a> The Belfast Pride Guide 2025 is currently under development; however based on last year's guide there will likely be events on Sun 20th and Sun 27th July
10	Belfast Pride 2025	Festival	18 - 27 July	Annual	Specific Sunday event(s) include: [Ticketed]
11	Belfast TradFest	Festival	27 July - 3 Aug	Annual	27.07 Dervish and NOTIFY @ Ulster Hall <a href="https://www.belfasttraditionalmusic.com/concerts-july">https://www.belfasttraditionalmusic.com/concerts-july</a>

12	Féile an Phobail Custom House Square (CHSq)	Festival	31 July - 10 Aug	Annual	Féile 5k + 10k [Ticketed] Sunday 3 August 2025 at 9am Starts at 10k Finaghy Road North + 5k st Andersonstown Specific Sunday event(s) include: @ CHSq [Ticketed] 17.08 Texas 24.08 The 30+ Club Festival 31.08 Nile Rodgers & Chic
13		Festival	7 Aug - 6 Sept	Annual	<b>TBC</b> Full Mela+ programme not available yet Specific Sunday event(s) include: 24.08 Mela Day @ Botanic Gardens
14	Belfast Mela	Festival	16 - 24 Aug	Annual	
15	Emerge Belfast	Festival	23 - 24 Aug	Annual	Specific Sunday event(s) include: @ Boucher Rd Playing Fields 24.08 Programme listing - <a href="https://www.emergebelfast.com/">https://www.emergebelfast.com/</a> Regular exhibitions (including Wild Ireland: Past, Present, Future) Cost = Free All Ages ranges
16	Ulster Museum Titanic Martime Walking	Museum	10am - 5pm	Regular	
17	Tour	Tour	10am - 12.30pm	Regular	Departs from the Albert Memorial Clock Ticketed Museum and Exhibitions; Gallery café open daily; The Pantry open daily (including Lucian Freud Etchings: A Creative Collaboration - Admission free)
18	Titanic Building	Museum	9am - 7.30pm	Regular	Ticketed
19	SS Nomadic St George's Market Walking	Museum	10am - 6.30pm	Regular	Ticketed
20	Tour	Tour	11am + 1pm	Regular	Ticketed

21	W5 Friar's Bush Belfast	Museum	10am - 6pm	Regular	Ticketed Exhibitions, STEM based (including Dinosaurs Survive! General admission)
22	Tours Sunday Sessions @ The Dirty	Tour	12 - 1.15pm	Regular	Ticketed  live trad session and live folk bands Free
23	Onion North Block Bazaar @ McConnell's	Music	1pm - 12.30am	Regular	July 6/13/20/27
24	Distillery Titanic Eastside	Market	1 - 5pm	Monthly	First Sunday of every month [admission] July 6th, Aug 3rd, Sept 7th Tour departs from Native Coffee Queen's Quay Ticketed
25	Bike Tour Ciorcal Comhrá @ The Second	Tour	2 - 5pm	Regular	July 6/13/20/27 August 3/10/17/24/31
26	Fiddle Wee Taste of Ormeau: The Sunday	Social	4 - 6pm	Regular	Irish Speaking Circle is free and open for all levels. July 6/13/20/27
28	Brunch Edition Arts Across Belfast Bus	Tour	10.30am - 12.30pm	Regular	brunch-themed food tour Third Sunday of every month [ticketed] July 20th, Aug 17th Tour of the city's arts centres, theatres, art galleries and music venues, see street artwork and public sculptures and listen to music and stories
31	Tour Belfast Whiskey	Tour	10.25am - 2.30pm	Regular	July 20th / Aug 10th [Ticketed] Ireland's largest Whiskey Festival [Ticketed] Full programme and prices to be announced
32	Week	Festival	18th - 26th July 12pm - 12am	One off	Specific Sunday - 20th July

36	City Centre shops	Retail	1 - 6pm	Regular	General opening hours across the city
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<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Asset Management</b> <b>i)</b> Parkgate Avenue Car Park – Licence Extension <b>ii)</b> Smithfield Market – Update on Unit Lettings <b>iii)</b> Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence Agreement with Friends of the Field <b>iv)</b> Benview Community Centre – New Licence <b>v)</b> Commission House – New Lease <b>vi)</b> Overflow Parking Area adjacent Cregagh Youth & Community Centre – New Licence
<b>Date:</b>	20 June 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Pamela Davison, Estates Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	<b>Yes</b> <input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted</b>	
<b>Insert number</b> <input style="width: 30px;" type="text"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information relating to any individual</li> <li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li> <li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li> <li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li> <li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li> <li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li> <li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li> </ol>	
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b> <b>After Council Decision</b> <b>Sometime in the future</b> <b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>



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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Committee on asset related disposal, acquisition and estates matters.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>i) Parkgate Avenue Car Park – Licence Extension</b> - Approve the extension of an existing Licence agreement with the Directors of Argento Contemporary Jewellery Ltd for a right of way over Council owned lands at Parkgate Avenue Car Park.</li> <li><b>ii) Smithfield Market – Update on Unit Lettings</b> – Note the recent lettings and rent reviews at Smithfield Market approved under delegated authority to the Director of Property &amp; Projects.</li> <li><b>iii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence Agreement with Friends of the Field</b> - Approve the grant of a further Licence Agreement between the Council &amp; Friends of the Field to cover their continued use of portion of Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) as an agroecology community garden in conjunction with the Horizon 2020 UPSURGE project.</li> <li><b>iv) Benview Community Centre – New Licence</b> - Approve a new 5-year licence agreement for the use of a portion of Benview Community Centre as a play centre &amp; for use of storage container.</li> <li><b>v) Commission House – New Lease</b> – Approve the lease of Commission House for office use to The Parent Rooms</li> <li><b>vi) Overflow Parking Area adjacent Cregagh Youth &amp; Community Centre – New Licence</b> - Approve of a new licence to Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch) for their occasional use of the overflow parking area adjacent to Cregagh Youth &amp; Community Centre.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><b>i) Parkgate Avenue Car Park – Licence Extension</b></p> <p><b><u>Key Issues</u></b></p> <p>The Directors of Argento Contemporary Jewellery Ltd ('Argento') own a piece of land adjoining the Council owned Parkgate Avenue car park. Council entered into a Licence with Argento granting a right of way over the car park to gain access to their adjoining lands via the gates and/or turnstile located in the boundary fence illustrated at Appendix 1. The existing Licence</p>

	<p>expired on 31 August 2020 and has been extended on an annual basis to 31 August 2024. The fee was £3,000 pa. It is recommended that the Licence is extended for two further years to 31 August 2026 subject to a revised fee of £3,300 per year. The Licence protects the Council's interest in the car park and indemnifies Council against liabilities arising out of Argento's use of the lands.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>Legal Services and Estates would draft the Licence extension. The Council will receive an income of £3,300 per year.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>																						
3.2	<p><b>ii) Smithfield Market – Update on Unit Lettings</b></p> <p><b><u>Key Issues</u></b></p> <p>The Committee is asked to note recent lettings and rent reviews of Units at Smithfield Market as agreed under the delegated authority granted to the Director of Property &amp; Projects. The Council's Scheme of Delegation provides for retrospective reporting of lettings and rent reviews at Smithfield Market.</p> <p><b><u>New Lettings</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Unit 2 - Smithfield Market</u></b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><i>Unit size</i></td><td>178 sq ft</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Use</i></td><td>Nail Salon</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Rent</i></td><td>£275 per month plus rates</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Term</i></td><td>Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2023.</td></tr> </table> <p><b><u>Unit 3 - Smithfield Market</u></b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><i>Unit size</i></td><td>136 sq ft</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Use</i></td><td>Sale of Classic Football Memorabilia</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Rent</i></td><td>£225 per month plus rates</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Term</i></td><td>Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 14<sup>th</sup> Nov 2024.</td></tr> </table> <p><b><u>Unit 17/18 - Smithfield Market</u></b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td><i>Unit size</i></td><td>996 sq ft</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Use</i></td><td>Sale of second-hand musical instruments, records, CD's and Cassettes</td></tr> <tr> <td><i>Rent</i></td><td>£900 per month plus rates</td></tr> </table>	<i>Unit size</i>	178 sq ft	<i>Use</i>	Nail Salon	<i>Rent</i>	£275 per month plus rates	<i>Term</i>	Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 1 <sup>st</sup> Oct 2023.	<i>Unit size</i>	136 sq ft	<i>Use</i>	Sale of Classic Football Memorabilia	<i>Rent</i>	£225 per month plus rates	<i>Term</i>	Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 14 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2024.	<i>Unit size</i>	996 sq ft	<i>Use</i>	Sale of second-hand musical instruments, records, CD's and Cassettes	<i>Rent</i>	£900 per month plus rates
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<i>Use</i>	Sale of second-hand musical instruments, records, CD's and Cassettes																						
<i>Rent</i>	£900 per month plus rates																						

<i>Term</i>	Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 17th January 2023. This agreement was subsequently terminated 5 <sup>th</sup> January 2025
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### **Unit 23 - Smithfield Market**

<i>Unit size</i>	150 sq ft
<i>Use</i>	Hydroponics Store
<i>Rent</i>	£250 per month plus rates
<i>Term</i>	Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 6th Jan 2025.

### **Unit 35 - Smithfield Market**

<i>Unit size</i>	306 sq ft
<i>Use</i>	Barbers and Hair Training Academy
<i>Rent</i>	£600 per month plus rates.
<i>Term</i>	Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 17th Jan 2024.

### **Unit 38 - Smithfield Market**

<i>Unit size</i>	306 sq ft
<i>Use</i>	Sale and servicing of Mobility Scooters
<i>Rent</i>	£550 per month plus rates.
<i>Term</i>	Tenancy Agreement for six months and monthly thereafter commencing 6th May 2024.

### **Rent Reviews**

Rental increases with affect from 1<sup>st</sup> February 2025

	<b>Previous Rent</b>	<b>New Rent</b>
<b>Unit 1</b>	£1,860	£2,580
<b>Unit 5/6</b>	£10,200	12,000
<b>Unit 7</b>	£5,520	£6,000
<b>Unit 9/10</b>	£10,920	£11,880
<b>Unit 13/14</b>	£9,000	£11,623
<b>Unit 15</b>	£4,800	£6,000
<b>Unit 19</b>	£2,160	£2,820
<b>Unit 20</b>	£2,160	£2,820
<b>Unit 21</b>	£3,000	£4,440

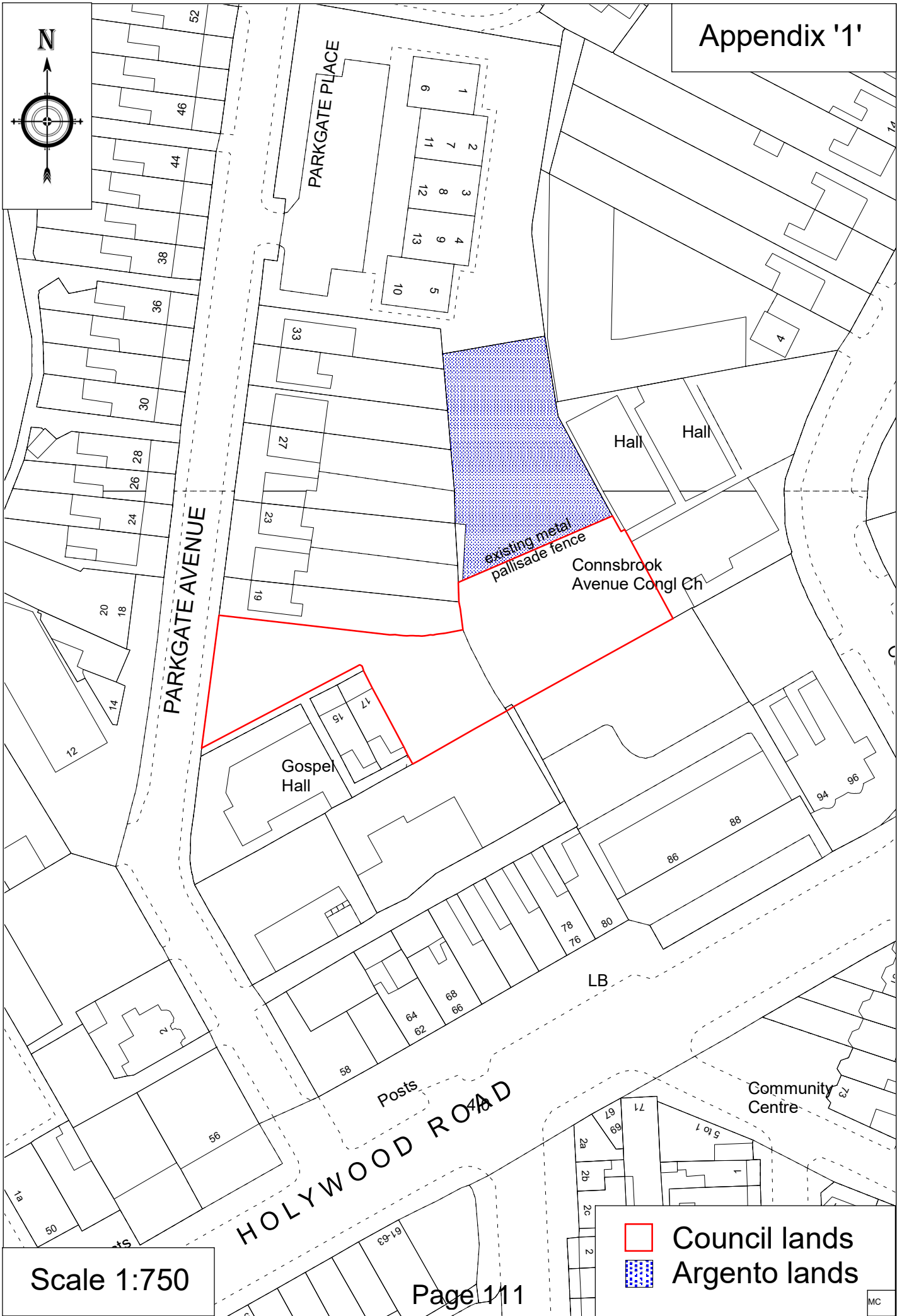
	<b>Unit 26/27</b>	£9,720	£14,640
	<b>Unit 28</b>	£5,700	£7,200
	<b>Unit 29</b>	£4,740	£7,200
	<b>Unit 30/31</b>	£10,800	£14,100
	<b>Unit 32/33</b>	£9,300	£14,100
	<b>Unit 39</b>	£5,520	£7,920
	<p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>The current rental income for Smithfield equates to £179,587 rising from the previous figure of £158,220 per annum noted at previous Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> Feb 2023.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>		
3.3	<p><b>iii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence Agreement with Friends of the Field</b></p> <p><b><u>Key Issues</u></b></p> <p>SP&amp;R at its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2024 approved a licence agreement between the Council &amp; Friends of the Field (FotF) for their use of a part of Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) as an agroecology community garden, in conjunction with the Horizon 2020 UPSURGE project. The subject licence commenced on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024 and is due to come to an end on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025. However, further works are still required and FotF have therefore requested a new licence from the Council. Subject to Members approval, it is proposed that the Council will enter into a further licence agreement with Fotf for a period of 6 months from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2025. However, if subsequent delays occur then this further licence may be extended on a month-to-month basis from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2026 up to a maximum of 6 further months in order for FotF to completely fulfil the objectives of the Upsurge Project through their use of a portion of the Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) as an agroecology community garden. FotF are continuing to partner with the Council in the delivery of the Upsurge Project and therefore a licence fee shall once again not be applicable. See map attached at Appendix 2 showing the location of the licence area delineated blue to FotF and the existing research garden area shaded green which Queen's University Belfast presently occupy in delivering up the Horizon 2020 UPSURGE project in partnership with the Council.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resources Implications</u></b></p> <p>Legal Services shall act on the instructions of the Estates Management Unit. FotF are continuing to partner with the Council in the delivery of the Upsurge Project and therefore a licence fee shall once again not be applicable.</p> <p><b><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>		

3.4	<p><b>iv) Benview Community Centre – New Licence</b></p> <p><b><u>Key Issues</u></b></p> <p>Belfast City Council have occupied and used a portion of Benview Community Centre as a play centre from 1997. The Council’s current Licence expires on 30th June 2025. The People &amp; Communities Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025 agreed to extend the existing agreement with the Benview Community Centre for a period of 5 years. The People and Communities Committee report is attached at Appendix 3. It is therefore proposed that the Council enter into a new 5-year licence agreement from 1st July 2025 with a licence fee of £4,025.56 per annum with any additional use of the hall and hall annex to be charged at £10 per hour. The Council own and use a storage container on the site which can be removed by the Council at any time upon providing to 1 weeks’ notice to the Community Centre. The Council will have the right to terminate the licence at any time by the giving of one month’s notice to the Community Centre. The Council shall also be permitted use of the Play Park &amp; Football Pitch at any time throughout the licence term by prior agreement with Benview Community Centre. See Map attached at Appendix 4.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>Legal services shall act on instructions of the Estates Management Unit. An annual licence fee of £4,025.56 per annum will be payable by the Council with any additional use of the hall and hall annex to be charged at £10 per hour.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.5	<p><b>v) Commission House – New Lease</b></p> <p><b><u>Key Issues</u></b></p> <p>Commission House office building was acquired via the City Centre Investment Fund for regeneration purposes and is held as a regeneration asset within the wider Dunbar Regeneration Scheme. It is currently vacant having previously been occupied by the Local Government Staff Commission, with Council seeking a short term let pending redevelopment of the wider scheme. Commission House has been actively marketed since June 2023 and an expression of interest has recently been submitted by The Parent Rooms. The organisation supports parents with mental health through a range of wellbeing programmes, counselling and social connection. The proposed use for the building would be office premises, which would house staff and delivery of their services. The group are part funded by both the Department of Health and CNS. Members are asked to approve the granting of a one-year lease to the Parent Rooms for the premises and associated car parking, as delineated in red on the Site Map attached at Appendix 5, at an initial annual rent of £45,000.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p>

