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BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

28th March, 2025

SUMMONS TO ATTEND THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

TO: THE LORD MAYOR, ALDERMEN AND THE COUNCILLORS OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Notice is hereby given that the monthly meeting of the Council will be held in hybrid format, both in the Council Chamber, City Hall, and remotely, via Microsoft teams on Tuesday, 1st April, 2025 at 6.00 pm, for the transaction of the following business:

1. Summons
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of the Council (Pages 1 - 8)
5. Official Announcements
6. Minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (Pages 9 - 38)
7. Minutes of the People and Communities Committee (Pages 39 - 66)
8. Minutes of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee (Pages 67 - 96)
9. Minutes of the Licensing Committee (Pages 97 - 100)
10. Minutes of the Planning Committee (Pages 101 - 112)
11. Minutes of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee (Pages 113 - 118)
12. Minutes of the Climate and City Resilience Committee (Pages 119 - 128)
13. Minutes of the Standards and Business Committee (Pages 129 - 130)
14. Notice of Motion
 - a) Paramilitary Transition Scoping and Engagement Exercise (Pages 131 - 132)

The Members of Belfast City Council are hereby summoned to attend.

John Walsh

Chief Executive

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Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall,
on Monday, 3rd March, 2025 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCormick);
The High Sheriff (Councillor McAteer);
and Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCoubrey,
McCullough and Rodgers; and Councillors
Abernethy, Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower,
Bradley, Brennan, R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting,
Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Collins, de Faoite,
Doherty, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly,
Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson,
Flynn, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey, Kelly, Long,
Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, McCabe, McCallin,
McCann, McCusker, McDonough-Brown,
McDowell, McKay, McKeown, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin, Murphy, Nelson, O'Neill, Smyth,
Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of The Lord Mayor, Councillor Murray.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCormick),
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting
of the Council of 3rd February, 2025, be taken as read and signed as
correct.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors McCabe, Groogan, R-M Donnelly, Duffy and Verner declared an interest in the item 'Minutes of the Shared City Partnership' within the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st February, in that they worked for organisations which had applied for PEACEPLUS funding. Councillor McKeown declared an interest in 'Draft Response to Department for Communities Fuel Poverty Strategy' in that his employer was referenced within the report. Councillor Long declared an interest within the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in items 2 (d) Wider University and Lower Ormeau Intervention; and 2 (e) Support for businesses affected by the August riots, in that his wife was Justice Minister.

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Councillor Black declared an interest in the item 'Independently Managed Community Centres' within the People and Communities Committee minutes of 4th February' in that she worked for an organisation in receipt of Council support under the terms of the fund. Councillor I. McLaughlin declared an interest in the same item in that he was a member of the committee of an organisation in receipt of Council support under the terms of the fund.

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in the item 'Request to Present – Belfast Harbour Commissioners – Corporate Strategy 2025-2029' within the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, in that he was a member of the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

As the above-mentioned matters did not become the subject of discussion or debate during proceedings, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Official Announcements

The Deputy Lord Mayor referred to the recent passing of Mr. Cyril Thompson, a former Health Safety and Fire Advisor with the Council, and of Mr. Andrew Ross, a Parks Warden based in the East Belfast area. It was agreed that letters of condolence would be forwarded on behalf of the Council to the families of Mr. Thompson and Mr. Ross.

Alderman McCullough referred to the deaths of Shiri Bibas and her children Kfir and Ariel, all of whom had been taken hostage by Palestinian militants on 7th October, 2023, and expressed his condolences and support for the Bibas family.

Councillor D. Douglas extended congratulations to Council employee Mr. Kyle Smith who had recently won the Ulster senior middleweight boxing title representing his club Holy Trinity.

Councillor R. Brooks reminded the Council that it was World Hearing Day and welcomed the recent second reading of the Sign Language Bill, which had been introduced to the Assembly in February. She outlined the benefits which Bill would bring across the community and how the Council would be able to provide additional accessibility to the deaf community through the outworkings of the legislation.

