

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 4th March, 2025

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor R. Brooks (Chairperson);
Councillors Abernethy, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley,
Bunting, Canavan, Cobain, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
R-M Donnelly, Flynn, Garrett, Magee, Maghie,
Maskey, McKeown, I. McLaughlin and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Operational Director of Resources,
Fleet, Open Spaces and Streetscene;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building
Control; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

There were no apologies received.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 4th and 18th February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 3rd March, subject to the amendment to the minute of the meeting of 4th February, under the heading 'Applications for Dual Language Street Signs', to provide that Malone Valley Park be included within the list of streets in which a second street nameplate, in Irish, would be erected.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors M. Donnelly, Black, Canavan, Verner and I. McLaughlin declared an interest in item 5 (b), 'Funding Awards for 2025', in that they worked for, or were associated with, organisations which had been referenced within the report. The Members left the meeting whilst the item was under discussion.

Regarding item 3 (b), 'Social Supermarkets', Councillors M. Donnelly and Canavan declared interests in this matter since they worked for, or were associated with, organisations which had been referenced within the report. The Members left the meeting whilst the item was under discussion.

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in item 6 (b), 'Pitch Partnership Agreements' in that a relative played for Rosario Football Club. Since the item did not become subject to discussion or debate, Councillor McKeown was not required to retire from the meeting.

Presentations

Irish Football Foundation Stadia Community Benefits Initiative - People with a Disability

Further to its decision of 5th November, the Committee welcomed Ms. C. Rea (Disability Development Manager) and Mr. A. Crooks (Lead Contact) from the Irish Football Foundation to present on the Stadium Community Benefits Initiative (SCBI).

The Committee was reminded that Irish Football Association, Belfast City Council and the Department for Communities oversaw the SCBI, which was delivered through the Irish Football Foundation. The programme's overarching objective was to improve the quality of life for future generations by encouraging wellbeing and healthy lifestyle choices; improving community engagement through schools, clubs and youth organisations; and supporting new and existing football clubs to increase their capacity to deliver by creating participation opportunities across Belfast, particularly for younger people with a disability.

Mr. Crooks reported that a range of clubs across the City were in receipt of support and funding to assist in the delivery of a variety of initiatives for persons with disabilities, with 185 participants recorded in 2024/25. The success of the initiative was measured against an outcomes-based framework, which had recorded a 100% positive feedback during the current year. In addition, work was undertaken to ensure that the benefits of the programme were aligned to partners' strategies and a range of indicators had been developed to monitor delivery.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the representatives of the Irish Football Foundation for attending and welcomed the work which had been achieved through the programme.

Noted.

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) Service Provision for People with Additional Needs

Further to its decision of 5th November, the Chairperson welcomed Ms. J. Pope (Head of Service, GLL) and Mr. J. Michael (Business Manager, GLL) who were in attendance to present on the range of services offered to people with additional needs.

Mr. Michael outlined the initiatives which had been introduced across the Council's leisure estate by GLL, which ranged from specialised swimming lessons, tennis programmes, inclusive climbing and an 'able and active' holiday scheme, which would be delivered in 2025. He outlined the benefits which GLL provided in participating in the JAM card scheme – which stood for 'just a minute' of patience, which allowed people with a hidden disability or communication barrier to be afforded extra time to express themselves to staff in a private and easy way. Staff across the organisation had been trained in this regard and in additional disability inclusion training was ongoing.

The Committee was given an overview of the junior programmes that were delivered across Belfast, with inclusive sessions offered at Andersonstown and Brook. In addition, it was anticipated that specialised birthday parties would be introduced across several centres in 2025. Also, an 'Understanding Disability' course

would be undertaken by all staff who worked with service users in a gymnasium environment.

In response to a Member's query, Mr. Michael outlined the benefits of the 'accessibility app' which was used by the organisation to enhance the experience of users. He indicated that GLL would be keen to explore the provision of software that would provide a virtual tour of a building, aimed specifically for persons with autism.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the representatives of GLL for attending and welcomed the work which had been undertaken in providing services for people with additional needs.

Noted.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

Departmental Finance Update - Quarter 3

The Committee noted the contents of a report and an associated financial pack which provided an overview of the Department's financial performance as of the end of Quarter 3 of the financial year 2024/25.

Social Supermarket Funding 2025/26

(Ms. N. Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager, and Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer Community Provision, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee:

- noted the outcome of the recent open call process for 2025/26 and noted further that there existed no budget to support the applications since no confirmation had been received from the Department for Communities regarding the level of funding which the Council would receive in the 2025/26 financial year; and
- noted that a paper on the outcome of the open call process for 2025/26 would be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, with a view that it be referred onwards to the Cost-of-Living Working Group, should any underspends or additional funding become available within the Council's Hardship Programme, which might be re-allocated to the Social Supermarket budget.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Council Allotment Provision

The Operational Director presented a report which gave an overview of the current Council allotment provision, together with the numbers of individuals currently on the associated waiting lists. He explained that the Council oversaw 281 plots at seven locations, whilst there were 964 individuals on the waiting list.

The Committee was provided with details on the review process which the Council used to identify abandoned/vacant/unmanaged sites and the methodology for reallocating plots, together with the engagement work undertaken in the facilitation of food growing opportunities and initiatives in conjunction with local communities.