	<p>The Council will receive rent of £45,000 per annum. Legal Services shall act on the instruction of the Estates Management Unit</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.6	<p><b>vi) Overflow Parking Area adjacent Cregagh Youth &amp; Community Centre – New Licence</b></p> <p><b><u>Key Issues</u></b></p> <p>Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch) 'IRFU – UB' have requested a new licence for use of the overflow parking area adjacent Cregagh Youth &amp; Community Centre on games days / evenings during the forthcoming 2025 / 2026 rugby season. Subject to members approval, the new licence will permit IRFU – UB with use of the overflow parking area on up to 20 instances (performance dependent) at an agreed cost of £300 on each occasion of use. The licence will also make provision for any requested additional use of the site by IRFU-UB (outside of the fixtures list) subject to at least one week's notice in advance being provided and on the agreement that an overall total of 20 instances of use shall not be exceeded under the licence. See Map at Appendix 6.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>Legal Services shall act on the instructions of the Estates Management Unit. The Council will receive a licence fee from Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch) of £300 per each occasion of use of the overflow parking area.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices - Documents Attached</b>
	<p>Appendix 1 – <b>Parkgate Avenue Car Park – Licence Extension</b> Map showing Parkgate Avenue Car Park outlined red and Argento lands shaded blue.</p> <p>Appendix 2 – <b>Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence Agreement with Friends of the Field</b> - Map showing the location of the proposed licence area delineated blue to FotF and existing research garden area shaded green which Queen's University Belfast presently occupy</p> <p>Appendix 3 - <b>Benview Community Centre – New Licence</b> - People and Communities committee report dated 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2025.</p> <p>Appendix 4 - <b>Benview Community Centre – New Licence</b> - Map outlining Benview Community Centre in red, the storage container position shaded yellow, play park shaded blue and football pitch shaded green.</p>



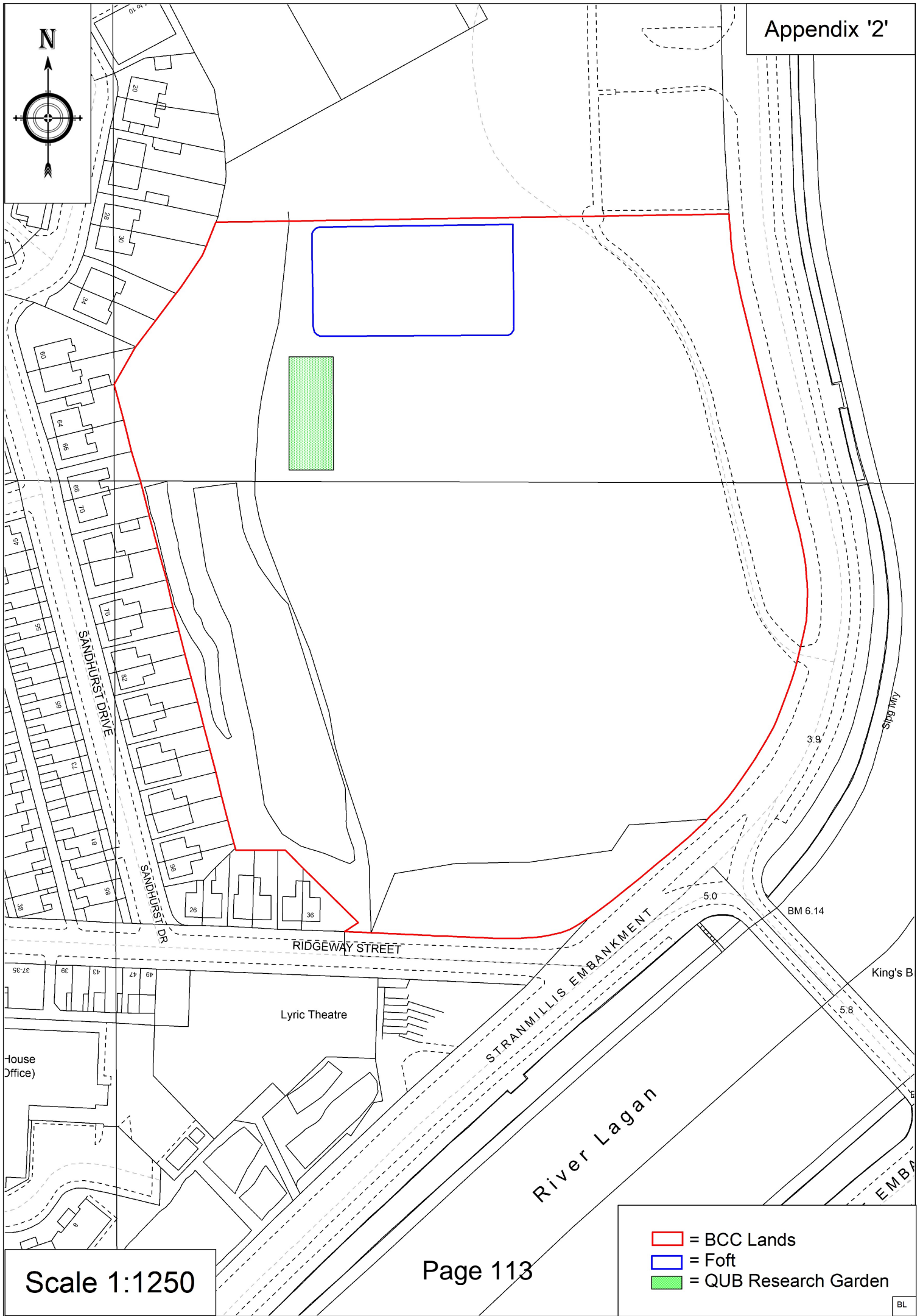
	<p>Appendix 5 – <b>Commission House – New lease</b> - Map showing Commission House outlined red.</p> <p>Appendix 6 – <b>Cregagh Youth &amp; Community Centre – New Licence</b> - Map showing the overflow parking area adjacent Cregagh Youth &amp; Community Centre delineated red and temporary route of access shown shaded yellow.</p>
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Scale 1:750

Council lands  
Argento lands

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<b>Subject:</b>	Play Services Rental Agreement for Benview Residents Association
<b>Date:</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Jim Girvan – Operational Director, Neighbourhood Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Israel Hontavilla – Community Services Unit Manager

## Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐  
☐  
☐  
☐

## Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐



<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The Committee will recall that, at its meeting on 6th May, it had agreed to defer, for a period of one-month, consideration of the above-mentioned report to enable further engagement to be undertaken between officers and locally Elected Members in respect of the rental agreement. The report, as presented, is set out for Members' information. Accordingly, the Committee is requested to consider the extension or expiry of the current rental agreement with Benview Residents Association.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	That committee considers the extension or expiry of rental agreement with Benview Residents Association.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
	<b>Background</b>
3.1	Belfast City Council's Play Service operated from six core centres in 2024 - 2025, additionally providing external projects for 18 schools, 8 community outreach programmes and one ethnic minority location. All play service delivery is child centred with all data held in compliance with General Data Protection Regulations removing concerns for parents/guardians.
3.2	<p><b>Benview Residents Association</b></p> <p>Belfast City Council entered into an informal agreement with Benview Residents Association (BRA) in 1997. A formal agreement was put in place on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2003 for an initial term of three years. This agreement has been extended in two-year periods since then. The rental agreement to Benview provides Play Service with access to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Storeroom.</li> <li>• Outdoor space for a container.</li> <li>• Office space Monday to Friday 09:00 to 17:00.</li> <li>• Main Hall for activities on Mondays, Tuesday, Thursday from 13:30 to 16:30.</li> </ul>
3.3	The Play Service pays Benview Residents Association a rental amount of £4,225 for this access and locates a Play Team and part-time cleaner in an office. Council is also required to pay £800 rent to BRA to provide a short summer scheme in the centre.
3.4	Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Play Service operated from two Council owned buildings and three rental venues. To improve service provision the Play Service began the process to locate all staff within Belfast City Council building to ensure a standardised approach to staff facilities, programme design and implementation and outreach provision.
3.5	This approach has enabled the service to design and deliver targeted programmes working closely with local schools, service providers, residents and voluntary groups on the most impactful days and times. This targeted approach has resulted in Play Teams creating increased connections with local communities, increasing the overall outputs of the Play Service and improving outcomes in line with the Belfast Agenda.

3.6

Play Service engaged with officers from across the Department to identify under-utilised buildings which could be transformed into Play Centres. In 2022 Play Service agreed access to new venues at under-utilised Downshire Hall, Botanic Bowling Pavilion and Woodvale Bowling Pavilion. They terminated two of the three historical rental agreements and fully re-located two teams to re-purposed buildings with supporting outdoor spaces at Downshire Hall and Botanic Bowling Pavilion.

3.7

Full daytime access and control of the buildings enables the Play Service to programme services in line with local need. Hours delivered and attendance increased by 27% (average). The financial resources that were allocated to the rental agreements were re-invested in direct service delivery.

3.8

At the end of 2022, Play Service advised Benview Residents Association that they were considering re-locating the team based in Benview to Woodvale Bowling Pavilion in line with the new delivery model.

3.9

This change enabled the relocation of Belfast City Council staff to both an office and play facility within our owned facilities whilst having increasing service provision. The Play Service currently provides seven weekly sessions, to other organisations in their facilities, where we provide staff free of charge to deliver a wide range of programmes targeted to the needs of the children and group. Play

3.10

The Play Service recognises that the delivery of their after-school and summer programmes is highly appreciated by residents. It also recognises that BRA delivers similar after-school and summer scheme services in their building themselves. At the start of 2024, after conversations with BRA, a one-year extension was agreed to provide the organisation with sufficient time to identify alternative sources of income or delivery models to suit their requirements. This notice period will expire on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2025.

3.11

The Play Service has relocated its office space and staff to Woodvale Play Centre, has made arrangement for removal of the storage container and continues to provide after-schools programming at Benview three afternoon’s each week.

3.12

Belfast City Council would like to continue our work with Benview Residents Association where we will continue to deliver an afterschool and summer scheme service to children. This service would be in line with our outreach service across the City where we provide staff to deliver a high-quality play experience to children with no cost to an organisation or charge incurred by Belfast City Council.






3.13

The table below illustrates the financial support which Benview Residents Association received from Council in 2024 – 2025 and what it will be offered by Council in the 2025 – 2026 financial year, based on the decision on this report.

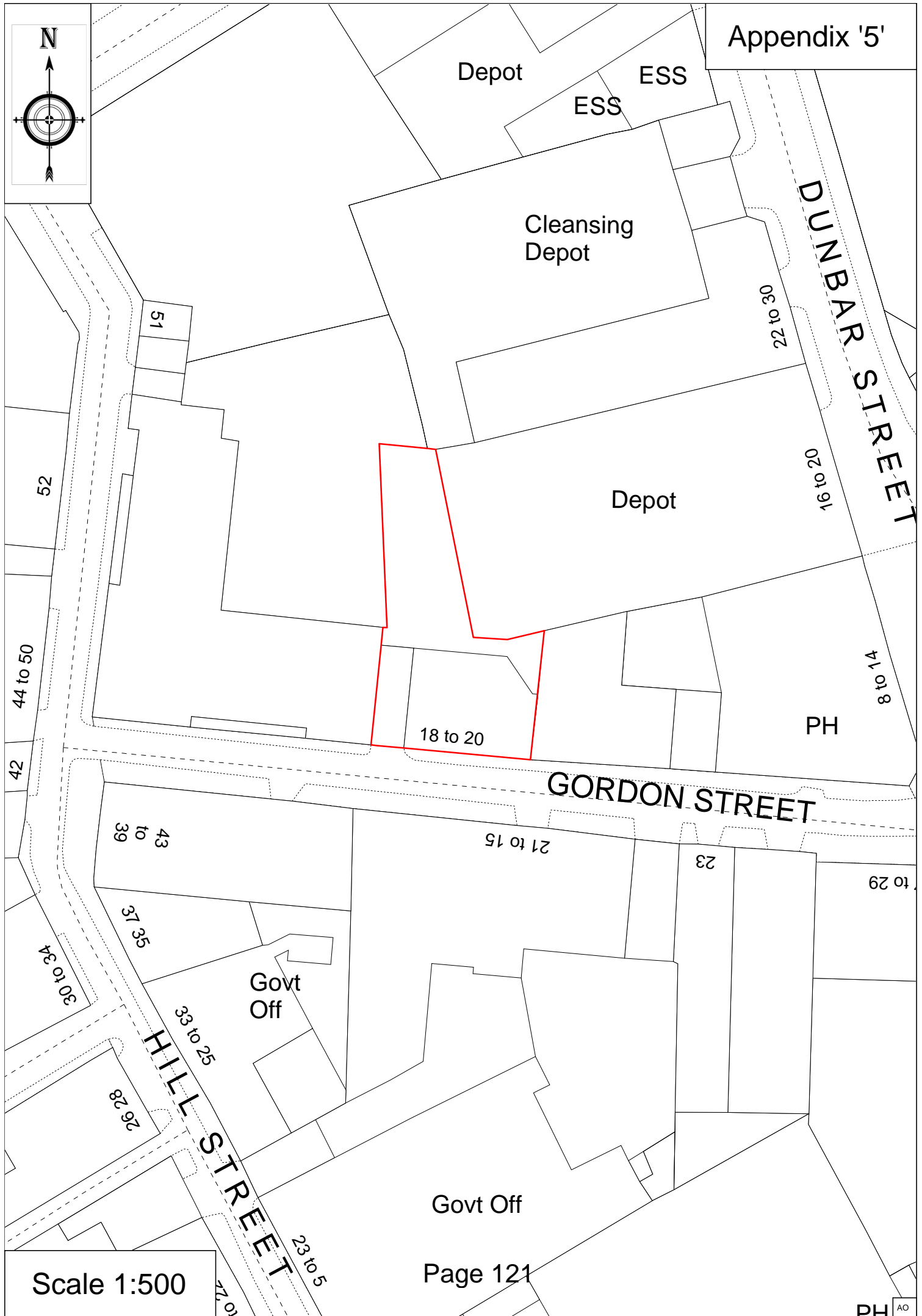
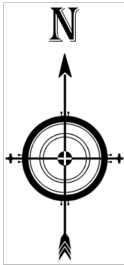
Funding	2024 - 2025	2025 – 2026 incl. rental	2025 – 2026 excl. rental
Community Summer Scheme	£2,500	£2,500	£2,500
Revenue Grant for Community Buildings	£20,623	£41,246	£41,246

3.14	Play Service Rental Agreement	£4,225	£4,225	£0
	Rent of room for summer scheme	£800	£800	£0
	Total amount	£28,148	£48,771	£43,746
	Belfast City Council has received a request from Benview Residents Association for an extension of the current rental agreement for a period of 5 years. Members are asked to consider the request with the consideration that the Play Service no longer requires office space, outdoor space for a container and does not pay other organisations while delivering services at their facilities.			
3.15	<u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u> This decision will either continue with a rental agreement or enable improved service delivery through re-allocation of resources.			
3.16	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u> There are no equality or good relations implications from the implementation of this decision.			
4.0	<b>Appendices</b>			
4.1	None.			