Councillor Walsh reminded the Council that the date of the Council meeting coincided with *Seachtain na Gaeilge*, the annual festival to celebrate Irish language and culture and he encouraged people to use their Irish words, or *cúpla focal*, in the promotion of the Irish language.

Councillor Groogan pointed out that International Women's Day would be marked on Saturday, 8th March, and that the theme for the celebration in 2025 would be 'Solidarity Beyond Borders – Women for World Peace'. She encouraged as many people as possible to attend the march and rally to mark the day which would commence in Writers' Square on the aforementioned date.

Councillor Nelson conveyed his congratulations to all of the nominees and winners at the recent Northern Ireland Care Awards, which had taken place in the City Hall.

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He paid tribute to the vital work undertaken local by the fostering community across Belfast and Northern Ireland.

Councillor Canavan extended congratulations to St. Dominic's Grammar School's under-16 camogie side on winning the Corn Úna thus becoming the first side from Belfast and Ulster to win an all-Ireland camogie title at any grade. At Councillor Canavan's request, the Deputy Lord Mayor indicated that a letter of congratulations would be forwarded to the school.

Councillor McKay expressed his thanks to the volunteers of the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals who had assisted recently in the rescue of a distressed swan in the vicinity of the Albert Bridge.

Requests to Address the Council

Action to Address Empty Homes

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from the Community Action Tenants Union, who wished to speak on a notice of motion 'Action to Address Empty Homes' which had been proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor Groogan. That motion, which had been considered by the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 20th February, was referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration. The Council acceded to the request and the Deputy Lord Mayor welcomed Ms. H. Gibson and Mr. S. Gibson to the meeting.

The Council was informed that, despite the huge demand for public housing across Belfast, there remained a substantial number of unoccupied homes throughout the city. It was reported that Land and Property Services had determined that the figure sat at 3,694 for the Belfast area. In the last decade, it was pointed out, the number of people deemed officially as homeless across Northern Ireland had risen by 136 per cent, whilst there existed an estimated 22,500 vacant domestic properties. In addition, it was added, rents were rising at a significant rate, with a 10 per cent increase recorded over the past year alone. Ms. Gibson pointed out that the lack of adequate social housing meant that significant resources were being spent on temporary accommodation and hostels and that the housing issue needed to be addressed urgently by all statutory bodies and agencies.

The Deputy Lord Mayor thanks the representatives of the deputation for attending the meeting. The Council noted that the motion would be discussed at the meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, scheduled for Friday 21st March.

Dogs in Kennels - Transfer of Ownership

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Ms. Z. Duncan, Mr. D. Barclay and Ms. S. Wood, regarding the notice of motion 'Dogs in Kennels - Transfer of Ownership'. That motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Flynn and seconded by Councillor Verner, was referred to the Council by

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the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 20th February. The Council acceded to the request.

The Council was advised that the current breed specific legislation, which was applied to determining a 'dangerous' dog breed, was over thirty years' old. It was stated that a review should be undertaken since the legislation was based on a dog's appearance and not its temperament, which led to the unnecessary destruction of healthy dogs. It was suggested that an updated training criteria was required to ensure that the welfare of dogs was maintained throughout the assessment and outcome process. It was suggested that criteria based on a dog's appearance and attributes was subjective and negated the role of dog owners in the management of their animals. The deputation concluded their address by requesting that the Members would support the motion as set out on the agenda.

The Deputy Lord Mayor thanks the representatives of the deputation for attending the meeting.

Adjournment

At this point of the meeting, the attention of the Deputy Lord Mayor was drawn to the fact that there had been a connectivity issue affecting those Members who had joined the meeting remotely. In accordance with section 2.1.0. of the Council's Remote Meetings' Protocol and Procedure Rules, the Deputy Lord Mayor adjourned the meeting for a period of fifteen minutes to allow for the connection to be re-established.

After the period specified, it was determined that the remote connection to the remote Members could not be re-established. In accordance with section 2.1.1. of the aforementioned protocol, the Deputy Lord Mayor determined that those Members who had joined the meeting remotely were deemed to have left the meeting and that proceedings would continue to consider the remaining items on the agenda.