The Operational Director answered a range of Members' questions and the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

In addition, the Committee noted that the City and Neighbourhood Services Department would seek to bid for funding from within the Council's Capital Programme to enable a feasibility study to be undertaken regarding the increasing of allotment provision and improving the current infrastructure across existing sites.

**Request for Memorial Tree/Signage –
Ruby Murray Village Green**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 4th February, it had considered a request to erect a tree within the Ruby Murray Village Green in memory of the late Mr. Trevor Greer, who had been a community worker within the area. At that meeting, the Director of Resources, Fleet, Open Spaces and Streetscene had undertaken to examine the request and the Committee considered a report in this regard which provided also several design options for the placing of new signage within the park.

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to the installation of a memorial tree within the Ruby Murray Village Green in memory of Mr. Trevor Greer and agrees also to approve option 2, as set out within the report, for the new signage within the Ruby Murray Village Green.

Boxing Strategy – Update

(Mr. P. McGrattan, Leisure Development Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee noted the progress achieved to date of the Council's Boxing Strategy and its associated work plan for the year 2024/25. In addition, the Committee approved an attached action plan and agreed to extend the scope of the strategy and funding for the delivery of the related work programme from 1st April, 2025 to 31st March, 2026.

**Funding Awards for 2025/26 - Capacity Building
and Revenue Grants and Generalist Advice**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The main purpose of this report is to:

- Advise members that the Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer for 2025/26 has not yet been received by Council from DfC.
- Seek members approval to issue Letters of Offer for 2025/26 for Capacity Building & Revenue Grants and Generalist Advice in the absence of a Letter of Offer from DfC.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to;

- Consider the contents of the report and
- Grant approval for officers to progress funding agreements for the Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building grants and Generalist Advice for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026. 50% payments will be issued in advance upon the return of required paperwork with a second payment made pending return of satisfactory interim monitoring report covering 1 April to 30 September 2025 and available budget.
- Note that Council does not have any budget to support activity that is 100% funded through the CSP. Members will note that a separate paper on the Social Supermarket Fund which is 100% funded through the CSP has been brought to committee this evening. A further report on other 100% funded elements will be provided when the CSP Letter of Offer has been received.
- Approve the 2024 – 25 doubling of financial allocations for the Revenue of Community Buildings grants to the organisations for the 2025 – 2026 financial year.

Background information

3.1 Members will be aware that the Department for Communities (DfC) provides an annual grant to Council through its Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer. This funding provides an element of the budget towards Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Building grants as well as Generalist Advice.

The CSP also provides 100% funding for other elements of activity such as Social Supermarkets and Welfare Reform Mitigations.

3.2 Council has yet to receive a CSP Letter of Offer for 2025/26 and therefore does not have the total budget available to provide the full grant allocation. Any reduction in the DfC allocation will impact on the overall level of the grant budget and potentially awards to the grant recipients. The CSP Letter of Offer is received in March - June each year, although members may recall that in 2024/25, DfC funding was released on a gradual basis and the full allocation was not provided until July 2024.

Key Issues

3.3 Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Buildings Grants

Members may be aware that in March 2023, Council agreed to provide multi-annual funding covering 3 years 2023-2026 for the Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Building grants. Although the grants are multiannual, Funding Agreements are made on an annual basis.

As part of the rate setting process, Council approved an additional budget envelope of £1.5 million for the 2025 – 2026 financial year, with this funding to double the financial allocation to groups in receipt of the Revenue for Community Buildings grant.

Officers are seeking approval to make payments covering 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

The total cost of the grants allocation for 2025/26 is £4,847,382.39

- Capacity Building £1,872,358.29
- Revenue for Community Buildings £ 2,975,024.10

3.4 The list of organisations that receive funding is outlined in appendices 1 and 2. Members will note that awards in 24/25 included an uplift which DfC provided in their Letter of Offer, officials have advised that we should plan on the same budget for 25/26. This amount provided an additional £629 for each Revenue for Community Buildings grant recipient.

3.5 Council's contribution to Capacity & Revenue Grant Programmes is 66% of the overall budget thus we can guarantee the first 50% payment.

Generalist Advice Funding

3.6 Members will be aware that Council provides funding for generalist advice provision to 5 Advice Consortia covering: Central, East, North, South and West Belfast. The funding is allocated to the consortia using a funding model based on population and multiple deprivation indicators (2015).

3.7 Council's contribution to Generalist Advice is 37% of the total allocation. Members are asked to consider if they are content to approve the issue of Letters of Offer and 50% payment.

3.8 A further report will be presented to committee when we receive the Community Support Programme Letter of Offer from DfC. Members are asked to note that Council does not have any budget to support activity that is 100% funded through the CSP.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.9 Members may wish to note that last year the allocation was as below. The council budget is the same for capacity and advice as 24/25; The council budget for revenue increased for 25/26.