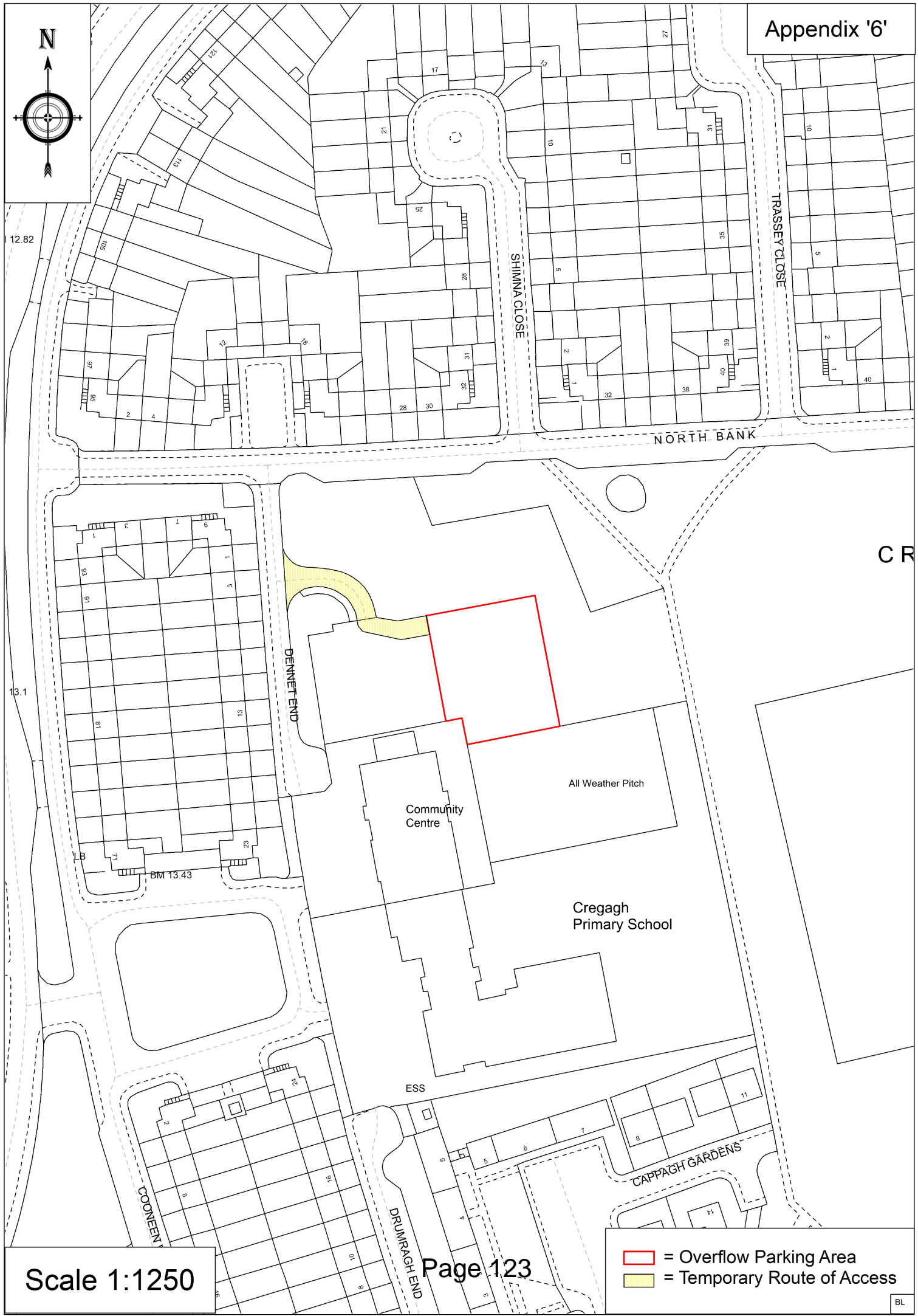
-  = Benview Community Centre Site boundary
  -  = Benview Community Centre
  -  = Storage Container
  -  = Play Park
  -  = Football Pitch
- Date:-

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Scale 1:1250

 = Overflow Parking Area  
 = Temporary Route of Access

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<b>Subject:</b>	Audit and Risk Panel Annual Report to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee including Draft Annual Governance Statement
<b>Date:</b>	20 June 2025
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)

<b>Restricted Reports</b>									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p><b>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</b></p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Information relating to any individual</li> <li>2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual</li> <li>3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)</li> <li>4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter</li> <li>5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained</li> <li>6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction</li> <li>7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime</li> </ol>									
<p><b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b></p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>
1.1	The Audit and Risk Panel is constituted as a working group of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The purpose of the Panel is to provide an independent assurance

1.2	<p>on the adequacy of the Council’s risk management framework and associated control environment. The Panel also oversees the Council’s financial reporting process.</p> <p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide a summary to Committee of the key issues that have been considered and discussed by the Panel during the 2024/25 financial year, the assurances received and the areas requiring attention.</li> <li>▪ Present the Annual Governance Statement for 24/25 for consideration and inclusion in the unaudited statement of accounts which will be certified by the Chief Finance Officer by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2025 and then subject to NIAO audit. The Statement has been considered by the Audit and Risk Panel but must be approved by the Committee Chair and the Chief Executive.</li> <li>▪ Present the updated Raising Concerns policy for approval.</li> </ul>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>The Members of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Note the summary of the work of the Panel during 2024/25 as set out at Section 3.</li> <li>▪ Review and approve the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 at Appendix A, and particularly the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained in the statement.</li> <li>▪ Approve the updated Raising Concerns policy.</li> <li>▪ Note the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 3 June 2025 at Appendix B.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p><b>Summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel in 2024/25</b></p> <p>In March 2024 the Panel approved the internal audit strategy and plan for the 2024/25 year. The plan was designed to allow AGRS to provide independent assurance over the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Key financial systems / income generating activity</li> <li>▪ Key programmes / projects</li> <li>▪ Corporate priorities</li> <li>▪ Management of key corporate risks</li> <li>▪ Meeting external grant funding requirements</li> <li>▪ Governance arrangements</li> </ul>

3.2	<p>During 2024/25, the Panel met four times on a hybrid basis. At these meetings the Panel considered progress reports on delivery of audit plan and issues arising from audit activity, including the findings, assurance levels and recommendations arising from audit work and the progress being made to implement audit recommendations. It also received regular updates on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the Council’s financial position, as set out in its financial statements</li> <li>▪ reports from the Council’s external auditors</li> <li>▪ risk management</li> <li>▪ business continuity</li> <li>▪ fraud, financial irregularity and whistleblowing / raising concerns investigations</li> <li>▪ governance related matters</li> <li>▪ financial control</li> <li>▪ health and safety</li> <li>▪ performance management</li> <li>▪ staff attendance.</li> </ul>
3.3	<p>The key assurances that the Panel received are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the Council’s <b>financial statements and annual governance statement</b>, as prepared by the Director of Finance and their team; this provided a management assurance on the Council’s financial position</li> <li>▪ the audited accounts and the associated <b>external audit annual letters for 2023/24</b> (providing an opinion on the accounts) <b>and report to those charged with governance</b> (setting out control issues arising from the annual external audit), as prepared and presented by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. This provided an external assurance on the Council’s financial position for 2023/24. (The accounts for 2024/25 are to be prepared by the end of June 2025)</li> <li>▪ the <b>Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service’s annual assurance statement</b> on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council’s risk management, control and governance arrangements, based on the findings of audit work completed throughout the year.</li> </ul>
3.4	<p>The Panel received assurance from the NIAO regarding their performance improvement audit and assessment for the Council which resulted in a standard, unqualified opinion regarding how the Council has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties.</p>
3.5	<p>In terms of the improvement assessment the Panel learned that the LGA had provided an opinion, that the Council is likely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2024-25. The Panel also received regular reports on the Performance Improvement activities.</p>

3.6	<p>Where areas for improvement have been identified, these have been reported and implementation of agreed recommendations is actively monitored and reported back to the Panel. The Panel has, on occasions, raised issues where either audit reports have identified significant issues or progress against recommendations has not been satisfactory, with Directors asked, where necessary, to attend the Panel and provide further explanation. The key areas considered during 2024/25 include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Internal audits of key areas</b> such as the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) Programme Management Office, Smart Belfast Urban Innovation Framework, Intelligent Client Function for the Planning Portal, Markets, Belfast Waterfront Ulster Hall Ltd / Innovation Factory / Visit Belfast, Asset Management Gap Analysis, Belfast Castle / Malone House / Zoo, Community Asset Management, Cultural Strategy, External Affairs, Communications and Marketing, NI Houses in Multiple Occupation, Dog Warden Service, Government Procurement Cards, Police &amp; Community Safety Partnerships, Births, Deaths, Marriages &amp; Civil Partnerships, Planning Application and Decision Making Process, Corporate Complaints and Payroll – Data Analytics.</li> <li>▪ <b>Audit of the management of the corporate risk</b> for the BRCD Digital Strand.</li> <li>▪ <b>Assurance and advisory work over key programmes</b> including the projects to replace the Accounting System, the new HR system, the In-Cab Technology project, the Asset Management IT System and the Building Control IT System.</li> </ul>
3.7	<p>The Audit and Risk Panel have also received updates during the year on the Council’s risk management arrangements, including reports on the management of the Council’s key corporate risks.</p> <p><b>Compliance with the CIPFA Position Statement</b></p>
3.8	<p>The CIPFA publication “Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police” dated October 2022 sets out guidance on the function and operation of audit committees and represents best practice</p>
3.9	<p>Based on the Panels evaluation of its impact and effectiveness and the assessment against best practice in March 2024, and given that there have been no significant changes to the Panels arrangements during 2024/25, the Panel are compliant with the CIPFA position statement with one minor exception regarding how the Panel is appointed. Council policy is based on nomination of one member from each of the main political parties with an external member to provide independence and expertise, rather than on members skills.</p>
3.10	<p>In May 2025, the NIAO issued published its latest <b>Good Practice Guide – Effective Audit and Risk Committees</b>. This Good Practice Guide supplements the large amount of relevant guidance already available and is intended to bring all this guidance into one document to be used by all Audit and Risk Assurance Committees within both Central and Local</p>

	Government in Northern Ireland. During 25/26, the Panel will complete a self-assessment against the new guide.
	<b>Annual Governance Statement</b>
3.11	At their meeting on 3 June 2025, the Panel considered and agreed the draft Annual Governance Statement for the Council for 2024/25 and the significant governance issues contained in the statement.
3.12	The Annual Governance Statement is an important document, and it is important that the Committee is fully aware of its contents. The disclosures in the statement are based upon the Council's corporate risk register and take into consideration the disclosures made by Chief Officers in their individual annual assurance statements. The Annual Governance Statement also incorporates a summary of the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement.
	<b>Updated Raising Concerns Policy</b>
3.13	At their meeting on 3 June 2025, the Audit and Risk Panel received an update on the routine review of the Raising Concerns policy. The review identified some minor amendments which have been agreed through the Councils Industrial Relations Framework process. Strategic Policy and Resources committee is asked to review and approve the updated Raising Concerns policy (appendix B).
	<b>Minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel meeting on 3 June 2025</b>
3.14	In line with usual protocol, the minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel meeting are presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.
3.15	<u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u> None
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.16	None
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices – Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix A – Draft Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 Appendix B – Updated Raising Concerns policy Appendix C – Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 3 June 2025



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## **Annual Governance Statement 2024/2025**

The Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) follows the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK 2024/25 and comprises the following sections:

- Scope of responsibility
- The purpose of the governance framework
- The governance framework
- Review of effectiveness
- Update on the significant governance issues that were declared last year
- Significant governance issues for the year-end 2025

### **Scope of responsibility**

Belfast City Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and is used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to make arrangements for continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has prepared an Annual Governance Statement, which is consistent with the principles of the new CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016 edition)*. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and meets the requirements of regulation 4 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2015) in relation to the publication of an annual governance statement.

### **The purpose of the governance framework**

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework continues to be in place at Belfast City Council for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and up to the date of approval of the Annual Governance Statement

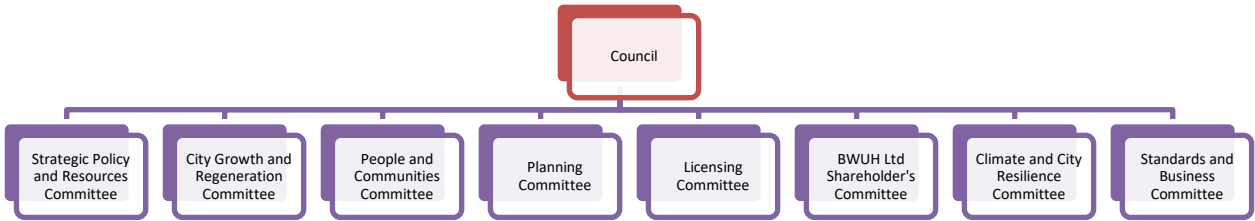
and statement of accounts. The following section sets out the key elements of the governance framework.

**The governance framework**

Following the expiration of the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Local Authority Meetings) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 members were required to be physically present at Council and Committee meetings from 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024 in order to take part in debates and to vote on any issues which may be raised. The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 were approved by the NI Assembly and became operational from 25 June 2024 which required councils to put in place standing orders governing remote attendance at meetings of council. Belfast City Council approved the Supplement to the Standing Orders, Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedure Rules, on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2024. The first remote meeting under the new legislation was Strategic Resources and Policy committee on 20 September 2024.

As working groups and workshops are not decision-making bodies and are not subject to the same legislation, these continue to be held as hybrid meetings.

Our committee structure, which is based on the full council and eight standing committees is illustrated and described below.



Through the work of committees, our Members oversee the work of the council. All committee decisions need to be ratified by the full council except where committees have been granted delegated authority to make decisions.

The full council, which consists of all 60 elected representatives, is the overarching decision-making body.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Council through the development of its corporate plan and other key corporate and cross cutting strategies and policies. It will also ensure effective use of resources and value for money for ratepayers and oversee the Council’s relationship with a number of key agencies and partners.

The City Growth and Regeneration Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects directed to the

regeneration and growth of the city in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The People and Communities Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects aimed at improving life at a local level in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The Planning Committee is responsible for all the Council's planning functions, except those matters, which are delegated to officers or reserved to full Council.

The Licensing Committee is responsible for the consideration of all matters pertaining to policy and legislation in relation to licensing issues.

The Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd Shareholders' Committee is responsible for making the decisions required by the Shareholders' Agreement and ensure that the company complies with the contract for the operation of the venues.

The Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for political oversight of the resilience strategy for Belfast, liaising with Belfast Resilience and Sustainability Board who are responsible for monitoring and delivery with the support of Belfast Climate Commission, supporting a targeted approach through existing structures to those issues which pose the greatest risk to the city, its economy and its people. This includes considering the potential implications of climate change for the city of Belfast and for making recommendations to the Council on Belfast City Council's approach to addressing the climate crisis and Council's role and responsibilities at city level.

The terms of reference of the Standards and Business Committee are to: promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Councillors within the Council; promote a collaborative working relationship between senior officers and Members; ensure the probity of all the council's proceedings; and review and improve processes in relation to bringing business before the Council, including review of all Notices of Motion, any review of Standing Orders and the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

In addition to the Committees listed in the diagrams above there are 19 Working Groups established which include the Audit & Risk Panel and four Area Working Groups. In addition, there is a Party Leaders' Consultative Forum.

The Audit & Risk Panel provides an independent assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and associated control environment. It provides an independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance, which is relied upon by the Council, to the extent that it exposes it to risk and weakens the control environment. The Panel reports to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Audit & Risk Panel met four times during 2024/25.

The Council's Code of Governance is based on the seven core principles set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework (2016 edition). How we meet these seven core principles is reviewed and updated annually. A summary of the key elements of our governance framework are set out in the following table:

## Our seven principles of good governance

### A: Behaving with integrity

- Shared values communicated via corporate plan, community plan and key strategies
- Codes of conduct for Members and staff
- PDP / appraisal process for Members & staff
- Gifts and hospitality and conflicts of interest policies and registers in place
- Fraud and Raising Concerns policies
- Good Relations Unit
- Equality and Diversity Framework
- Council constitution, standing orders & scheme of delegation
- Expert professional advice
- Partners and contractors required to comply with relevant policies
- Achieving Through People Framework
- Standards and Business Committee
- Accessibility Statement for the updated website
- Social Value Procurement Policy

### B: Ensuring openness

- Council / committee meetings open to the public and agendas / minutes on website
- Belfast Agenda developed via extensive consultation and engagement.
- Corporate plan and annual improvement plan are subject to consultation before agreement
- Statement of Community Involvement for production of the Local Development Plan
- Ongoing consultation and engagement with staff and trade unions
- Corporate communications
- Annual financial report published on the BCC website
- Equality Screening Outcome reports available through the BCC website
- Formal Partnership arrangements with GLL, Active Belfast, arc21, BWUH Ltd, Visit Belfast, Innovation City Belfast
- "Your Say" consultation hub
- Working with Belfast Region City Deal partners

### C: Defining outcomes

- Belfast Agenda outlines long term economic, social and environmental benefits and is refreshed every 4 years
- Belfast Region City Deal Investment Plan
- Cultural Strategy
- Corporate plan outlines the annual contribution to the Belfast Agenda
- City Centre Regeneration & Investment strategy
- Physical Investment Programme
- Grant funding processes
- Equality Impact Assessments

### D: Optimising the achievement of outcomes

- Corporate plan aligned to delivery of Belfast Agenda
- Adoption of the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) - Plan Strategy
- Key partner in the Belfast Region City Deal
- Consultation and engagement processes
- Strategic financial management and reporting framework in place.
- Performance management framework
- Regular reports on progress of our performance improvement plan to CMT and SP&R
- Risk management strategy & framework

#### E: Developing capacity & capability

- People Strategy
- Achieving Through People Framework
- Benchmarking activity
- Efficiency programme
- Regular performance monitoring of the delivery of improvement objectives
- Learning and development policy
- Health and wellbeing strategy
- Appraisal scheme in place for Chief Officers, Operational Directors / Heads of Service and Senior Managers
- PDPs for officers and Members
- Member capacity building / training
- Continuing Development Programme for members
- Party group briefings

#### F: Finance, performance and risk management

- Annual Rate Setting process
- Financial Strategy
- Compliance with CIPFA Financial Management Code
- Performance management framework
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Capital Strategy
- Risk management strategy
- Corporate risk management framework
- Regular reporting of finance, risk and performance
- Audit and Risk Panel
- Internal audit function / annual internal audit strategy and plan in place
- Recommendations Monitor process
- Data protection policy and procedures
- Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment
- Increased data security controls

#### G: Transparency, reporting & effective accountability

- BCC website regularly updated
- Publication of key reports including the annual financial report; annual governance statement and; performance improvement report
- Committee support framework to approve papers prior to submission to Members
- AGRS (internal audit) annual assurance statement within the annual governance statement
- Internal Audit effectiveness annually reviewed against relevant internal audit standards, with an independent external review every five years
- Internal / external audit recommendations followed up as part of recommendations monitoring process every six months
- Key governance arrangements in place for the Council's Accountable Body role for the Belfast Region City Deal

The Chief Executive is the Council's designated Chief Financial Officer under the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.

The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016).

We have re-assessed our compliance with the principles of the CIPFA Financial Management Code and work ongoing to improve compliance in three areas:

- Governance - the City Solicitor and Director of Legal Services is leading on the update of the Council's Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations.
- Integrated Planning – a cross departmental working team is reviewing the current financial and corporate planning processes so that Corporate, Departmental and Service Plans will be aligned with approved estimates for the start of the 2026/27 financial year.
- Investment Planning – the new 8-10 year capital programme should be integrated with the annual rate setting process.

The continuing development of the Council's approach to Medium Term Financial Planning will support performance by better alignment of corporate and service plans with financial plans. Planning beyond the annual budget will enable Members and senior management to protect the financial sustainability of the Council by linking vision and strategy to outcomes.