Grant	CSP funding DfC	24/25 BCC Contribution	25/26 BCC Contribution	Total
Capacity	£ 463,075.29	£1,409,283	£1,409,283.00	£ 1,872,358.29
Revenue	£ 353,052.05	£1,134,469	£2,621,990.05	£ 2,975,024.10
Advice	£ 667,959.58	£391,729	£391,729.00	£ 1,059,688.58
Total	£ 1,484,086.92	£2,935,481	£4,423,002.05	£ 5,907,070.97

Members will note that Council has the available budget to make a 50% payment to recipients of all three elements (Capacity, Revenue and Advice), however, should there be a reduction in DfC funding this would impact on the overall budget available to cover costs.

Based on legal advice, Funding Agreements for 2025/26 Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Buildings Grants and Generalist Advice will contain a condition that the second payment may vary due to the level of funding received from DfC.

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

3.10 Any reduction in the available budget has the potential to impact on service delivery which may have equality, good relations or rural needs implications for Belfast City Council."

The Committee:

- granted approval for officers to progress funding agreements for the Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building Grants and Generalist Advice for the period 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026 - with a 50% payment to be issued in advance upon the return of required paperwork, with a second payment to be made pending the return of a satisfactory interim monitoring report covering 1st April to 30th September, 2025 and available budget;

noted that the Council did not have a budget to support the Social Supermarket Fund, which was 100% funded through the Department for Communities' Community Support Plan (CSP);

noted that a separate paper on the Social Supermarket Fund would be provided as and when a CSP Letter of Offer had been received; and

approved the 2024/25 doubling of financial allocations of revenue for Community Buildings Grants to the organisations listed within the report for the 2025/26 financial year.

**Community Support Plan - 2025/29 - Including
a Review of Community Support Large Grants**

The Committee considered the flowing report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To update members that we will continue to implement the business-as-usual aspects of the draft Community Support Plan, including Council direct delivery and ongoing allocation of funding programmes which are not being reviewed as part of this work.

This report will also outline the requirement to start to develop the processes for the new funding programme (replacing the capacity and revenue funding) which is being reviewed as part of this work and the risk that we may not be able to deliver on a new funding programme by April 2026.

2.0 Recommendation

- i. Note the contents of the report.**
- ii. Note the business as usual and improvement aspects of the draft community support plan will proceed, this will include funding programmes that are not under review. Note that our continuous improvement actions in the plan have been informed by our engagement processes.**
- iii. Due to the tight timeframe for developing a new funding programme to replace the current Community Development Large Grants (Capacity and Revenue), advise they are content that the proposal for one funding programme as outlined in the draft CSP will replace the current capacity and revenue programme; and agree that officers start to develop the processes for a new programme for 2026/27.**
- iv. Consider the options for future budget allocation and maximum limits for the Community Support Large Grants Programme and recommend an option that will be included in the draft Community Support**

Plan. If this is an option that exceeds the current budget of £3.3 million recommend that this is considered by SP&R, given the implications for 26/27 rate setting.

- v. Note that the draft CSP plan, including the funding approach, is undergoing an equality and rural needs screening which will form part of our consultation approach. It is expected that once we agree a final Community Support Plan, we may have to undertake a formal consultation in Spring/Summer 2025. In keeping with our policy around screening and consultation, this work has already begun.**
- vi. Agree that following completion of the required screening/consultation exercise, a paper will be brought to committee in summer 2025 outlining feedback and seeking agreement on the final Community Support Plan. Officers will deliver on this plan in 2025/26 but the plan is subject to change based on any feedback that may be received from formal consultation.**
- vii. Agree that a final detailed update on the Funding Programme is brought back to members in advance of going to open call in late Summer 2025.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

In January 2024, the People and Communities committee agreed to the following – ‘That officers produce a Council Community Support Plan (25/29) and at the same time, undertake a review of current community support large grants schemes’. Members will know that the community support large grants schemes form part of our overall funding package that is included in the Community Support Plan.

3.2 Further updates have been brought to members at P&C Committee which detailed progress to develop the CSP. At December committee, officers brought in a draft Community Support Plan seeking members approval to proceed with implementing the plan. This included priorities for Council Delivery and options on a new funding model. At the December meeting, committee agreed to defer consideration of the Community Support Plan to enable further examination and discussion to be undertaken between political parties and officers, particularly in respect of the viability of the funding model with a view that the matter be considered also within the wider rate-setting process for 2025/26. For all of this, members should be aware that while we will deliver on what is contained within the draft plan including areas of improvement, this is subject

to change following any formal consultation that we have to undertake.

Ongoing Community Support Provision

3.3 While the above action is being progressed, officers are seeking approval from members to start to progress work that is contained within the new draft Community Support Plan on the basis that it is business as usual (and improvement) work that is already being delivered by our staff and within our community centres and independent community centres. The new plan outlines work on 2 areas:

- How the Council will directly support the local community/voluntary sector and the communities that it serves through our community support, assets, people and programming.
- How our funding will support community activity

Council Direct Delivery

3.4 The related work that we wish to continue and improve on includes the following;

- Leading networking / co-ordination & partnership development in local communities to create active, engaged and resilient communities.
- Supporting volunteering by creating new and better opportunities for people to give their time and make a difference to their communities and the issues they care about.
- Providing access to mentoring / training and ongoing support for community organisations
- Improving current systems and processes - e.g. developing an electronic booking system for Community Centres
- Delivery and co-ordination of activity programmes including reviewing the current programmes within council facilities across the city to ensure that they meet identified need.
- Ensuring all BCC facilities meet quality standards
- Supporting organisations that receive funding and facilitating networking amongst groups

CSP Funding

3.5 While we are undertaking a review of the large community development grants (Capacity & Revenue), members should note that there are three funding programmes that are not currently being reviewed (see table below). To continue to provide funding support we will continue to deliver these funding programmes and bring updates to members. Members will note that there is a separate paper for this committee meeting in relation to the 25/26 CSP Letter of

Offer from DfC and programmes funded through that resource.

Current Funding included in the Community Support Plan

Grant	No. Groups Currently Funded
<u>Under Review</u>	
Capacity Building (up to £50k)	43
Revenue for Community Buildings (up to £20k)	87
<u>Not Under Review</u>	
Summer Schemes	98
Advice Services	14
Social Supermarkets	21

Funding Under Review

3.6 We are reviewing a significant part of our funding offering, our large, multi-annual capacity and revenue grants which currently provide £3.3million to 130 groups across the city. Feedback received from our engagement on funding priorities suggested a need to include the following when developing the new funding approach;

- Funding levels for revenue related costs should increase
- Funding should be available for both core revenue/running costs and activity/programmes
- Applications should be assessed against the impact that they make to overall outcomes
- Application requirements should be proportionate & timely
- Funding levels to include small grants

Members should note that there are significant tight timeframes around the development of a new scheme and application process. Members are asked to;

- Agree that from April 2026 the capacity and revenue programme will be replaced by one Community Support large Grant that will support delivery on outcomes as outlined in the draft CSP.
- Agree that officers start to draft the application, assessment, monitoring, training and other relevant processes that will be required to put in place a new funding programme and which will allow Council to be ready to go to open call as early as possible.

Members will recall that consideration of the draft CSP was deferred at December 24 committee to allow further consideration of the available finance for community support grants. Members will also know that as part of growth bids

an additional non recurrent budget of £1.5 million has been agreed for 25/26 to enhance Revenue grants.

3.7 Options in are provided for the current budget of £3.3million and for an additional £1.5million which would create a budget of £4.8million. If this funding were made recurrent from 26/27, it would require agreement through the 26/27 rate setting exercise. Given the financial implications and the additional impact on the rates for 26/27, this would necessitate consideration at SP&R.

The timeline outlined below is based on final approval dates by council following committee consideration the previous month. Members should note that there is no scope for delay in the current timescale.

Action	Completion Date
Final approval to proceed with the Funding model in the Community Support Plan	March 25
Equality & Rural Needs Screening and Consultation	April to July 25
Final CSP agreed including new funding programme which incorporates Equality screening & feedback from consultation	August 25
Final systems and processes agreed by members for funding programme	October 25
New funding programme open – 8 weeks application period	November 25
Deadline for applications	December 25
Assessment	Mid Feb 26
Committee approval of awards	March 26
Notification to applicants of funding allocation	May 26

Further Engagement with Stakeholders

3.8 Members will be aware that there is significant interest in this work, particularly the funding element and it is important that we continue to engage with stakeholders on the development and implementation of the CSP. If members agree to the recommendations in this paper officers will consider the best way to engage with stakeholders, which may include information sessions with stakeholders in March/April, further details will be provided when available.

Given the potential impacts on existing grant holders of any change to the funding programme, officers will also engage with those organisations to provide information. Officers will continue to engage with organisations to provide support in preparing project ideas and will offer support to potential

applicants when the new programme opens. Further detail on the programme of support will be provided in the paper to committee prior to the Scheme opening.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 Staff and financial resources to complete this work will be taken from existing budgets. The council element is included in existing budgets and the DfC contribution comes from the Community Support Programme Letter of Offer (LoO).

The CSP LoO provides a one-year commitment from DfC for funding on an annual basis, although the CSP has been in place across all councils for a number of years Members may wish to note that in 24/25 DfC is providing £831,192 toward the Capacity and Revenue grants. Council increased its financial allocation in March 2023 by almost £1.4 million per annum providing an annual commitment of £2,446,918. In 2025/26 financial year, members agreed a non-recurrent budget of £1.5 million for Revenue grants. This combined amount provides the overall budget of £4,778,110 for the 2025/26 year.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

5.1 Given the significant impact which any changes to the large grant funding programme will have on the VCSE sector and communities across the city, an equality screening exercise and rural impact assessment are being undertaken on any resulting change in policy/programme. Any potential additional equality considerations have been factored into the timeline.”

The Committee noted the contents of the report and adopted the recommendation as set out, subject to the following, that:

- under item 3.7, the Committee proposed to change the application assessment to complete by December 2025, and to change the timeline for Committee approval to January 2026;
- under item 3.7, the Committee did not agree a financial budget for 2025/26 year and requested that officers engage with thirty community organisations, already funded through the CSP, to ascertain their current revenue costs; and
- noted also that the outcome of the engagement exercise would be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to assist the Council in making a better-informed funding decision as part of the 2026/27 revenue estimates process.

Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service – Request for Funding

The Committee considered a report in respect of a request for funding which had been received from the Belfast Advice Group regarding the delivery of the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service in 2025/26.

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the request for one month to enable further consideration to be undertaken by the Party Group Leaders and it was noted that the matter would be referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration, if considered appropriate.