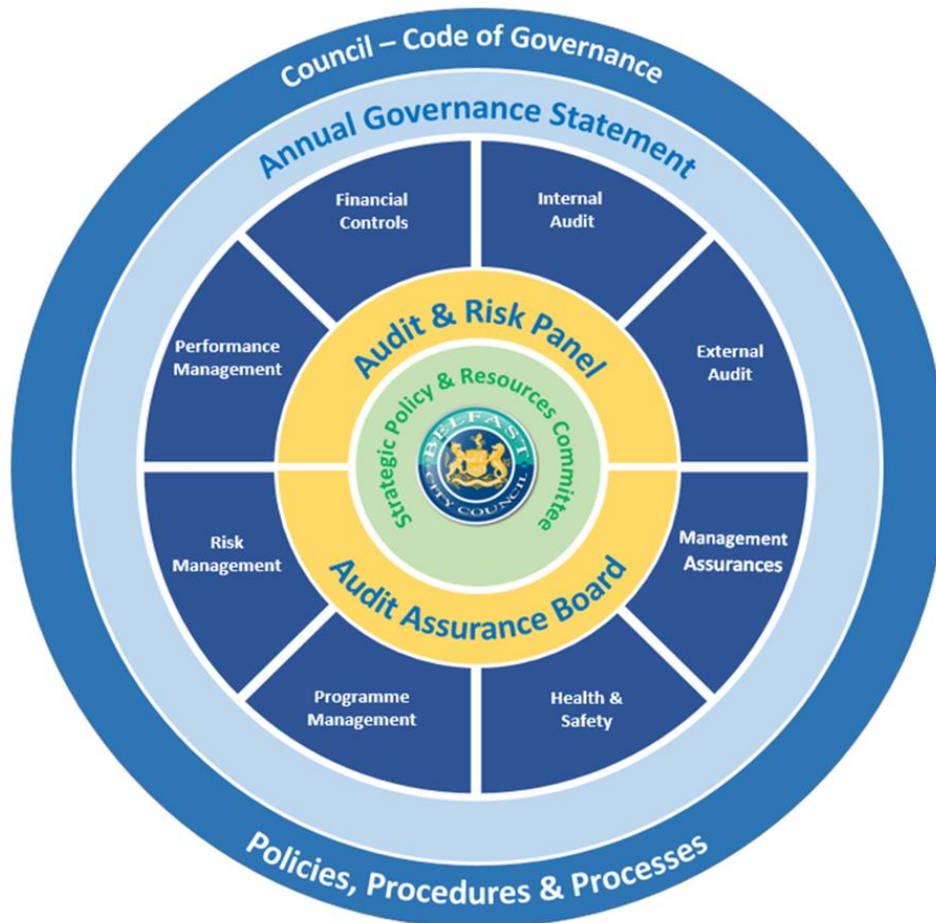
Having considered all the principles of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (2014), subject to the implementation of the Corporate Fraud Risk Action Plans, the Council has adopted a response that is appropriate for its fraud and corruption risks and commits to maintain its vigilance to tackle fraud.

The Council's arrangements conform to the requirements of the new CIPFA Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in UK Local Government (2025) which apply from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025.

The CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019) outlines the five principles that set out the organisation's responsibilities to ensure the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) can operate effectively and perform their core duties. The Statement also sets out the core responsibilities of the HIA along with the personal skills and professional standards expected of the HIA. The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), and the supporting operational arrangements in place, conform to the five principles set out in the CIPFA Statement. This is demonstrated through a self-assessment exercise undertaken by the Head of AGRS. While the principles state that the HIA should not be responsible for preparing the annual governance report, the arrangements within the council, involve AGRS co-ordinating the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement which is then reviewed and agreed by the Corporate Management Team, Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel, before being reviewed by Strategic Policy and Resources committee and signed by the Chair of Strategic Policy & Resources and the Chief Executive.

The Council reported one breach of personal data to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) during 2024/25. After further investigation, it was confirmed that there was no personal data breach, and no further action was taken by the ICO.





### Review of Effectiveness

The following diagram illustrates the Assurance Framework in place that provides information on compliance with the various elements of the Council's Governance Framework, including performance reports, health and safety reports, finance reports, external audit reports, internal audit reports and risk management reports.

Continued effort has been put into developing and implementing the key elements of an assurance framework within the Council with the key elements being:

- a process whereby senior managers are required to sign annual assurance statements;
- a process whereby members of CMT are required to sign quarterly assurance statements;
- embedding risk management and developing the arrangements for oversight of the management of these risks;
- business planning and related performance reporting arrangements;
- an Audit and Risk Panel;
- a professional internal audit function, which has been reviewed for effectiveness against the relevant professional standards; and
- a Health & Safety Assurance Board.

The various in year and year-end reports arising from the Assurance Framework are reviewed and approved by the Audit and Risk Panel and Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

In addition, the review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework is also informed by:

- the annual review and update of the Code of Governance;
- comments or recommendations made by the external auditors during their annual audit; and
- the Head of Audit Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) annual assurance statement for the period ending 2024/25, which gives an opinion on the Council's risk and control environment.

### **A Statement by the Head of Internal Audit**

As Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), on the basis of work carried out, I can provide a reasonable assurance regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control.

We developed our audit plan in consultation with management to ensure that our audit work was focussed on the areas where assurance was most valuable. Member and management agreement of this plan combined with delivery of the majority of this plan signifies members and managers recognition of the importance of receiving independent assurance over the council's risk, control and governance frameworks and provided me with sufficient evidence to support my assurance statement.

My opinion is based on completion of audits in the audit plan for 24/25; programme and project assurance and advisory work undertaken for a number of fundamental corporate IT projects; other advisory work and; quarterly assurance statements from senior management on compliance with risk management and internal control systems.

Specifically, my opinion is based on the following:

Evidence from areas subject to detailed internal audit during 2024/2025, in that AGRS has been able to provide positive statements of assurance with the majority of audits falling into the 'some improvement needed' category - the 2<sup>nd</sup> tier of assurance in the 4-tier model.

Provision of assurance and advisory work for major programmes and projects including the new accounting system which went live on 1 May 2024.

The results of the recommendations monitor exercise completed in February 2025.

The work that was undertaken to support management in their quarterly review and update on the management of the corporate risks that could potentially impact on delivery of our corporate plan and priorities.

The work that was undertaken to complete the review of the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessments and to support management in the development of associated fraud risk mitigation plans.

Quarterly assurances from senior management on the management of key risks and maintenance of internal control systems.

The evidence set out in the review of the Council's Code of Governance and Annual Governance Statement regarding the range of key assurance and governance arrangements that the Council has in place to direct / oversee its activities.

However, some weaknesses and areas for improvement have been identified through audit work. These have been reported in detail to the Council's Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel during 2024/25 through quarterly progress reports. In addition, I have highlighted, where appropriate, where further action is required to implement agreed audit actions. The key issues I would highlight in this statement are as follows:

AGRS was able to provide positive statements of assurance in the majority of audits completed in 2024/25, however one area resulted in 'major improvement' assurance level, relating to Communications, Marketing and External Affairs. It is important that the action plan for this audit is implemented in as timely a manner as possible.

The Asset Management gap analysis reported to the Panel in December 2024, set out improvement actions that should enable the Council to manage its substantial asset base in a way that should ensure the maximum contribution to delivery of corporate objectives. It is important that an agreed approach to improving asset management is developed and implemented.

The most recent recommendations monitor exercise completed in February 2025, showed a reduction in the implementation rate for audit actions. An analysis into the reasons for this reduction is underway and it is important that appropriate action is taken to ensure that there is a robust control environment to support delivery of services, programmes and priorities.

Departmental risk management processes were reintroduced during 2024/25, with each Director agreeing the risk management framework that was appropriate for their department. Departmental risk management frameworks take account of risk management processes for health and safety, programmes and projects, fraud etc. I underline the importance of Directors ensuring that these risk management frameworks are implemented effectively.

Looking ahead, I highlight the importance of the ongoing development of the council's approach to medium term financial planning and adequate and effective programme management and performance management processes to support the delivery of the new corporate plan and priorities for 2025-28.

Limitations – the most recent External Quality Assessment (EQA) of AGRS found strong evidence that AGRS is viewed as making a positive contribution to the continuous improvement of governance, risk management and internal control in the Council and conforms to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. One of the recommendations for improvement arising from the EQA was that my annual assurance report should highlight the limitations that result from AGRS' role in supporting the Council's risk management arrangements. In this regard I highlight that AGRS is responsible for assisting the Director in establishing, maintaining and supporting the implementation of the council's Risk Management Strategy. This places limitations on AGRS' ability to assess the overall effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements. To manage these limitations and to preserve the independence and objectivity of AGRS a number of safeguards have been put in place including resource planning to manage boundaries between our advisory and assurance work; self-assessments against best practice and periodic external assurance reviews of the councils' arrangements for risk management.

## **Public Sector Internal Audit Standards**

I can confirm that the AGRS Service has conformed to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards during 2024/25. A quality assurance and improvement programme is in place including internal review of work, annual assessment against professional standards, quarterly progress and performance reporting to the Assurance Board and Audit & Risk Panel. An external quality assessment of AGRS took place in 2022 and this confirmed the Service's compliance with professional standards.

Looking ahead, as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 the new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) and the Application Note for the Public Sector come into effect and replace the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). I have completed an initial assessment of AGRS conformance with the new GIAS and I can confirm that AGRS conforms with these standards.

## **Update on the Significant Governance Issues that were declared last year**

Four issues were declared last year and two continue to be declared as issues in this year's statement regarding Digital Information Security and the Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health. The issues relating to Financial Planning and the Black Mountain Shared Space Non-Compliance Issue are no longer considered to be significant governance issues for the year-end 2025 and an update on the work that was completed last year to manage these issues is set out below.

### **Financial Planning**

The 5-step strategy was stood down for 2024/25 however, during the year, regular monitoring and reporting on actual spend against budget spend, as well as forecast spend against annual budget was carried out. This provided the council with assurance that the financial position of the Council was secure.

Contract savings achieved during the 24/25 financial year were incorporated into the 25/26 rate setting process, and although the increase in the district rate was above inflation, this was to allow for additional growth in services and capital spend and not because of a shortfall in the budget position.

This no longer remains a significant issue for 2025/26.

### **Black Mountain Shared Space Non-Compliance Issue**

In 2024-25, the Director of Property and Projects have strengthened and ensured that adequate management and control systems are in place to ensure full compliance with all European Union grant funding conditions to prevent any reoccurrence of losses from fines. The Director has agreed additional management step and controls to be built in for above threshold capital projects funded by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) or any other European funding source, such as:

- procurement strategy must include a section on the requirement to advertise in the Official Journal of the European Union as necessary;
- prior to commencement of procurement, written approval of the procurement strategy must be secured from the funding body as well as the Project Board;
- the Programme Delivery Manager must confirm to the Portfolio Office that the funding body has approved the procurement strategy prior to requesting the commencement of the procurement exercise, both for construction professionals and contractors; and

- the Portfolio Office to ensure this confirmation has been received before publishing any procurement exercise.

Furthermore, the Council has received SEUPB funding for both Belfast Local Community PEACE Action Plan and PEACEPLUS Reconnected Belfast which will deliver infrastructure projects and investments to local community activities. The Director will ensure that these projects will comply with the set funding terms and conditions, and lessons learned on the above governance issue will be considered.

### **Significant Governance Issues for the year-end 2025**

The significant governance issues for the year-end 2025 were identified through review of the risks in the Corporate Risk Register and review of the Directors' Annual Assurance Statements.

The most significant issues for the Council are listed below and relate to two issues which have been carried forward from last year:

1. Digital Information Security / Digital Strategy
2. Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health

More information on these significant governance issues is provided on the following pages.

#### **1. Digital Information Security / Digital Strategy**

Digital information security continues to be a significant governance issue and is overseen through the Council's risk management processes by the Council's Corporate Management Team. Digital Services has implemented the following controls to manage and have better visibility of the growing threats in this area:

- Completion of penetration tests and vulnerability scans.
- Completion of Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard attestation.
- Ongoing delivery of a Security Awareness programme through regular five-minute online training modules on a range of issues that pose a cyber risk for our network.
- Unannounced phishing tests.
- Public Key Infrastructure to enhance network access control.
- Always-On Virtual Private Network to ensure all homeworking access is managed through our security infrastructure.
- Mobile device management using Microsoft Intune being rolled out for all new mobile phones.
- Completion of firewall upgrades.
- Draft Ransomware incident response playbook.
- Cloud services access report reviewed by Security Oversight Group.
- Completion of separate cyber security desktop exercises for response to a ransomware incident for Digital Services, critical services and the Corporate Management Team.

The Digital information Security programme will continue to focus on priority areas that are most important to enhance the council's cyber security controls, including:

- Cyber security incident response.
- Identity management.
- Cloud strategy.
- Maturity assessment priorities.

Additional actions to be undertaken to further mitigate this key corporate risk in 2025/26 include:

- Carry out a new Cyber Security desktop Exercise.
- Ongoing Ransomware Playbook development.
- Managed Security Operations Centre procurement.
- Carry out NCSC Cyber Assessment Framework self and external assessments.

An internal audit highlighted issues with the management of the corporate risk on the strategic approach to the use of data, including future ownership of this risk. A Data and Analytics Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive / Strategic Director of Corporate Services has been established and has focussed on:

- The development technical infrastructure to support a corporate approach to Data & Analytics.
- Preparing a pipeline of data and analytics use cases.
- Developing an AI policy.
- Developing an Outline Business Case for the implementation of a corporate approach to the implementation of an Electronic and Document Records Management system.

Our new Digital Strategy with the vision to make the best use of digital and data to deliver excellent public services and inclusive growth in the Belfast City Region is supported through the delivery of a digital programme of work. The main objectives of the Digital Strategy relate to Digital Public Services; Information as an Asset; Digital City Innovation and Digital Capability.

ICT capability is an intrinsic pillar of the overall operating model of the Council, and it is important that we have the right skills within Digital Services and across the Council. Attracting new talent is proving problematic across the service but particularly in specialist areas such as Cyber Security and Application Development. In 24-25 Digital Services:

- Established a workforce planning group to review and determine future skills and development needs across the service.
- Focused on successfully recruiting external staff into entry level posts with a view to developing staff with the right skills required for the service.
- Successfully recruited 18 posts including our first apprentice post.

Additional actions are still required due to the high number of vacancies that still exist in the service. The following actions are planned to be carried out to mitigate this risk in 25-26 include:

- Carrying out a salary benchmark of the roles in Digital Services.
- Procuring managed Security Operations Centre services to enhance the cyber security team.
- Keeping a strong focus on recruitment and retention of staff.

## **2. Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health**

Engagement has continued at strategic and operational levels with partners including Food Standards Agency (FSA), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) across all key strands of work to implement the changes, processes, systems and facilities required for delivery of the Council's Port Health statutory functions, including delivery of the Windsor Framework. This has included:

- Funding model: The Council has continued to advocate for a longer-term funding model for the provision of Port Health services. A further one-year funding arrangement is planned for

2025/26 however we are aware that a further four-year funding package is under consideration. It remains unclear when or if this will be confirmed. There is also no confirmation from Government whether fees and charges for checks / inspections will form part of the longer-term funding model.

- New Sanitary and Phytosanitary Inspection (SPS) inspection facility at Belfast Port: The Council has participated in the DEFRA SPS Facilities Board and Steering Groups which leads on construction and Go Live planning for operationalisation of the new inspection facilities in July 2025. The Council has developed its own Go Live plan in consultation with partners for transition to the new facility. This will be further developed as Standard Operating Procedures; risk assessments and detailed timelines are confirmed by DEFRA.
- IT systems: The Council has worked closely with DAERA and other Councils to enhance the DAERA IT systems provided to Council to streamline the process for recording of checks and inspections, and to move towards a more efficient one system approach which will be required when these services are co-located on the new inspection facility site. This work will continue in 2025/26.
- Staffing: A number of recruitment exercises have been completed in 2024/25 which has reduced the number of vacancies within the teams. However, challenges remain in securing sufficient Environmental Health Officers and a small number of vacant posts remain. Going forward, there remains uncertainty over future trade volumes which may be impacted further by introduction of latter phases of the Windsor Framework arrangements, and this may impact future resourcing requirements for the service. It is anticipated that further review will be required in the future to confirm the longer-term staffing requirements and structures.

In 2025/26, this remains a significant governance issue for the Council due to lack of clarity regarding future funding models, trade volumes and resourcing requirements particularly in the context of the announcement in May 2025 relating to the UK and EU discussions regarding a future sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) agreement. The move to a new inspection facility in summer of 2025 also poses risks to the Councils service delivery as it relies on effective staff resourcing, traffic management and operations management by the operator (DAERA), together with efficient service delivery by users (including Belfast City Council's Port Health service).

In each of these areas the Council will continue to engage with partners to:

- Advocate for a longer-term funding model.
- Ensure plans for transition to the new inspection facility are robust and effectively implemented in Summer 2025.
- Transition to the newly developed IT systems to improve joint working.
- Undertake recruitment campaigns to fill priority vacant posts.
- Following the announcement in May 2025 arising from UK and EU discussions, as more information becomes known, assess the impact of the future SPS agreement on Port Health arrangements.

**Signed:** .....

Chair Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

**Signed:** .....

Chief Executive Officer



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## RAISING CONCERNS POLICY<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Contents

This policy document includes the following sections:

- [Introduction \(section 2\)](#)
- [Aims of this policy \(section 3\)](#)
- [Types of concerns covered by this Policy \(section 4\)](#)
- [Raising Concerns: General \(section 5\)](#)
- [Raising Concerns: Our Workers \(section 6\)](#)
- [Raising Concerns: Others \(section 7\)](#)
- [Handling Concerns Raised \(section 8\)](#)
- [If you are the Subject of a Concern Raised \(section 9\)](#)
- [How to Contact Us \(section 10\)](#)
- [Outcomes \(section 11\)](#)
- [Summary of Roles and Responsibilities \(section 12\)](#)
- [Policy Control \(section 13\)](#)
- [Appendix: Routemap](#)

### 2. Introduction

Raising a concern in the public interest is the action of telling someone in authority, either internally and/or externally, for example regulators, about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice.<sup>2</sup>

As regards terminology used 'whistleblowing', 'raising a concern' or 'speaking up' generally refer to the same thing. In line with NI Audit Office guidance, this policy refers to raising concerns.