Operational Issues

Community Summer Schemes Charges

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 4th February, it had agreed to defer consideration of a report in the respect of the above-mentioned matter to enable officers to draft a further report that would examine a range of charging options for Community Summer Schemes Charges in 2025. Accordingly, the Committee considered a report which outlined several options for consideration.

The Committee agreed to introduce a 'no charge for participation' fee for the Council's Summer Schemes in 2025.

Pitch Partnership Agreements

(Mr. P. McGrattan, Leisure Development Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered a report which provided an overview of the progress achieved in the implementation of the Pitch Partnership Agreements from 1st April to 31st December 2024.

After discussion, the Committee:

- noted the progress achieved as of 31st December 2024.
- agreed that the partner agreements be extended until 31st March 2026, or until new arrangements had been put in place following completion of the Council's Playing Pitches and Outdoor Sports Facilities Strategy; and
- agreed that an additional amount of up to £2,000 per month be allocated to Rosario FC to support with the costs associated in operating the site until the community asset transfer process had been completed.

Request for Storage Container – Henry Jones Playing Fields

The Committee considered a request which had been received from East Belfast GAC seeking permission to install a shipping container for storage purposes within the Henry Jones Playing Fields.

The Committee acceded to the request and noted that a report in relation to a corporate policy regarding the installation of shipping containers at Council facilities would be submitted for consideration in due course.

Request to hold an Event in Victoria Park

The Committee considered a request which had been received from the Mae Murray Foundation to host an event in Victoria Park which would seek to raise funds to support social inclusion for persons of all abilities.

The Committee granted authority for the hosting of the 'Move a Mile for Mae' event at the Victoria Park Pavilion on 25th May 2025, subject to the organisers meeting with the conditions as set out within the report.

Request to Name the Continuation of an Existing Street

The Committee granted permission to name the continuation of an existing street as 'Lady Ishbel Boulevard'.

Applications for Dual Language Street Signage – Standard Monthly Applications

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at St. Agnes' Drive, Colinglen Road, Rosemount Gardens, Mount Eagles Crescent, Rinnalea Grove, Trench Park, Lavinia Square, Catherine Street North, Lower Stanfield Street, Upper Stanfield Street, Henrietta Street and Hamilton Street.

Dual Language Street Signs – Proposed Mechanism for Deferred Applications and Wynchurch Avenue, Sunningdale Park North, Ben Madigan Park South and Wellington Park Terrace

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 At the Council meeting on 4th November 2024 members agreed that a report would be brought to the People and Communities Committee to include a mechanism to deal with deferred applications and to consider the decision to defer the application for Wellington Park Terrace, and the other dual language street signs that had been deferred. The minute was as follows:

1.2 'That the Council agrees that the decision of the People and Communities Committee, at its meeting on 8th October, in relation to an application for a second street nameplate at Wellington Park Terrace, under the heading 'Proposal for Dual Language Street Signage' be taken back to the Committee for further consideration, together with other similar applications which have met the threshold for approval but have been previously deferred, following an undertaking by officers to examine international best practice and develop a mechanism to deal with such applications.'

2.0 Recommendation

1. Agree to the proposed mechanism to deal with applications that are deferred.
2. Determine if the applications for Wynchurch Avenue, Sunningdale Park North, Ben Madigan Parth South, Wellington Park Terrace are to:
 - a) continue to follow this proposed mechanism,
 - b) be reconsidered by committee based on the previous survey results,
 - c) be subject to a further survey of occupiers or
 - d) be closed.
3. determine if the applications for Ebor Street and Ballysillan Road are to:
 - a) follow this proposed mechanism,
 - b) be subject to a survey of occupiers or
 - c) be closed.

3.1 Key Issues

The report sets out:

1. the current policy position,
2. the proposed mechanism by which these decisions will be dealt with,
3. consideration of best practice for these types of decisions and
4. the decisions previously taken to defer applications and put them to the back of the queue.

1. Policy position:

3.2 The current Dual Language Street Signs policy came into effect in October 2022. The policy states that

3.3 *'When an application is received, the Council will canvass by post all Occupiers of that street and seek their views on the request to erect a street sign in a second specified language.'*

3.4 *'Each application will be subject to an initial assessment for any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs. This assessment will commence when the application is received and where any adverse impacts are identified that information will be brought to Committee.'*

3.5 Therefore, some applications will be brought to committee seeking approval to carry out the survey of that particular street if adverse impact are identified.

3.6 *'Where fifteen percent or more of the Occupiers of that street have indicated that they are in favour of the erection of a*

second language street sign, then such a sign may be erected, subject to the residual discretion of the Council as specified in subsection (xi) below.'

3.7 'The Council will retain a residual discretion to decide to erect or not to erect a street sign in a language other than English in certain circumstances. This will be done on a case-by-case basis. It may be appropriate to depart from the procedures in this policy when there are clear reasons for doing so. This may include considering:

3.8 the views of the Occupiers of the street;

- (a) the results of the initial assessment for the application, including any identified potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs;**
- (b) consideration of the local context of the application;**
- (c) any other Council policies or strategies related to the application; and**
- (d) all material considerations relating to the application.'**

2. Mechanism for deferred applications:

3.9 As a result of the decision to defer some applications, putting them to the bottom of the queue that existed at the date of decision, officers have been working to the following procedure:

Currently implemented.

3.10 The applicant for the street that was deferred was written to and advised of the committee decision. Their application was marked as deferred and another application in their name was created at the end of the queue. The purpose of which would be to facilitate processing at the relevant time in the future when all other applications up to that point were dealt with. Once the deferred application is reached, it will be brought back to committee to consider how it is to be progressed.

Additional steps proposed

3.11 In addition to the above, and in instances where another application has been made for the street, officers propose the following to help manage these deferred applications:

3.12

- We write to applicants of all applications for the same street and for any second language and advise them of the committee decision for that street based on a previous application.**

3.13

- All the applications are marked 'on hold' noting that further processing of the applications is on hold pending the outcome of the deferred application.**

3.14

- Any subsequent applicants for the street would be informed that a decision has already been made to defer an application for consideration in the initial language but that applications would be taken and marked 'on hold' until the time a decision is made on the deferred application.

3. Consideration of best practice for making decisions on dual language street sign applications in these circumstances

3.15 Council's dual language street sign policy is based upon international best practice in relation to minority languages and was co-designed with stakeholders. The policy has regard to the Council's commitments in the Language Strategy which include, amongst other things, addressing language barriers as well as promoting, protecting and enhancing linguistic diversity in the city. The policy therefore complies with best practice.

3.16 The application of the policy, including the weight to be attached to the views of the residents and the exercise of residual discretion, is for elected members having regard to its commitments in the Language Strategy around the promotion of minority languages, its statutory obligation to have regard to the views of the residents of the street and all other material considerations.

4. Decisions taken to defer applications:

Deferred applications based on survey results.

3.17 Members have taken a previous decision to defer consideration of the following applications for the erection of dual language street signs based on survey results. Whilst 15% of residents were in favour of the erection of dual language street signs the committee took into consideration the number of people who voted against the proposal. For all of these applications the second language proposed was Irish. The streets involved and the survey results of occupiers for and against are indicated below.

3.18

Streets	For Proposal	Against Proposal
Wynchurch Avenue (First Survey)	18%	26%
Wynchurch Avenue (Second Survey)	15.04%	28.31%
Sunningdale Park North	22%	33%
Ben Madigan Park South	23.18%	26.08%
Wellington Park Terrace	17.14%	31.42%

Deferred applications prior to survey.

- 3.19 Members have also taken a previous decision to defer consideration of two applications prior to survey based on adverse impacts identified at the initial assessment and based on elected member notifications. These applications were for Ebor Street and Ballysillan Road
- 3.20 The record of the decisions taken in relation to all these deferrals were similar to that taken for the first deferred application in relation to Wynchurch Avenue where the minute states:
- 3.21 *'That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the decision to erect a Dual Language Street Sign at Wynchurch Avenue until those applications already received to date had been processed.'*
- 3.22 The effect of these decisions meant all the above applications were put to the back of the queue that existed at the time of the decision being taken, following the ratification of each decision by council.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.23 There are no Financial, Human Resources, Assets and other implications in this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

- 3.24 Each application for a dual language street sign is subject to an initial assessment for any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs. The applications being considered in this report underwent this assessment and feedback was given for each application when originally presented to committee.
- 3.25 The applications were also notified to elected members to allow any member of the DEA in which the street is located

to identify any potential for adverse impacts on the grounds of equality of opportunity and good relations.

A prolonged debate ensued in respect of the applications for a second street sign at the above-mentioned locations. Several Members indicated that the surveying of streets would cause community tensions in certain areas where a majority of residents were opposed to the erection of a second signs.

Other Members felt that the process adopted by the Council was in accordance with minority rights guidance and policies.

Proposal

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

That the Committee agrees to proceed with the erection of a second street signs, in Irish, at the following locations, viz., Wynchurch Avenue, Sunningdale Park North, Ben Madigan Park South and Wellington Park Terrace.

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

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor Verner,

That the Committee agrees that the applications for dual street signs, in Irish, at Ebor Street and Ballysillan Road be closed and that no further surveys be undertaken.

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

Further Proposal

Moved by Councillor Maghie,
Seconded by Councillor Abernethy and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to adopt the revised mechanism for considering deferred applications and that the applications for second street signs, in Irish, at Ebor Street and Ballysillan Road, be subject to the revised mechanism.

**Applications for Dual Language Street Signs in Irish
- Ormeau Road, Delhi Street, Whitewell Road, Victoria
Road, Upper Dunmurry Lane, Burmah Street, Upper
Newtownards Road, Sunningdale Gardens, Donegall
Road and Belmont Avenue**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To consider if a street survey of occupiers will be carried out for ten applications for the erection of dual language street signs in Irish within the city where potential adverse impacts have been identified by the initial assessments. Objections have been received from elected members for two of these streets with further representations from the community regarding another street.