Why is a policy for Raising Concerns needed? All organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) 'Raising Concerns: A Good Practice Guide' sets out the benefits to an organisation of encouraging the raising of concerns, including:

- Identifying wrongdoing as early as possible,
- Exposing weak or flawed processes and procedures which make the organisation vulnerable to loss, criticism or legal action,

<sup>1</sup> This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and BCC may amend it at any time.

<sup>2</sup> Raising Concerns: A good practice guide for the Northern Ireland public sector, NIAO June 2020

- Ensuring critical information gets to the right people who can deal with the concerns,
- Avoiding financial loss and inefficiency,
- Maintaining a positive corporate reputation,
- Reducing risks to the environment or the health or safety of workers or the wider community,
- Improving accountability, and
- Deterring workers from engaging in improper conduct.

### Who can raise a concern?

A concern may be raised by someone internal to the council, such as a worker<sup>3</sup> or by someone external, such as a member of the public. In developing this policy, the council recognises the need for an open and honest culture where our workers and others have clear information on how to raise concerns that are in the wider public interest and are encouraged to do so in the knowledge that they will be listened to and treated with respect.

If an Elected Member has concerns regarding wrongdoing, risk or malpractice, they are advised to refer to the Northern Ireland Code of Conduct for Councillors, or to seek the advice of the council's Legal Services section.

## 3. Aims of this Policy

Belfast City Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with this commitment, we want our workers and others that we deal with who have serious concerns about any aspect of the council's work to come forward and voice those concerns. This policy aims to:

- Make you feel confident to raise concerns within the council, as soon as possible, rather than overlooking a problem or raising the concern externally,
- Give you avenues to raise concerns and receive feedback,
- Inform you how to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with our response, and
- Reassure our workers that, in line with [legislation](#), you will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for raising concerns that you reasonably believe to be true and in the public interest.

## 4. Types of Concerns Covered by this Policy

The **nature of the issue being raised** will determine whether it is a concern, a grievance or a complaint, and subsequently the appropriate policy under which it should be addressed.

Raising a concern is where an individual discloses information about suspected danger, wrongdoing or illegality that is in the **public interest** (i.e. that affects others). The individual raising the concern is usually not personally affected by the danger, wrongdoing or illegality. Consequently, they rarely have a personal interest in the outcome of the enquiries or investigation into their concern – they are simply trying to alert others.

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<sup>3</sup> Worker, as defined in legislation, includes staff and may also include agency assignees, volunteers, consultants, those on secondment and contractors.

The types of concerns covered by this policy include those matters that we, as a council, are the 'prescribed'<sup>4</sup> person for. Prescribed persons are responsible for the investigation of concerns that fall under their jurisdiction and protecting those raising concerns and their interests. For the council, these are:

- Matters which may affect the health or safety of any individual at work,
- Matters which may affect the health or safety of any member of the public, arising out of or in connection with the activities of persons at work,
- Compliance with the requirements of consumer protection legislation, and
- Compliance with the requirements of food safety legislation.

In addition, other types of concerns covered by this policy include, but are not restricted to:

- Risk to children and / or vulnerable adults,
- Conduct which is a criminal offence,
- Abuse of public funds,
- Potential fraud (see also the council's fraud and bribery policy statement for more details),
- A breach of the employee **Code of Conduct**, and
- Conduct likely to damage the council's reputation.

Personal grievances or dissatisfaction in respect of employment issues are not considered to be within the scope of this policy unless a particular case is in the public interest. These types of issues should be raised in line with our **Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure**. Examples of misconduct issues are set out under Appendix 2 of the procedure.

Complaints are not within the scope of this policy. Raising a concern is very different to making a complaint. Complaints should be made in line with our **Complaints Handling Procedure** which defines a complaint as 'an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more members of the public about our action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by us or on our behalf.' Examples of types of complaints are set out in the procedure.

The Routemap in the [Appendix](#) shows the relationship between these policies. In addition, any concerns raised in relation to **safeguarding or modern slavery**, will be handled in line with the related council policy.

### **False Allegations**

Although you are not expected to prove the truth of a disclosure, you will need to demonstrate that you have a reasonable belief that the concern is made in the public interest and that there is evidence of some malpractice.

If you raise a concern that you reasonably believe to be true which is subsequently not confirmed by initial enquiries or investigation, no action will be taken against you.

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<sup>4</sup> As set out in the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order (Northern Ireland) 1999. In addition, from December 2022, the Office for Environmental Protection is the prescribed body for raising concerns on matters relating to failures of public authorities to comply with environmental law.

However, to ensure the protection of all of our workers, those workers who raise a concern frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain and / or make an allegation that they do not reasonably believe to be true and not made in the public interest may be subject to disciplinary action.

## **5. Raising Concerns: General**

Concerns can be raised in a number of ways, including in person or in writing, providing as much detail as possible. The background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible should be set out and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation. You should highlight if you wish to raise the matter under the council's Raising Concerns policy.

All concerns raised, regardless of their origin, will be subject to the same process as set out in [Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised](#).

### **Raising Concerns Champion**

The council's Raising Concerns Champion is available for advice and guidance, either prior to formally raising a concern or at any stage during the process. The Raising Concerns Champion has a detailed knowledge of raising concerns and can provide advice to management, our workers, or any individual external to the council. Contact details can be found [here](#).

### **Openness, confidentiality and anonymity**

In most cases the best way to raise a concern is to do so openly. By making their identity known, those raising concerns are more likely to secure a positive outcome. Openness makes it easier for us to address the issue, work out how to investigate the matter, understand the reasons for concern, get more information and report back on the outcome of preliminary enquiries / any investigation undertaken. This policy encourages you to put your name to your concern.

We recognise that there may be circumstances when you would prefer to speak to someone in confidence first. If this is the case, please state this at the outset. Confidentiality will only be breached if required by law and, where possible, we will gain your consent prior to undertaking any action that could identify you.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful as proper investigation may be impeded. Whilst we will accept anonymous concerns and commit to giving them due consideration, we would ask anyone thinking of making a disclosure to consider the following points:

- Detailed investigations may be more difficult, or even impossible, to progress if you choose to remain anonymous and cannot be contacted for further information,
- The information and documentation you provide may not be easily understood and may need clarification or further explanation,
- There is a chance the documents provided may reveal your identity,
- It may not be possible to remain anonymous throughout an in-depth investigation,
- It will not be possible to provide details of the outcome of any investigation to you if your disclosure is anonymous, and

- Statutory protection for a council worker is easier to obtain if a concern is raised openly. If a concern is raised anonymously, it may not be possible to afford protection. Furthermore, it may be difficult to demonstrate to a tribunal that any detriment you have suffered is as a result of raising a concern.

We will make every effort to preserve your anonymity if you so wish. Please be aware that the investigation process may inadvertently reveal the source of the information and a statement from you may be required as part of the evidence.

### **Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations**

Concerns raised will be treated in the strictest confidence and all personal data held securely in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Information obtained during initial enquiries or subsequent investigation will be maintained securely and confidentially so as not to prejudice future investigations.

## **6. Raising Concerns: Our Workers**

The importance of the Raising Concerns policy is explicitly covered in our ***Code of Conduct for Belfast City Council Employees***. Our workers are often best placed to identify deficiencies and problems before any damage is done, so the importance of their role as the ‘eyes and ears’ of organisations cannot be overstated. Our Raising Concerns policy provides our workers with an opportunity to raise serious, ***genuine*** concerns rather than overlooking the problem or raising the concern externally.

### **Safeguards**

The Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 (amended in October 2017) defines an individual raising a concern as a “worker”, that is, someone inside the organisation. This policy therefore applies to Belfast City Council staff and may also include agency assignees, volunteers, consultants, those on secondment and contractors while they are engaged in carrying out duties for the Council.

The Order offers protection to ‘workers’ who disclose serious concerns made in the public interest. In accordance with this legislation workers ***must not*** suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, withholding a pay rise, objecting to a promotion, not giving training or any other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern.

The council will fulfil its responsibility to ensure that you are NOT harassed, victimised or otherwise disadvantaged when you raise a concern. We will take appropriate action including the application of the disciplinary and grievance procedure to protect a worker who raises a concern that they reasonably believe to be true and in the public interest. If you believe you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform one of the named officers in [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#) immediately. If it is not remedied, you should raise it formally using our ***Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure***.

If a worker is already the subject of disciplinary or redundancy procedures, these HR procedures will not be halted as a result of their raising a concern.

We trust that our workers will feel able to raise their concerns openly under this policy, however we recognise that some may want to raise their concerns confidentially (and anonymously). This policy document makes it clear that you can raise any concerns you have without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage.

### How to raise a concern

If you have a concern about a risk, malpractice or wrongdoing at work, we hope that you will feel able to raise the matter first with your immediate line manager, Director or Business Support Manager. [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#) sets out a number of alternative options to raise your concerns. Alternatively, you can raise concerns through your trade union.

We recognise that the decision to raise a concern can be a difficult one to make but in uncovering malpractice you will be doing a service to the council, our ratepayers and members of the public. The earlier you express the concern the easier it will be to take action.

### Contractors

As a first step, if you are a contractor, you should normally raise concerns with your manager, who should inform the most senior council officer who is dealing with the particular contract. If you do not have a manager, you should raise your concerns directly with the most senior council officer who is dealing with the contract. If you believe that your manager or the most senior council officer who is dealing with the contract is involved, you should approach one of the named officers set out in [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#).

All concerns are handled in the same way as set out in [Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised](#). If the concern relates to fraud, bribery or financial impropriety it will be referred to the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services.

## 7. Raising Concerns: Others

Anyone external to the council can raise the same types of concerns as a worker. As highlighted in the NIAO's good practice guide, **it is the issue being raised that is important, not the person raising it**. While the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 does **not** extend protection to members of the public who raise concerns, the council will endeavour, as far as possible, to apply the same principles to these concerns.

Information on how to raise a concern, whether that be in writing, verbally or in person, is available on our website. These options are also set out in this policy at [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#).



## 8. Handling Concerns Raised

### What should I expect from the Council when I raise a concern?

If you raise a concern the council will (so long as you have not submitted your concern anonymously):

- Formally respond to your concern within seven days of receipt. You will receive a written response acknowledging that the concern has been received and indicating how we propose to deal with the matter,
- Offer you the opportunity to meet to discuss the issue,
- Take steps to ensure that you have appropriate support and advice,
- Agree a timetable for feedback. If this cannot be adhered to, we will let you know,
- Provide you with feedback to demonstrate that the concern has been appropriately considered and addressed, and
- In the case of our workers, take appropriate and timely action against anyone who victimises you.

The council has arrangements in place around how concerns should be handled. This includes guidance and procedures for helping to preserve confidentiality and the integrity of evidence as well as undertaking preliminary enquiries, conducting investigations and reporting on the outcome of these investigations. We will respect your confidentiality where this has been requested. Confidentiality will not be breached unless required by law and we will consult with you prior to any action that could identify you.

### Receipt of concerns raised

It is essential that anyone who raises a concern is supported and, as such, **managers who receive disclosures** should:

- Have a positive and supportive attitude towards the individual raising a concern,
- Record as much detail as possible about the concern being raised and agree this record with the individual,
- Be aware of the process following the raising of the concern and explain this to the individual,
- Make sure the person raising the concern knows what to expect, for example feedback in relation to their concern,
- Assure the individual their confidentiality will be protected as far as possible,
- Make no promises and manage the expectations of the individual,
- In the case of one of our workers raising a concern, make clear that the organisation will not tolerate harassment of anyone raising a genuine concern and ask the individual to let you know if this happens,
- Refer the individual to available sources of support and advice, for example to Protect, a trade union or a professional association,  
Pass the information as quickly as possible to the council's Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) or the Raising Concerns Champion who will log the case and consider the best way in which to respond (see below).

Cases will be carefully logged by the Raising Concern Champion in Audit, Governance and Risk Services to enable the investigation's progress to be monitored in a way that, where

requested, safeguards the identity of the individual raising the concern. The Raising Concerns champion will refer the concern to the appropriate person for initial enquiries.

### **Initial Enquiries**

In order to protect individuals and the council, initial enquiries will be made by the appropriate person(s) to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of other existing procedures will normally be referred for consideration under these procedures. It may not be necessary to carry out a formal investigation in every case. The action taken by the council will depend on the nature of the concern. There may be a range of possibilities, depending on the nature of each case, for example:

- Explaining the context of an issue to the person raising the concern may be enough to alleviate their concerns,
- Minor concerns may be dealt with straight away by line management,
- A review by Audit, Governance and Risk Services as part of planned audit work might be sufficient to address the issue, for example, through a change to the control environment,
- There may be a role for the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) in addressing the concerns raised and either providing assurance or recommending changes to working practices,
- The matters raised may require a detailed internal investigation, or
- In some instances, concerns raised will be referred directly to the police or other statutory agencies.

The course of action will normally be agreed by Audit, Governance and Risk Services, Corporate Human Resources and Legal Services in consultation with senior departmental management, as appropriate. Audit, Governance and Risk Services will, in consultation, with these services, agree the approach to be taken and the appointment of officers to undertake a detailed investigation where this is required.

### **Detailed investigation**

During any investigation, the amount of contact between you and the investigating officer considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the investigating officer will seek further information from you. Where any meeting is arranged, this can be off-site if you so wish and you can be accompanied by a trade union representative, a colleague or friend. We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

### **After the Investigation**

The council accepts that you may wish to be assured that the concern you have raised has been properly considered and appropriately addressed. Feedback will be as set out in [Section 11: Outcomes](#).

## **Governance, Oversight and Monitoring**

AGRS will liaise with the investigating officer(s) regarding progress updates; to support the oversight, governance and reporting processes and, to provide advice and assistance where appropriate.

AGRS will provide a high level update quarterly to the Audit Assurance Board and Audit & Risk Panel on the progress of ongoing investigations. An annual report will also be provided on cases handled in the year.

### **9. If you are the Subject of a Concern Raised**

If you are the subject of a concern raised, we will endeavour to inform you as soon as is practically possible. There are occasions when it may be necessary for initial enquiries to be undertaken first. In addition, where the concern raised is potentially serious in nature, the council may initially seek to validate the concern raised through observation, enquiry and / or liaison with the Police. Following these initial enquiries, you will then be informed of the allegations made and you will be given an opportunity to provide an explanation. We will apply the same considerations of confidentiality to the worker at the centre of the concern raised, as far as appropriate.

If following explanation and, if necessary, further investigation, there is no evidence to suggest misconduct, the matter will not be referred for disciplinary action. However, if there is evidence of potential misconduct there is a possibility that the council's Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure may be invoked to further investigate the matter.

### **10. How to contact us**

There are several ways concerns can be communicated to the council. The options are set out below.

#### **Option 1 – Raise your concern with management**

We hope that our workers will feel able to raise the matter first with their immediate line manager, Director or Business Support Manager. Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing.

#### **Option 2- Raise your concern by email**

Concerns can be raised using the council's dedicated Raising Concerns mailbox, managed confidentially by the council's Audit, Governance & Risk Services.

*Email:* [raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk)

#### **Option 3 – Raise your concern in writing or by telephone**

Concerns can be raised in writing, by telephone or in person with the following officers:

- Raising Concerns Champion - Liam Mulholland, AGRS Manager and Cathy Haughey, Principal Auditor

These officers can be contacted at:

*Corporate Services  
9-21 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8DJ*

Tel. council switchboard on **028 90320202**.

#### **Option 4 - Raise your concern with senior, designated officers**

If you feel unable to raise the matter with management or the Raising Concerns Champions, you should raise it with one of the following people:

- Chief Executive
- Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Corporate Services
- Director of Human Resources
- City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
- Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services

These senior, designated officers can be contacted via the council switchboard on **028 90320202**.

#### **Option 5 - Raise your concern with a regulator**

We hope that this policy gives you the reassurance to raise a concern internally. However, it is also recognised that there may be circumstances where you may wish to report a concern to an outside body, such as a regulator. You can seek independent advice from an experienced organisation before doing this. **Protect** is an independent, charitable organisation that runs a free, confidential whistleblowing advice line. The number is 020 3117 2520 or you can contact them online via their website [www.protect-advice.org.uk](http://www.protect-advice.org.uk)

In addition you may wish to report the concern to the Local Government Auditor (including the NIAO), who has been prescribed as a person to whom protected disclosures can be made under the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 in relation to the proper conduct of public business, value for money, fraud and corruption in relation to the provision of centrally funded public services and health service bodies. More information can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on **028 9025 1062 or 028 90251000 or email [raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk](mailto:raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk)**

## **11. Outcomes**

The council accepts that you may wish to be assured that the concern you have raised has been properly considered and appropriately addressed. Subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcome of any enquiries / investigation undertaken.

The response will be issued by AGRS, who will consult with the investigating officer(s), relevant Departmental Business Manager, Departmental Human Resources, Corporate Human Resources and Legal Services, where appropriate.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can write to the Chief Executive and ask for the investigation and outcome to be reviewed. If you remain dissatisfied and you feel it is right to take the matter outside this process, the following are possible contact points:

- NI Commissioner for Complaints,
- Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Local Government Auditor),
- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations,
- Your solicitor or
- The police.

Workers can rely on their rights under the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 (amended in October 2017). The Order gives you protection from victimisation if you make certain disclosures of information in the public interest. The provisions are quite complex and include a list of prescribed people outside of the council who can be contacted in certain circumstances. You should seek advice from your solicitor, your local Citizens Advice Bureau, the Ombudsman or Protect on the effect of the Order.

If you take the matter outside the council, you should make sure that you do not disclose confidential information. In order to make sure that you do not make any such disclosures you may want to check the position with the council's Legal Services section.

<b>12. Summary of Roles and Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Members</b>	Leadership, approve policy, receive and consider high level progress updates at the Audit & Risk Panel on concerns raised (as appropriate).
<b>Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Corporate Services, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services, Director of Human Resources, Head of AGRS</b>	Potential contact points for those individuals raising concerns
<b>Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Corporate Services,</b>	Responsible for policy ownership and implementation.
<b>Departmental management</b>	<p>Management should ensure that their workers are aware of relevant council policies and procedures and ensure they are complied with.</p> <p>Management should be aware of what to do if someone raises a concern with them. (Refer to <a href="#">Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised</a>) This includes notifying AGRS / Raising Concern Champion as soon as a concern has been raised, <u>prior to</u> any initial enquiries being undertaken.</p> <p>Managers may be asked, where appropriate, to undertake enquiries / investigations including liaising with the individual raising the concern, where possible.</p> <p>Business Support Managers will, where appropriate, be consulted on the investigation of concerns raised and will, where appropriate, keep senior departmental management and AGRS informed of the progress of investigations.</p>
<b>Our Workers</b>	<p>Worker, as defined in legislation, includes staff and may also include agency assignees, volunteers, consultants, those on secondment and contractors.</p> <p>Our workers should ensure they comply with relevant council policies and procedures.</p> <p>Our workers should be aware of what to do if someone raises a concern with them. (Refer to <a href="#">Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised</a>)</p>
<b>Audit, Governance and Risk Services</b>	<p>Nominated officers in AGRS will undertake the role of the <a href="#">Raising Concern Champion</a>.</p> <p>AGRS will undertake or provide advice and assistance to management in undertaking investigations.</p>

	<p>Provide the framework for the management of all concerns raised and the related investigations.</p> <p>Supporting the Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Corporate Services with policy maintenance and communication.</p> <p>Supporting the governance, oversight and monitoring processes.</p> <p>Ensuring staff awareness and training on the Raising Concerns policy is adequate for their specific needs, that is, workers, line managers, senior managers and Members.</p>
<b>Raising Concerns Champion</b>	<p>Potential contact point for those individuals raising concerns and available for advice and guidance, either prior to formally raising a concern or at any stage during the process.</p> <p>Will understand the types of public interest concerns the council can consider and redirect concerns where necessary to the appropriate body.</p> <p>Log concerns and ensure they are directed within the council to the most appropriate person for proper consideration and appropriate action, in liaison with Corporate Human Resources, Legal Services and senior departmental management, as appropriate.</p> <p>Liaise on an ongoing basis with those in the organisation handling concerns, to ensure progress is made and that appropriate feedback is provided to those raising the concerns.</p> <p>Where necessary, escalate concerns higher up the organisation.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the policy and the related roles and responsibilities across the organisation.</p>
<b>External Audit – NI Audit Office</b>	<p>Local government auditors have been prescribed as persons to whom protected disclosures can be made under the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 in relation to the proper conduct of public business, value for money, fraud and corruption in relation to the provision of centrally funded public services and health service bodies. More information can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on <b>028 9025 1102 or 02890 251000</b> or email <a href="mailto:raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk">raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk</a></p>
<b>Departmental HR, Corporate HR and Legal Services</b>	<p>Provision of specialist advice on investigations as well as potential disciplinary and or criminal matters.</p>



13. Policy Control	
Policy or template title	Raising Concerns Policy (formerly Whistleblowing)
Document version	Updated April 2025
Departmental ownership	Corporate Services
Document owner	Deputy Chief Executive and Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Officer responsible or document authority	Claire O’Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)
Date of approval	TBC (Prev Full Council January 2023)
Date of last review	April 2024
Date of last update	
Updated by	Liam Mulholland, AGRS Manager
Date of next review	April 2026
Approval details	Audit Assurance Board / Audit & Risk Panel / Full Council
Locations of where document is held and referenced	AGRS / Interlink
<b>Intended audience</b>	<b>Communication process</b>
Workers	Intercom, Interlink, and departmental briefings.
Elected members	Audit & Risk Panel training and reports, Member briefings
Contractors	BCC website, contract documents
Members of the public	BCC website

## Appendix Routemap

The table below provides an overview of the relationship between the following council policies / procedures – Complaints Handling Procedure, Fraud and Bribery, Raising Concerns and the Disciplinary & Grievance procedures. Note that only workers are protected by legislation. More detail is provided in each policy.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Policy / Procedure</i>
<i>Service complaint, including anonymous complaint?</i>	<b>Complaints Handling Procedure</b>
<i>Allegation of fraud or financial impropriety?</i>	<b>Fraud &amp; Bribery Policy</b>
<i>Danger, wrongdoing or illegality that affects others, including anonymous complaints?</i>	<b>Raising Concerns Policy</b>
<i>Concern, problem or complaint relating to you and your employment?</i>	<b>Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures</b>
<i>Alleged employee misconduct?</i>	<b>Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures</b>
<i>Alleged criminal misconduct?</i>	<b>Procedure on Criminal Misconduct</b>
<i>Concern relating to council's prescribed activities? (Refer to section 4 above)</i>	<b>Referral to City Protection Services</b>
<i>Concern relating to safeguarding?</i>	<b>Safeguarding Policy</b>

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# Audit and Risk Panel

Tuesday, 3rd June, 2025

## MEETING OF AUDIT AND RISK PANEL

Members present: Councillor R. McLaughlin (Chairperson);  
Alderman Rodgers,  
Councillors Hanvey, Groogan and McKeown; and  
Mr. D. Wilson (External Member).

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and  
Civic Services;  
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;  
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;  
Ms. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services;  
Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services Manager;  
Mr. L. Mulholland, Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services Manager;  
Ms. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager;  
and  
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Also attended: Mr. D. Campbell, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

### **Election of Chairperson**

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin  
Seconded by Councillor Hanvey, and

Resolved – “That Councillor McLaughlin be elected to serve as Chairperson for the Audit and Risk Panel until the date of the Annual Council Meeting in 2026.”

### **Apologies**

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 4th March, 2025, were approved by the Panel.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

**Absence Rates Y/E March 2025**

The Director of Human Resources provided the Panel with an overview of the following report:

**1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to inform the Audit Panel of the Council's performance in managing absence at the end of quarter four, April – March 2025.

**2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1** The Audit Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.

**3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 Key corporate indicators:**

At the end of quarter four:

- The Corporate target for 2024/25 was 16.23 days per full time equivalent (FTE). The Council's average sickness absence rate stands at 14.58 days per FTE, a significant decrease of 2.42 days compared to absence for the same period last year (17 days).
- A total of 33135.4 working days were lost due to sickness absence. This accounted for 6.48% of the total working days available.
- The table below provides a summary of how departments performed against the target. Three departments did not meet the corporate target of 16.23 days for quarter four.

Department	Total days lost (FTE)	Number of employees (FTE)	Average number of days lost per FTE	Variance	% of work force	% of absence
City and Neighbourhood Services	21785.21	1324.16	16.45	0.22	58.26%	65.75%
City and Organisational Strategy	891.17	89.61	9.94	-6.29	3.94%	2.69%
Corporate Services	594.8	127.73	4.66	-11.57	5.62%	1.80%
External Affairs Comms & Marketing Dept	162.59	26.91	6.04	-10.19	1.18%	0.49%
Finance	242.68	46.74	5.19	-11.04	2.06%	0.73%
Human Resources	285.22	32.55	8.76	-7.47	1.43%	0.86%
Legal and Civic Services	2839.63	159.6	17.79	1.56	7.02%	8.57%
Place and Economy	4072.87	348.01	11.70	-4.53	15.31%	12.29%
Property and Projects	2261.23	117.36	19.27	3.04	5.16%	6.82%
Grand Total	33135.4	2272.67	14.58	-1.65		

**Additional Absence information:**

- There was an increase in the number of staff with no absence this year (42.68%), compared to last year (41.78%).
- There has been a significant decrease of 13% in absence classified as long term (20+ days) this year (23045.53 days) compared to the same time last year (26508.72 days).
- The number of days lost per FTE decreased in quarter four (3.67 days) when compared to quarter three (4.06 days), see figure 1.
- Depression/anxiety/stress (31.33% of total days lost) and musculo-skeletal (26.79% of total days lost) continue to be the top two reasons for absence. Refer to figure 2 for further information.
- From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, 2,717 cases of sickness absence were recorded. Discretion was reported as having been applied to 387 of these cases (14.2%) and accounted for approximately 25.86% of the total absence for 2024/25. Refer to figure 3 for further information.
- Issues were identified in how absences were being managed in 143 cases. These were discussed in detail with departments during quarter four. Refer to figure 4 for further information.
- Approximately 24.29% of absence (8049.08 days) is recorded as disability related. 64.4% of disability related absence was managed as long term. Employees who reported absence with depression / anxiety (30%), chronic back condition (15.4%) Osteoarthritis (9%) accounted for over half (54.4%) of all disability related absence days. Refer to figure 5 for further information.
- 20 employees met the trigger for a Stage four/ final absence hearing (FAH):.
  - Four employees were ill health retired (IHR) prior to their hearing being convened.
  - Discretion was applied to four cases where a decision was taken not to proceed to hearing:
    - one case was due to the employees returning to work at month six.
    - one case was due to an employee undergoing cancer treatment.
    - one case was due to an industrial injury.
    - one case involved work related stressors.
  - Two employees resigned before their hearing convened.
  - Two cases are due to be heard in May 2025.

- Five cases proceeded with one employee given a final opportunity to improve their attendance and another employee was granted a career break to assist their long-term recovery from surgery and treatment. Three employees were dismissed.
- A decision was taken not to proceed three cases to hearing as additional medical information was required.
- Throughout the year, a total of 35 employees were dismissed due to absence (eight by way of stage four/FAH and 27 by way of IHR). This was an increase of five cases when compared to 2023/24.

**3.3 Departmental improvement plans and Absence reporting to DMT:**

Corporate HR (CHR) has reviewed all the departmental improvement plans for quarter four. Overall, meaningful information, updates and progress reports were provided by the departments.

However, City and Neighbourhood Services (CNS) has, again, resource issues in carrying out the analysis required for the improvement plan.

All absence dashboards were returned for January, February and March 2025.

CHR will review departmental improvement plans for 2025/26. A progress report on how departments are implementing and monitoring its 2025/26 improvement actions will be provided to CMT at the end of quarter one 2025/26.

**3.4 Conclusion**

There was a significant reduction in sickness absence in 2024/25 when compared to 2023/24.

The Council's top two reasons for absence ,Stress / Depression / Anxiety and Musculoskeletal, remain but were reduced by 17.5% and 6% respectively. This reduction equated to over 2,700 FTE working days.

It should be noted that whilst three departments did not achieve the corporate target of 16.23, there were substantial reductions in departmental absence. CNS absence decreased by almost 3 days per FTE when compared to 2023/24 (16.45 days to 19.41), Legal and Civic Services decreased by over 5.5 days per FTE from



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**23.26 days in 2023/24 to 17.79 days in 2024/25. Property and Projects decreased by over 5.5 days per FTE from 23.26 days in 2023/24 to 17.79 days in 2024/25.**

**A key area of focus for all departments in 2025/26 will be to ensure consistent application of the Attendance Policy – particularly in relation to the use of discretion and the scheduling of absence hearings in accordance with the Policy.**

**Since the launch of the Health & Wellbeing (H&WB) Strategy, in April 2024, there has been a marked increase in health & wellbeing activity.**

**The H&WB programme delivered 94 events attended by 1,367 staff. CHR was supported by Internal Communications to help promote and increase awareness to all staff including those at frontline locations. A quarterly Wellbeing and Development email is sent to all staff directly and a 'Wellbeing Wednesday' Interlink article promotes topics and events each week, which are also displayed on "big screens" across various council locations Activity is also promoted via a team of Wellbeing Champions. The programme and wellbeing hub "Staywell" is promoted via posters on staff noticeboards.**

**Thirteen sessions of stress awareness and positive mental health training was attended by 124 staff. Promotion of different wellbeing themes such as Mental Health Week and Men's Health Week were used to specifically promote cancer awareness sessions including two webinars on bowel cancer with 63 staff attending.**

**CHR partnered with Business in the Community to deliver its 'Healthier You' range of webinars which focus on musculo-skeletal issues and included topics such as Spinal Health, Osteoporosis, Healthy Eating and Movement.**

**CHR led a Stop Smoking campaign with the PHA and Cancer Focus. A number of staff have already stopped smoking with the support provided and others are still completing the programme.**

**For frontline staff, the Keeping Well van attended five CNS sites with a total of 74 staff receiving a 30-minute health check. From these, several GP referrals were recommended. 44 staff have attended health checks for**

office-based staff. A further three CNS site visits have been booked for 2025/26.

The Council's H&WB programme is supported by our Learning and Development programme with 47 staff attending the Understanding the Attendance Policy sessions. Corporate HR delivered ten sessions on management skills attended by 105 staff, notably; Skills for Performance Management; Dealing with Difficult Conversations and Conflict Resolution within your Team.

A dedicated area for line managers has been included on Interlink with information, policies and guidance to help them support their teams.

Leading the Way and Active Travel events and initiatives continue to be available and well supported as we continue to work with Sustrans and partners to introduce active travel initiatives.

In addition, the Council was awarded the Level 3 PHA Take 5 Award for our comprehensive approach to employee health and wellbeing across the Council.

#### **2025-2026**

CHR will continue to raise awareness of stress, mental health and musculoskeletal support and plan a specific focus this year on addiction and suicide awareness. Plans are in place to expand the Council's team of wellbeing champions and to help increase awareness among frontline staff, signpost to the extensive support available to them and encourage participation. A blood donation session for staff and members is planned for 18 June in Great Hall, City Hall and all staff and members are being encouraged to attend.

### **3.5 Target**

The corporate target for 2024/25 was 16.23 days. The Council's absence figure for 2024/25 was 14.58 days. This was a reduction of approximately 10%.

It is proposed that the Council strives to maintain its current absence rate and the target should be set at 14.58 days.

### **4.0 Resource Implications**

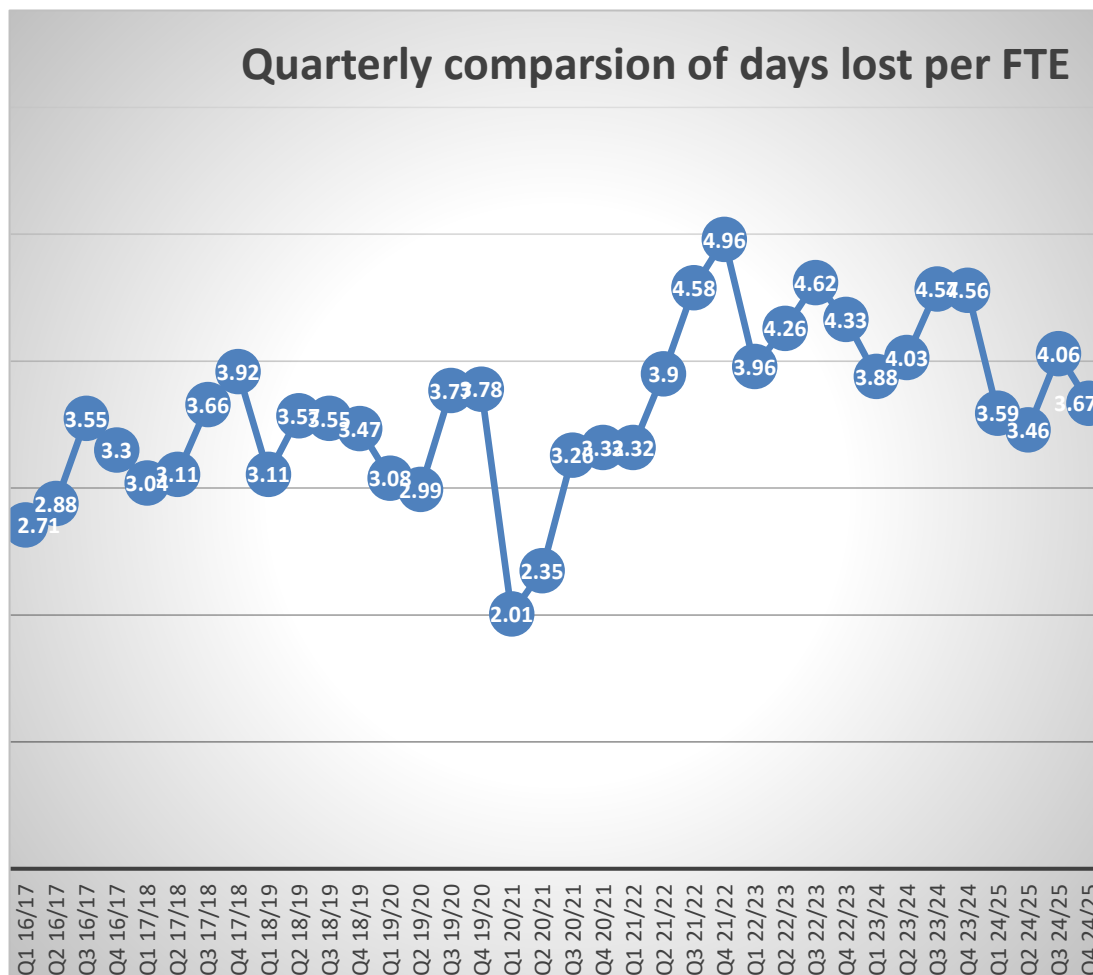
4.1 Directors are asked to ensure that:

- Resources are in place to ensure that adequate monitoring and review is in place at department level.