2.0 Recommendation

- 1. Members are asked to consider the report and matters raised in relation to the applications for dual language street signs in Irish received for Ormeau Road, Delhi Street, Whitewell Road, Victoria Road, Upper Dunmurry Lane, Burmah Street, Upper Newtownards Road, Sunningdale Gardens, Belmont Avenue and either:
 - a) Agree that surveys of occupiers of these streets be carried out, or**
 - b) Agree that no surveys will be carried out on the grounds of the potential adverse impacts identified and these applications are closed.****
- 2. Members are also asked to agree that the application for Donegall Road is closed on the basis of the agreement at SP&R in October 2023 that dual language street signs would only be erected in the section of Donegall Road within the Gaeltacht Quarter boundary between the Falls Road and the Broadway roundabout. Note signs have now been erected on this section of road.**

Key Issues

3.1 The power for the Council to consider applications to erect a second street nameplate in a language other than English is contained in Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995.

3.2 The Dual Language Street Sign policy states that ‘each application will be subject to an initial assessment for any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and

rural needs and where any adverse impacts are identified that information will be brought to Committee.'

3.3 The initial assessments were carried out for all the streets listed and potential adverse impacts were identified. Draft equality screenings were therefore carried out, assessing the request for dual language street signs in Irish for Ormeau Road, Delhi Street, Whitewell Road, Victoria Road, Upper Dunmurry Lane, Burmah Street, Upper Newtownards Road, Sunningdale Gardens, Donegall Road and Belmont Avenue for equality and good relations issues.

3.4 The screenings have identified that the carrying out of surveys and the erection of Irish language street signs in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension. Conversely the screenings also identified that the process could assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. The findings are outlined in the equality and good relation section below.

3.5 Objections to the applications for Ormeau Road and Donegall Road were also raised by Elected Members during the elected member notification procedure.

3.6 Ormeau Road – Cllr Davy Douglas, member for Lisnasharragh raised an objection stating: -

'Ormeau Road is a mixed community, and progress has been made in recent years around issues with flags in the area. I feel that the adoption of Irish street signage could be seen as divisive and have an adverse effect on good relations within the community, undoing some of the progress that has been made. I would therefore ask that the Council exercise its discretion not to apply its policy at this location'

3.7 Donegall Road – Cllr Tracy Kelly, member for Botanic raised an objection stating: -

'The Donegall Road splits in two, it is my understanding that the Nationalist side is already approved for Irish Language and Cllrs agreed that the Unionist side would be left as is due to the sensitivities.

3.8 *I would like to raise my objection to the Unionist side of the Donegall Road having Irish language street signs as this is a strong unionist area that will totally object this proposal, I believe any consultation may raise tensions and create division in a community that has recently just settled down after a spate of serious ASB and rioting'*

3.9 Members are further advised that the Donegall Road was discussed at an SP&R meeting as part of the proposal to erect dual language signs in Irish within the Gaeltacht Quarter. At a meeting on 20th October 2023, it was agreed 'that those streets which form the boundary of the Gaeltacht

Quarter also be included as part of the area, with only that portion of the Donegall Road within the boundary of the Gaeltacht Quarter. This was ratified at full council.

- 3.10 In this regard dual language street signs with a second language in Irish have already been erected on the portion of the Donegall Road which runs from the Falls Road to the Broadway Roundabout.
- 3.11 Based on this decision and given that dual language street signs have now been erected within the GQ section of Donegall Road, members are asked to confirm that the application for Donegall Road be closed.
- 3.12 Further to objections raised for the two streets above and following the member notification for Sunningdale Gardens the Director of Planning and Building Control received 19 emails from residents of Sunningdale Gardens and the wider local community. These emails expressed concerns about the application for this street and the negative impact on good relations which would be created by the installation of street signs in Irish.
- 3.13 These applications are therefore being brought to Committee to determine if surveys of residents of these streets will take place, considering this information.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.14 If it is decided to carry out surveys, the resulting tasks are included within the normal resources for the process.

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

- 3.15 An EQIA was carried out on the main Dual Language Street Signs policy in 2021-22. This confirmed the initial assessment process to be carried out, which may indicate the requirement for equality screening.
- 3.16 The applications for dual language street signs (with the second language in Irish) for Ormeau Road, Delhi Street, Whitewell Road, Victoria Road, Upper Dunmurry Lane, Burmah Street, Upper Newtownards Road, Sunningdale Gardens, Donegall Road, and Belmont Avenue were assessed for equality of opportunity and good relations issues through the initial assessment process. This process identified that the potential for adverse impact existed and recommended further screening prior to referral to committee for authority to proceed to survey.
- 3.17 The draft screenings have identified that the carrying out of a survey in itself in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension, as could the erection of the street signs and therefore has the potential to give rise to adverse impact on the grounds of good relations. It is acknowledged;

however, the process could alternatively assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.

- 3.18 The applications were also presented to Elected Members as part of the Elected Member notification procedure and objections were received from Cllr Davy Douglas with regard to Ormeau Road and from Cllr Tracy Kelly with regard to Donegall Road. The members were concerned about the potential for adverse impacts on good relations with full details of their objections in paragraphs 3.5-3.8 above.
- 3.19 Emails from the residents and wider local community were received regarding the application for Sunningdale Gardens which expressed concerns about the potential for negative impact on good relations caused by the installation of street signs in Irish.
- 3.20 The council retains 'residual discretion' in relation to these applications. In effect this gives Elected Members the option to not proceed to survey and/ or halt the erection of an Irish language street sign in this street where in the view of Elected Members considering the agreed criteria, this action would be considered inappropriate."