5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 5.1 Approximately 24.29% of absence (8049.08 days) is recorded as disability related and 64.4% of disability related absence was managed as long term.

**Figure 1:**



**Figure 2:**

Reason for absence:	Total days	% of total days
Stress. depression, anxiety	10382.63	31.33%
Musculo-Skeletal	8875.78	26.79%

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Stomach, digestive, etc	3383.22	10.21%
Infections, inc colds & flu	2678.56	8.08%
Heart, blood press, circ, etc	1746.91	5.27%
Neurological, inc headaches	1503.36	4.54%
Other	1142.61	3.45%
Chest and respiratory	974.11	2.94%
Genito-urinary, inc menstrual	741.41	2.24%
Infections, Covid19	698.12	2.11%
Eye, ear, nose & mouth/dental	628.25	1.90%
Pregnancy related	360.44	1.09%
Indust/Eye, ear, nose & mouth	20	0.06%
Totals:	33135.4	

**Figure 3:**

<b>Reason for discretion</b>	<b>Total days</b>	<b>% of total</b>
Disability / Underlying medical condition	363.13	18.00%
Planned Surgery and recovery	322.96	16.00%
Bereavement	241.56	11.97%
Industrial injury	184.47	9.14%
Hospitalisation	157.05	7.78%
Significant personal stressor	126.5	6.27%
Ongoing employee relations matters	125.77	6.23%
Emergency domestic responsibilities	118.76	5.89%
Pregnancy / Maternity related	81.25	4.03%
Mental Health	70.95	3.52%
Persistent absence; after a period of long term absence where an underlying condition has been identified.	62	3.07%
Ongoing ER / Legal matter	61.76	3.06%
Applied against Dept HR advice	53.85	2.67%
Previous long service and clear record	35	1.73%
Work related incident	12.91	0.64%
Grand Total	2017.92	
Total days lost in quarter four (January to March 2025)	8201.17	
% of total days lost where discretion applied in quarter four	24.61%	

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Average days off per occurrence of discretion in quarter four	21.6981	
Total days lost where discretion was applied in 2024/25	8569.31	
% of total days lost between April 2024 and March 2025 where discretion was applied	25.86%	

**Figure 4:**

<b>Department</b>	<b>Number of cases</b>
City and Neighbourhood Services	90
City and Organisational Strategy	1
Corporate Services	4
External Affairs Comms & Market	0
Finance	4
Human Resources	0
Legal and Civic Services	16
Property and Projects	14
Place and Economy	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>

The Panel requested that its thanks be passed on to the departments and the HR teams for the work undertaken to achieve the 2025 target, noted the content of the report and agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the corporate target for 2025/26 be set at 14.58 days.

**Corporate Health and Safety Performance Report**

The Corporate Health and Safety Manager provided the Panel with an update on the corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending 31st March, 2025.

She updated the Panel on progress against key performance indicators, employee and non-employee accidents and health and safety statutory agency enquiries and correspondence, she summarised the following health and safety data:

- Outstanding high priority actions;
- Outstanding fire actions;
- Outstanding health and safety actions; and
- Accident trend analysis.

She summarised three new health and safety statutory agency enquiries and one follow up that had been received from the Health and Safety Executive

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Northern Ireland (HSENI) and provided the Panel with an overview of the Health and Safety Assurance Board activity during 2024/25.

Following a suggestion from the Chairperson (Councillor R. McLaughlin) and, recognising that the Directors of Legal and Civic Services, Finance, HR, Corporate Services and City and Organisational Strategy attend the Panel regularly, the Panel agreed that the Strategic Directors for other departments be requested to attend one future meeting of the Panel to provide a departmental health and safety update.

The Panel requested that AGRS bring a paper to their next meeting with a schedule of when the strategic directors would attend the Panel in 2025/26 and noted the report.

**AGRS Progress Report May 2025**

The Audit, Governance and Risk Manager provided an overview of the Service's activity for the period from March 2025 to May 2025 and reported that the following eight assurance assignments had been finalised and provided the Panel with a summary of each:

- Government Procurement Cards;
- In Cab Technology;
- Police and Community Safety Partnerships;
- Planning Application and Decision-Making Process;
- Births, Deaths, Marriages and Civil Partnerships;
- Corporate Complaints;
- Payroll Data Analytics; and
- Year End Stock Take.

He explained that 80% of the planned activity within the delivery of the 2024/5 audit plan was either underway or completed and that the unit was continuing to provide advice and consultancy services to management and summarised work which had been undertaken by AGRS from March to May, 2025.

He informed the Panel that there were no ongoing fraud cases and that initial enquires were underway into a number of concerns that had been raised and that the Panel would be updated in due course.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Manager reported that management had requested the deferral of three audits which were in the 2024/25 Audit Plan. He explained that the request for the corporate risk on Health and Safety be deferred until 2026 due to ongoing resourcing issues within the Corporate Health and Safety Unit which had been directing its focus on high priority reactive work and could only provide limited assurance over the arrangements in place for the review, update and oversight of policies, codes of practice and the implementation of agreed audit actions. He stated that management were exploring a number of options to address the resource issues.

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He reported that management had requested the planned audit of Community Services Provision be deferred due to two significant pieces of work which were underway and a further request to defer the planned internal audit of the management of the corporate risk on Bereavement Services until completion of a service review and subsequent recruitment.

Following discussion, the Panel agreed to the requests by management to defer the internal audits of:

- Corporate risk on Health and Safety;
- Community Services Provision; and
- Corporate risk on Bereavement Services.

The Panel requested that AGRS report to the Panel in six months, with an update from management on the current position regarding the matters that have given rise to the requests for deferral of these audits, with a view to agreeing an indicative timeframe for commencing these audits.

**Analysis of Open Audit Actions**

The Audit, Governance and Risk Manager provided the Panel with an update following a further analysis of outstanding audit recommendations and the reasons which had been provided by management for the ongoing delays in their implementation.

He stated that, given that many of the recommendations had been outstanding for a number of years, it was likely that there would have been a combination of reasons for delays in implementation at various points in time, therefore the analysis was based on the understanding from the latest management update provided.

He outlined the following reasons for delay of implementation of the 146 outstanding recommendations:

- Resource pressures;
- Dependency on IT system ;
- Multiple reasons / no response ;
- Complex action ;
- Priorities ; and
- Potential close .

He highlighted that the most frequently cited reason for ongoing delay was pressures on resources and that it had been consistently stated across all departments except Human Resources and most prevalent in Legal and Civic Services. He stated that this could be attributed to known resourcing issues in the Information Governance Unit and Health and Safety.

He pointed out that the next most commonly stated reason for delay in implementation was departments awaiting the implementation of new IT systems which would then allow the outstanding recommendations to be addressed and he stated that

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projects to implement new IT systems were often more complex and time consuming than originally intended, and that anecdotally there had been repeated issues with suppliers delivering the product specified, which had led to further delays.

The Audit Governance and Risk Manager explained that 16 actions had been delayed due to the complexities associated with implementing or agreeing new strategies or projects and that 13 actions had been delayed due to management focusing on other priorities ahead of implementation of audit actions.

He broke down the analysis by priority and explained that the reasons for delay had been analysed in the context of the priority rating of the action and found that the reasons for delay remained relatively consistent across the priority levels and he provided an overview of the impact and consequences of ongoing delays.

He stated that each Director had been provided with information on the audit actions that were open by department and the analysis of the reasons why those actions had not been implemented. He asked the Panel to consider the next steps required to improve performance regarding the prompt implementation of agreed audit actions and to consider the date of the next full validation exercise.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Manager agreed, at the suggestion of a Member that, when categorising the reasons for the delays in implementation, 'multiple reasons' should be a separate category from 'no response'.

The Panel agreed to request an update from management on the action that was being taken to manage the issues that were delaying the implementation of audit actions and to remind Chief Officers of the importance of prompt implementation of audit actions.

The Panel agreed that the next full validation exercise would take place during December / January for reporting to the February / March 2026 meetings of the Board / Panel.

**Corporate Risk Management**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services outlined the following report to the Panel:

- 1.0     Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
- 1.1     To present the Audit Assurance Board with the Corporate Risk Dashboard summarising the key updates from the risk review for the year-end March 2025.**
- 1.2     To update the Board on compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for year-end March 2025, completed by senior management.**



1.3 To provide the Audit & Risk Panel with an update on business continuity management arrangements.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Panel are asked to:

a) Note the corporate risk management dashboard and agree the updates for year-end March 2025.

b) Note the assurances from senior management regarding compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for year-end March 2025.

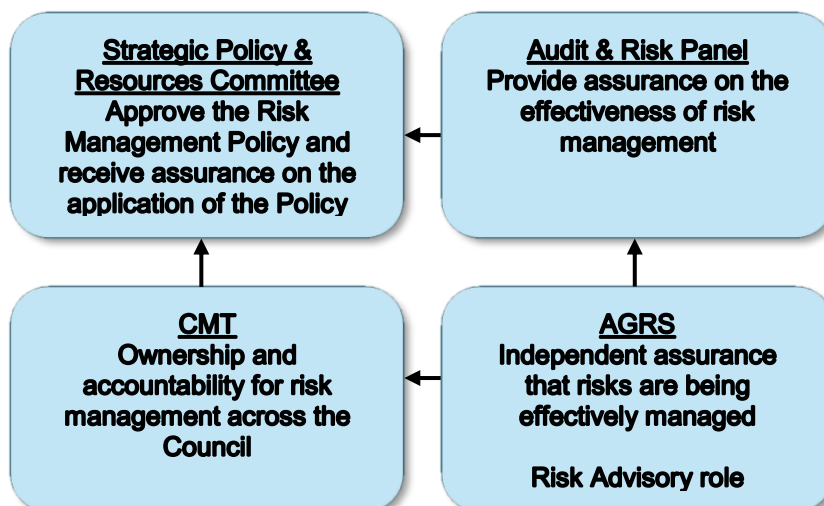
c) The current position regarding review and update of business continuity plans for the critical services.

3.0 Main Report

Summary of BCC Risk Management Arrangements

3.1 The aim of our Risk Strategy is to improve our ability to successfully achieve our objectives and deliver services to the communities to which we are accountable, by having a clear understanding of the key risks that could prevent us from delivering our priorities and putting in place measures to manage these risks.

An overview of the respective risk management responsibilities of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the Audit and Risk Panel, the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and AGRS is outlined below:



**Corporate Risk Management update for year-end March 2025**

**3.2** AGRS has met with risk owners to support them in their quarterly review of the corporate risks. The information from these meetings was used to prepare the Corporate Risk Management Dashboard for the year-end March 2025 which sets out:

- Corporate risk analytics – risks reviewed, risks by category, risks within risk appetite, risk actions implemented / not yet due / overdue, movement in risk assessment
- Key corporate risk updates for the quarter
- For each corporate risk, a summary of progress made to manage the risk and actions implemented in the quarter

**3.3** The Panel is asked to note the following corporate risk updates:

- There have been no changes to the risk assessment for any of the corporate risks
- Bereavement Services - while management are confident regarding operational delivery of the service they have highlighted that the effective management of the strategic aspect of this risk is reliant on working in partnership with other departments to progress significant projects.
- Physical Investment Programme - all planned mitigating actions have been implemented. Next quarter, the Director will consider the current risk assessment, whether the target risk rating has been achieved and whether any further action is required to achieve the target risk rating.
- Residential Waste Collection – the risk update reflects that the closed lid policy is being further considered by the People & Communities Committee.
- Port Health - a new action has been agreed to ensure day 1 readiness for transition and commencement of BCC Port Health operations at the new Inspection Facility at Belfast Port (Dargan Drive) scheduled to open in July 2025. Regarding the announcement in May 2025 relating to the UK and EU discussions regarding a future sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS), as more information becomes known, management

will assess the impact of the future SPS agreement on Port Health arrangements.

- The corporate risk on Asset Management does not yet have a mitigation plan in place. The Director of Property and Projects is the Risk Owner for the corporate risk on Asset Management and for ensuring that a risk action plan will be prepared. This will be informed by the gap analysis against the NIAO guide 'A Strategic Approach to the Use of Public Sector Assets – A Good Practice Guide for Local Government in Northern Ireland' which was completed by AGRS and reported to the Audit and Risk Panel in December 2024.
- Information Governance – the IG Board, who has the overall objective to ensure that information governance arrangements in BCC are efficient, effective and compliant with legislative requirements, has not been meeting regularly, with the last meeting in February 2024. The role of the Board is currently being reviewed in the context of the Governance review.
- Fleadh Cheoil - In March 2025 Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann (CCÉ) announced that Belfast would host the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture. The council will have a crucial role to play in the operational delivery of the Fleadh. The event should deliver major economic value, will involve considerable outlay for the council and will involve significant BCC and stakeholder people resourcing to prepare for the high level of expected visitors. AGRS will facilitate a workshop for the Programme Board to refresh the risk register. Following this refresh, and given the scale and importance of this event, in September the Panel will be in a position to consider whether it would be appropriate for a new risk to be added to the corporate risk register around delivery of the Fleadh, so that there is corporate oversight and visibility of the management of this risk.
- In December 2024, Belfast City Council selected a long-term private sector partner (PSP) to deliver £630 million residential-led, mixed-use, sustainable developments across multiple sites. The initial partnership phase will use strategic council-owned city centre sites with a development value of £280 million, which will deliver mixed tenure homes. The approach aims

to help drive forward city centre living and housing-led regeneration across the city and to allow Belfast City Council to bring forward development at scale with placemaking, people and connectivity at its heart to help meet the city's growth ambitions. This PSP initiative forms part of the current corporate risk on City Regeneration and Development. The Regeneration and Development Division are refreshing the PSP risk register and risk management arrangements to take account of this phase of the project. Following this refresh, and given the importance of this innovative approach, in September the Panel will be in a position to consider whether it would be appropriate for a new risk to be added to the corporate risk register around delivery of the regeneration objectives of the PSP, so that there is corporate oversight and visibility of delivery.

- 16 actions to manage the corporate risks were implemented / closed in the quarter. including:
- The action to deliver whole life cost training has been closed because the Director of Finance is satisfied that scrutiny and challenge of the estimated revenue costs of capital projects is sufficient to ensure that these costs are adequately considered.
- Refresh of BRCD Industrial Framework has been completed.
- Delivery of a senior leadership workshop on the role of data to support corporate decision making.
- The NI Public Data Panel has been set up to drive the innovative use of data with citizens.
- Waste management; efficiency and customer experience improvements through the use of technology and management information; work with Continuous Improvement has been completed to ensure the service is resourced / aligned appropriately and; completion of the review of legacy structure and formation of Operations Hub.
- Consultant appointed to provide Information Governance support to 'Go Succeed'.
- Climate; recruitment of temporary posts; approval of posts to manage the growing programme of work of the Climate Team were approved and; process in place to capture and coordinate climate information.

- **Belfast Stories; governance arrangements for Belfast Stories RIBA stage 2 reviewed and updated, with a Corporate Oversight Group established and chaired by the SRO; and completed the development of Outline Business Case for Belfast Stories.**
- **Agreement has been reached with Invest NI and Department for Economy for a fit-for-purpose approach to business cases for Digital Pillar projects.**
- **Growth proposal for small vehicle service for difficult to access streets was approved.**
- **A set of Customer Service Standards have been agreed for Bereavement Services**

#### **Horizon Scanning**

**3.4 Horizon scanning is built into the quarterly corporate risk management review process and the key themes to emerge this quarter relate to:**

- **The outcome of NI Reval 2026, where all non-domestic properties in Northern Ireland are being revalued for business rates, comes into force from 1st April 2026. Finance will work with LPS to assess the impact on the Council's rate base. In addition, regarding the proposal for a wide-ranging review of the rating system, at this stage only two elements are out for public consultation; the valuation cap and the repayment. There is also uncertainty regarding the funding for the increase in National Insurance Contributions**
- **Impact of tri annual valuation of pension scheme for the year-end March 2025.**
- **Potential for pay pressures given the potential impact of the NJC pay claim made to the Local Government Association for 2025-26, which will be subject to negotiations, particularly given the new BCC pay scales and the increase in employers national insurance contributions.**
- **Potential impact of tariffs on contractor pricing.**
- **Martyn's Law, known as Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, has received Royal Assent, Martyn's Law and is expected to have an implementation period of at least 24 months. The Act is intended to improve public safety and protect against the threat of terrorism. Property owners and business operators should consider if any of their properties would be classed as qualifying premises, what tier they would fall into**

and therefore what proportionate protection measures they may have to make (as part of a security risk assessment) and the cost of these. The implementation period should ensure that those responsible for premises and events in scope have sufficient time to understand their new obligations and to plan and prepare appropriately. The City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services is considering how to take this forward in the context of the current review of security arrangements.

- There is some thought leadership on Corporate Digital Responsibility which refers to a set of practices and behaviours that help an organization use data and digital technologies in a way that is socially, economically, technologically, and environmentally responsible. The council has various arrangements in place that would encompass the principles of CDR including work on the climate action plan, digital strategy, information governance, social value.

**3.5 These horizon scanning activities should:**

- Allow consideration of relevant information and any response that is required.
- Raise awareness of matters that could impact on longer term council and city plans, strategies and priorities.
- Enable Council to influence and challenge thinking on how to address city challenges.

**Annual Assurance Statements on compliance with the risk management strategy**

- 3.6 All Chief Officers and relevant senior managers complete an Annual Assurance Statement which allows them to focus on outlining the significant governance issues facing the Council at the year-end. These statements have been completed by all relevant officers who have confirmed that the arrangements in place for the management of risk and maintenance of internal control systems.**

**Business Continuity Management (BCM)**

- 3.7 The the year-end 2025 position on compliance with the requirements of the BCM policy.**

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- 14 of the 17 critical services completed their BCM exercise
- 13 of the 17 critical services completed their Report on their BCM exercise
- 9 of the 17 critical services completed their Report on the Update of their BCM Plan
- 12 of the 17 critical services completed the update of their Business Impact Analysis

**3.8 Critical Services have been reminded of the need to begin planning how to exercise their BCM plans during 25/26.**

**3.9 The BCM activities for Property Maintenance are not being completed due to ongoing restructuring and resourcing issues. Management expect to be in a position to complete these BCM policy requirements in the latter half of 2025/26 after the structural review, recruitment processes and service improvement work is complete.**

**4.0 Financial and Resource Implications**

**None.**

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

**None known at this time.**

The Panel:

- Noted the corporate risk management dashboard and agreed the updates for year-end March 2025;
- Noted the assurances from senior management regarding compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for year-end March 2025; and
- Noted the current position regarding review and update of business continuity plans for the critical services.

**Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services  
Annual Assurance Statement**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services outlined the following report to the Panel:

**1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

1.1 Each year the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) prepares an annual assurance statement. The statement is a professional opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk, control and governance arrangements, and this opinion is one of the sources of assurance that the council relies on for its annual governance statement.

1.2 The main purpose of this report is to present the Head of AGRS' annual assurance statement for 2024/25.

2.0 **Recommendations**

2.1 The Panel are asked to note the Head of AGRS' annual assurance statement for 2024/25.

3.0 **Main report**

**Key Issues**

**The Head of AGRS' Annual Assurance Statement**

3.1 The Head of AGRS' assurance statement is set out at section 2 of the attached report and information to support the opinion provided is provided in section 3 of the report. This opinion is one of the sources of assurance that the council relies on for its annual governance statement.

3.2 The report reflects the findings arising from audit work during 2024/25 as reported to the Board / Panel on a quarterly basis during the year (through audit progress reports, risk review reports and recommendation monitoring reports) therefore detailed findings / recommendations have not been reproduced in this report. However, a summary of audit reports completed is provided in Section 3 of Appendix A.

3.3 Our previous years self-assessments against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit have been reviewed and updated. The results of both of these assessments have not indicated any compliance issues, which is consistent with the results of the External Quality Assessment reported to the Board / Panel in September 2022.

3.4 Looking ahead, as of 1st April 2025 the new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) and the Application Note for the Public Sector come into effect and replace



the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). I have completed an initial assessment of AGRS conformance with the new GIAS and I can confirm that AGRS conforms with these standards. Some improvement actions have been identified, mainly around ensuring that AGRS can better demonstrate conformance.

**3.5 Financial and Resource Implications**

None.

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

None.

The Panel noted the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services' annual assurance statement for 2024/25.

**Code of Governance**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk provided the Panel with an overview of the updated Code to the Audit and Risk Panel for review and approval.

She explained that Audit, Governance and Risk Services had facilitated the annual review and update of the Council's Code of Governance in order to ensure that the Council had arrangements in place to address the seven principles of good governance and ensure that the Code reflects new initiatives and changes.

She outlined the main updates to the Code in relation to the following principles:

- Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respecting the rule of law;
- Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement;
- Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits; and
- Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

She stated that the review and update process confirmed that arrangements were in place to address the principles of the Code and had identified the undernoted areas where ongoing improvements were planned:

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- Work is underway to develop the Councils Performance Management Framework;
- Further work on the Medium Term Financial Plan, including efficiency;
- Race Equality Actions will be incorporated into the Corporate Delivery Plan for 2025/26;
- Plans are being made for delivery of Fleadh Cheoil;
- Development of the governance arrangements for the Private Sector Partnership for Strategic Site Development: and
- Governance review being led by the City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services.

The Panel approved the updated Code of Governance for Belfast City Council.

**Draft Annual Governance Statement 2025**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services referred the Panel to the Annual Governance Statement for the Council for 2024/25 and explained that the disclosures in the statement were based upon consideration of the Council's corporate risks, significant events and disclosures made by Chief Officers in their individual annual assurance statements.

She pointed out that in May, 2025, CIPFA SOLACE had issued an addendum which advised authorities to ensure that the Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26 onward would comply with the guidance and summarised the following tasks that would be completed in 2025/26 to ensure ongoing compliance under the following headings:

- Core arrangements for the local code;
- Conducting the annual review;
- Review of the content of the Annual Governance Statement; and
- Accountability: Presentation and communication of the Annual Governance Statement.

The Panel approved the draft Annual Governance Statement for the Council for 2024/25 and approved the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained in the statement.

**Fraud and Raising Concerns / Corporate Fraud Risk  
Assessment – Annual Report and Policy Update**

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager reported on the number of cases in which the Council policies for fraud and raising concerns had been applied, the

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nature of the allegations and the outcomes of the subsequent investigations, including actions taken to address underlying issues.

He explained that a register of cases was maintained and that the dedicated raising concerns email inbox was monitored daily and that a significant proportion of the emails received related to service delivery and operational matters which had been redirected to the Customer Hub or relevant department to be addressed.

He reported that the NIAO had recently requested details of concerns raised to the Council, as part of a wider piece of work it was undertaking to examine barriers affecting raising concerns within the public sector and summarised the information which had been submitted.

He reported that, following a review of cash handling processes within Finance, a number of control improvements had been agreed with management to reduce the risk of loss. He stated that one bank mandate fraud attempt had been reported to AGRS during 2024/25 which had been unsuccessful due to vigilance and application of controls by Council officers.

He explained that there were 18 corporate fraud risks within the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment, that there were mitigation plans in place for each and they had been reviewed and updated by the relevant Directors during 2024/25. He added that, whilst the level of fraud risk remained unchanged, management had proposed several changes which he summarised for the Panel.

He updated the panel on key changes which had been made following the reviews of the Raising Concerns Policy and the self-assessment checklist of the CIPFA Code of Practice for Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (2014).

The Panel agreed the updated Raising Concerns policy and noted the:

- updates on fraud, raising concerns and related cases handled in 24/25;
- annual review and update of the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment;
- The review of the Self-Assessment against the CIPFA 'Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption'. completed by AGRS.

**Performance Improvement Update**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy outlined the following report to the Panel:

**1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Panel with a Quarter 4 performance report of the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2024-25. Building upon the Quarter 4 performance report, a detailed year-end**

Performance Assessment report 2024-25 will be provided to SP&R on 22nd August 2025 before ratification by the Full Council on 1st September 2025 and publication on the Council website before the statutory deadline of 30th September.

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Panel is asked to:**

- i. note the update provided within this report.
- ii. consider and approve the Quarter 4 performance report for 2024-25 (Appendix 1).
- iii. note that a detailed year-end Performance Assessment report 2024-25 will be provided to the SP&R Committee on 22nd August 2025 before ratification by the Full Council on 1st September 2025 and publication on the Council website before the statutory deadline of 30th September.

**3.0 Main Report**

**Background**

- 3.1** 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 PIP, 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 annually by 30 September. The PIP 2024-25 does not include everything that the Council plans to do that year, but instead focused on a smaller set of performance improvement objectives and priorities.

**Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 Quarter 4/  
Year-end Performance Report**

- 3.2** The Panel will be aware that in the [2024-25 Performance Improvement Plan](#), agreed by SP&R on the 21st June 2024, we committed to monitoring progress and providing quarterly performance reports to the CMT, the Audit and Assurance Board, the Audit and Risk Panel, SP&R Committee, and the Full Council.
- 3.3** Following an update to the Audit and Assurance Board on 22nd May 2025, the Panel are advised that year-to-date progress, as at the end of quarter 4 is provided in

Appendix 1. In total there are 44 actions and 49 performance indicators (7 statutory and 42 self-imposed indicators). A high-level overview is provided on page 6 of Appendix 1, and is summarised as follows:

#### Actions

- Actions – all 44 actions are either achieved/complete (28) or partially achieved (16);

#### Performance Indicators

- In total there are 49 performance indicators – 7 statutory and 42 self-imposed indicators:
  - Data is not yet available for 1 performance indicator<sup>1</sup>.
  - Please note the data provided for the 7 statutory indicators is provisional and subject to external validation and update.

#### Performance against target

- Of the 48 performance indicators which have available data to measure *performance against target*, 87.5% (42) of the performance indicators were either on target or exceeded target (within 1% or better) or were slightly adrift of target (between 1% and 5%);
- Of the 48 performance indicators which have available data to measure *performance against target*, 6 (12.5%) are adrift of target by 5% or more, these are:
  - Customer contact service level (people answered within 120 secs).
  - % of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe.
  - % of corporate complaints with improvement actions.
  - Business start-up and job promotion: number of business plans completed (statutory indicator).
  - Average processing time for major planning applications (statutory indicator).

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<sup>1</sup> Data expected from Carbon Disclosure Project in May 2025.

- Average processing time for local planning applications (statutory indicator).
- The following performance indicator targets were adrift of target by 5% or more *and* are not showing improvement on preceding years – commentary/ rationale is outlined in Appendix 1:
  - Customer contact service level (people answered within 120 secs).
  - % of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe.
  - Business start-up and job promotion: number of business plans completed (statutory indicator).

#### **Performance Trend**

- Of the 48 performance indicators which have available data to demonstrate *improvement/trend*, 89.6% (43) have either maintained or showed improvement on previous years;

- 3.4 Based on the current progress against performance indicators and actions, the 6 improvement objectives are on track for achievement. When all data is available, an updated position will be available in the annual Performance Assessment Report, which will be presented to SP&R on the 22nd August 2025 before ratification by the Full Council on 1st September 2025.

#### **Draft Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26**

- 3.5 The draft Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26 will be presented to the SP&R Committee on the 23rd May, ratified by the Full Council on the 2nd June and published on our website before the 30th June. The Panel will receive quarterly performance reports (from quarter 2 onwards) on progress against the performance improvement objectives 2025-26.

#### **Next steps**

- 3.6 i. A detailed year-end Performance Assessment report 2024-25 will be provided to SP&R on 22nd August 2025 before ratification by the Full Council on 1st September 2025.

**4.0     Financial and Resource Implications**

- 4.1     There are no financial or human Resource implications arising directly from this report.**

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

- 5.1     There are no equality/ good relations or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.**

The Panel:

- noted the update provided within the report;
- approved the Quarter 4 performance report for 2024-25; and
- noted that a detailed year-end Performance Assessment report 2024-25 will be provided to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 22nd August 2025 before ratification by the Full Council on 1st September 2025 and publication on the Council website before the statutory deadline of 30th September.

**Annual report from Audit and Risk Panel to  
Strategic Policy and Resources Committee**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services provided the Panel with an overview of the Draft Audit and Risk Panel Annual Report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Panel requested that a report be brought back to its next meeting to consider whether there would be external experts who could undertake a review of health and safety arrangements within BCC and whether an external review of health and safety arrangements would be of benefit to the Council.

The Panel noted the report.

**Effective Audit and Risk Assurance Committees –  
A Good Practice Guide**

Mr. D. Campbell, NIAO, presented the Panel with the NIAO's Effective Audit and Risk Assurance Committees – A Good Practice Guide.

The Panel noted the Good Practice Guide and the NIAO's recommendation to complete the guide's Self-Assessment Checklist at least annually.

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 3rd June, 2025**

**Management Update on Internal Audit of  
Communications, Marketing and External Affairs**

The Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs provided the Panel with an update on the progress being made to address the issues which had been highlighted in the recent internal audit of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs.

He outlined each agreed action, the timeframe for implementation and the progress made to date on each of the actions.

The Panel thanked the Director for the positive steps taken and noted the report.

**Date of next meeting**

The Panel noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 9th September, 2025.

Chairperson



Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason
Fleadh Cheoil Belfast 2026 marketing and visitor servicing	Up to 1 year	£185,000	D Martin	There is currently a formalised agreement with Visit Belfast to act as the official Destination Marketing and Management Company. This STA is for additional work specifically for Fleadh Cheoil.	Visit Belfast	3

**STA/ Direct Award Reasons**

STA Number	Full description
1. Switching to a Direct Award	Switching to a Direct Award: No response or no suitable response following advertised procurement exercise.
2. Single Supplier for Art or Artistic Performance	Single Supplier for Art or Artistic Performance: the creation or acquisition of a unique work of art or artistic performance
3. Single Supplier Absence of Competition for Technical Reasons	Single Supplier Absence of Competition for Technical Reasons: only a particular supplier can supply the goods, services or works required and there are no reasonable alternatives to those goods, services or works
4. Single Supplier Intellectual Property Rights (IPR)	Single Supplier Intellectual Property Rights (IPR): only particular supplier can supply the goods, services or works required due to that particular supplier having IPR or other exclusive rights and there are no reasonable alternatives to those goods, services or works.
5. Urgency	Urgency: Where the goods, services or works to be supplied under the public contract are strictly necessary for reasons of extreme and unavoidable urgency which is not attributable to any act or omission of and could not have been foreseen by the council, and as a result the public contract cannot be awarded on the basis of a competitive tendering procedure using the reduced 10 day period for 'urgent procurements'
6. Prototypes and Development	Prototypes and Development: the production of a prototype, or supply of other novel goods or services (i.e. goods or services designed or developed at the request of BCC), for the purpose of testing the suitability of the goods or services, researching the viability of producing or supplying the goods or services at scale and developing them for that purpose, or other research, experiment, study or development.
7. Additional or Repeat Goods Services or Works	Additional or Repeat Goods Services or Works: Extension or Partial Replacement concerns the supply of goods, services or works by the existing supplier (includes supplier that the council no longer has a contract with) which are intended as an extension to, or partial replacement of, existing goods, services or works in circumstances where a change in supplier would result in the council receiving goods, services or works that are different from, or incompatible with, the existing goods, services or works, and the difference or incompatibility would result in disproportionate technical difficulties in operation or maintenance.
8. Commodity	Commodity: Supplies quoted and purchased on a commodity market

Appendix 1 a

9. Advantageous time-limited	Advantageous time-limited: Supplies or services on particularly time-limited advantageous terms e.g. supplier winding up its business activities
10. Additional or Repeat Goods Services or Works	Additional or Repeat Goods Services or Works: Similar to Existing Goods Services or Works, concerns the supply of goods, services or works by the existing supplier (includes supplier that the councils no longer has a contract with) that are similar to existing goods, services or works where the existing goods, services or works were supplied under a public contract that was awarded following a competitive procedure within the period of five years ending with the day on which the transparency notice is published, and the tender notice or any tender document in respect of the earlier contract set out the Council's intention to carry out a subsequent procurement of similar goods, services or works in reliance on this direct award justification, and any other information specified in Section 95.
11. Other	Other: Reason not in line with Procurement Act 2023
12. To Protect Life	To Protect Life: where a Minister of the Crown has by Regulations provided that specified contracts may be awarded to protect human animal or plant life or health or protect public order or safety
13. Schedule 2– Exempted Contract	Schedule 2– Exempted Contract: Requirement not considered procurement spend but use of STA process to document and approve spend. <a href="https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/54/schedule/2">https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/54/schedule/2</a>

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## **Social Policy Working Group**

Tuesday, 17th June, 2025

### **SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SOCIAL POLICY WORKING GROUP**

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND  
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

- Members present: The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);  
The High Sherriff (Councillor McAteer); and  
Alderman Copeland.
- In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director  
of Corporate Services;  
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;  
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;  
Ms. N. Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement  
Services;  
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;  
Mr. L. Murray, Strategic Category Manager;  
Ms. S. O' Regan, Employability And Skills Manager;  
Ms. C. Patterson, Policy and Programme Manager;  
Inclusive Growth; and  
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

### **Election of Chairperson**

It was agreed that the Deputy Lord Mayor be elected as Chairperson of the Working Group until the date of the of the Annual General Meeting of the Council in 2026.

### **Apologies**

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillor I. McLaughlin and Councillor B. Smyth.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 13th May, 2025, were approved.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were recorded.

### **Ethical Procurement Policy**

The Strategic Category Manager delivered a presentation in respect of the above-mentioned matter. He outlined the legislative framework in which the Council currently operated, its constraints and then gave examples of models of best practice across the region. The Working Group was then provided with an overview of the processes which

the Council adhered to at a pre-tender, tender and at the management stage of a contract, together with the overarching framework of checks and balances applied corporately. He then summarised the findings of several procurement benchmarking exercises which had been undertaken to examine best corporate practices across the British Isles linked to ethical procurement policies.

The Strategic Category Manager pointed out that the aforementioned exercise had established that, whilst many organisations would adhere to the legislative obligations in their procurement practices, many did not, unlike the Council, apply additional safeguards or criteria. He added, however, that some overarching policies applied elsewhere, were more specific in their standards when compared to the Council's current Social Value Procurement Policy.

The Working Group was then provided with an overview of a proposed mechanism to oversee the development of a corporate Ethical Procurement Policy that would see the development of a range of measures. Such measures may include strengthened approaches to ensuring external supply chains and businesses adhered to ethical standards. Such standards would, typically, include labour rights, environmental sustainability, fair trade practices and human rights. Such a corporate policy would be mindful of the need for a proportionate approach, whilst supporting and developing local Small and Medium Enterprises and their capabilities.

A number of Members thanked officers for the work which had been undertaken in developing the principles to oversee the emerging policy. In response to a Member's question, the Deputy Chief Executive outlined the next steps in the development of the policy and she clarified the level of engagement that would be undertaken, particularly with Small and Medium Enterprises in any development of the policy.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed to approve the emerging principles to oversee the development of an Ethical Procurement Policy for the Council.

It was noted that the minutes of the meeting would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th June with a view that it endorse the Working Group's decision to enable the further development of the policy.

Chairperson