Several Members indicated that the issue of the provision of a second street sign, in Irish, was proving to be decisive in the proposed streets and roads outlined within the report. Other Members referred to the potential which existed in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity within the areas mentioned through the erection of a second street sign.

Prior to proceeding to a vote, the Committee agreed that the application for the erection of dual language street signs on the Donegall Road be closed on the basis of the agreement reached at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in October 2023, in that dual language street signs would only be erected in the section of the Donegall Road within the Gaeltacht Quarter, i.e., between the Falls Road and the Broadway Roundabout.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin,

That the Committee agrees that no further surveys be carried out on the residents of Ormeau Road, Delhi Street, Whitewell Road, Victoria Road, Upper Dunmurry Lane, Burmah Street, Upper Newtownards Road, Sunningdale Gardens, Belmont Avenue and that the applications for a second street sign in Irish be closed.

Amendment

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

The Committee agrees that surveys be carried out on the residents in the aforementioned streets and roads.

The amendment was put to the Committee and was passed with fifteen Members voting in favour and five Members voting against.

The amendment was thereupon put to the Committee as the substantive motion and passed.

**Applications for Dual Language Street Signs
in Irish – Oldpark Road, Donegall Park Avenue
and Skegoneill Avenue**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To consider if a street survey of occupiers will be carried out for three applications for the erection of dual language street signs in Irish within the city for which potential adverse impacts have been identified by the initial assessments. These applications are being considered as ‘long streets’ as contained in clause 3 (X) of the Dual Language Street Signs policy.

2.0 Recommendation

- 1. Members are asked to consider the Dual Language Street Sign applications for Oldpark Road, Donegall Park Avenue and Skegoneill Avenue which have been identified as ‘long streets’ and for which the potential for adverse impacts has been identified and either:**
 - a) Agree that surveys of occupiers of these streets be carried out using the proposed approach; or**
 - b) Agree that no surveys will be carried out on the grounds of the potential adverse impacts identified and these applications are closed.**

Key Issues

3.1 The power for the Council to consider applications to erect a second street nameplate in a language other than English is contained in Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995.

3.2 The Dual Language Street Sign policy states that ‘each application will be subject to an initial assessment for any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs and where any adverse impacts are identified that information will be brought to Committee.’

3.3 The policy also states that:

‘Consideration will to be given to ‘long streets’ where opinion on whether to have a second language street sign may differ between readily identifiable, substantial lengths of the street. In these circumstances, the decision as to the erection of dual language nameplates in certain portions of the street will be made by Committee, exercising its residual discretion and considering advice from officers.’

3.4 Having carried out initial assessments, officers consider that Oldpark Road, Donegall Park Avenue and Skegoneill Avenue fall within this definition.

3.5 Draft equality screenings were therefore carried out and have identified that the carrying out of surveys and the erection of Irish language street signs in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension. Conversely, the screenings identified that the process could assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. The findings are outlined in the equality and good relation section below.

3.6 Members are therefore asked to confirm if surveys are to be carried out for these three streets. If members determine these streets should be surveyed, it is proposed that additional analysis of the results of the survey will be carried out by officers to confirm any difference of opinion in the readily identifiable sections, which may influence if and where signs would be erected. The findings will be presented to members for consideration at a future committee meeting, including the location of existing street signage.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.7 If it is decided to carry out surveys, the resulting tasks are included within the normal resources for the process.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.8 An EQIA was carried out on the main Dual Language Street Signs policy in 2021-22. This confirmed the initial assessment process to be carried out, which may indicate the requirement for equality screening.
- 3.9 The applications for dual language street signs (with the second language in Irish) for Oldpark Road, Donegall Park Avenue and Skegoneill Avenue were assessed for equality of opportunity and good relations issues through the initial assessment process. This process identified that the potential for adverse impact existed and recommended further screening prior to referral to committee for authority to proceed to survey. It also determined that the three streets met the definition of 'long street' contained in clause 3 (X) of the policy, in that opinion on whether to have a second language street sign may differ between readily identifiable, substantial lengths of the street'.
- 3.10 The draft screenings have identified that the carrying out of a survey in itself in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension, as could the erection of the street signs and therefore has the potential to give rise to adverse impact on the grounds of good relations. It is acknowledged; however, the process could alternatively assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.
- 3.11 The council retains 'residual discretion' in relation to these applications. In effect this gives the option to not proceed to survey and/or halt the erection of an Irish language street sign in this street were, in the view of Elected Members considering the agreed criteria, that this action would be considered inappropriate."

It was moved by Councillor Magee, seconded by Councillor Maskey, and agreed that surveys of the residents of Oldpark Road, Donegall Park Avenue and Skegoneill Avenue be conducted in respect of the applications for dual language street signs in Irish.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

'FIDO' - Dog Fouling Removal Vehicle **- Councillor Canavan**

The Committee noted that a wider report in relation to the 'FIDO' (dog fouling removal vehicles), which would address the associated street cleansing issues raised, would be submitted in due course.

Memorial at Former Workhouse Burial
Site at Donegall Road - Councillor McKeown

The Committee agreed that the above-mentioned matter be referred in the first instance to the South Belfast Area-Based Working Group for consideration.

Chairperson