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Doran,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the decision be deferred to enable the Council to receive a definitive answer from Urban Villages as to whether it was it was permissible to 'flip' an event space and for Council officers to bring back a report on all available options for Newington F.C. in North Belfast.

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On a vote by show of hands, fifteen Members voted for the amendment and thirty-seven Members against and it was declared lost.

2024/25 Quarter 3 Financial Report

At the request of a Member, the Council agreed that the decision under the heading '2024/25 Quarter 3 Financial Report' be amended to provide that a report be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee regarding the Council's banking arrangements and its ethical procurement framework.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

At the request of a Member, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st February, under the heading 'Finance, Procurement and Performance', be amended to provide that all of the tenders considered, including that for the appointment of a public analyst, be approved for public advertisement.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the above-mentioned amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor Bunting,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 4th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Brennan,
Seconded by Councillor Murphy,

That the minute of the meeting of the People and Communities Committee of 4th February under the heading 'Applications for Dual Language Street Signs' be amended to provide that Malone Valley Park be included within the list of streets in which a second street nameplate in Irish would be erected.

On a vote by show of hands, twenty-nine Members voted for the amendment and twenty-three against and it was declared carried.

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Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the above-mentioned amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 4th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Nelson,
Seconded by Alderman Lawlor and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 5th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Carson,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 11th February, 2025, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 20th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Notice of Motion

Dogs in Kennels Transfer of Ownership

In accordance with Notice on the agenda, it was

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Verner that

"This Council recognises that the safety of people and communities is paramount, and that any dog irrespective of breed or type may display aggression. However, this Council also recognises that the provisions, as set out within the Statutory Rule The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024, under powers conferred by Article 25(1)(c) and (8) of The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 (the 1983 Order), as

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relates to XL Bully dogs that make it an offence to rehome is unnecessary cruel.

Restriction of rehoming, even by establishments such as rescue centres and animal shelters has led, as is leading to, the unnecessary destruction and euthanasia of healthy animals, which have no history of violence or aggression, and goes against the 'unnecessary suffering' clause in the Welfare of Animals Act NI 2011. Therefore this Council will write to the DAERA minister outlining our opposition to the continuation of the legislation as currently set out and asks that the Minister allow for managed rehoming by shelters and other specific animal rescue establishments, of dogs including those considered to be XL Bullies with no history of aggression or violence, to suitable owners, to prevent further animal suffering."

Amendment

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

"This Council recognises that public safety is of utmost importance and that any dog, regardless of breed or type, may display aggressive behaviour. It is also essential to ensure that animal welfare is not compromised. The restrictions on rehoming outlined in The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order 2024 is now in place, and its implementation should be assessed particularly regarding outcomes for public safety and animal welfare.

A balanced and evidence-based approach is necessary to ensure that both public safety and animal welfare concerns are addressed effectively. Like any new legislation there is an imperative to consider its outcomes.

Therefore, this Council will write to the DAERA Minister requesting an assessment of the impact of these restrictions to date."

The amendment was put to the Council and on a vote by show of hands forty-six Members voted for the amendment and four Members voted against.

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

Deputy Lord Mayor
Chairperson

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Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 21st March, 2025

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Whyte (Deputy Chairperson); and
Alderman McCoubrey;
Councillors Beattie, Black, Brennan, Bunting, Cobain,
de Faoite, R-M Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett,
Groogan, Long, Maghie, McDonough-Brown, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin and Nelson.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Ms. S. Murtagh, Portfolio Manager, Property and Projects;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from the Chairperson (Councillor Murphy).

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st 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 omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Groogan, R-M Donnelly and Duffy declared an interest in item 7(a) Minutes of the Shared City Partnership in so far as it related to PEACEPLUS in that

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they worked for organisations which had applied for funding. As the item did not become the subject of debate, they were not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in item 2(c) Update on Hardship Fund, in that she worked for or was associated with an organisation which had applied for funding and left the meeting while this item was under consideration.

Councillor Long declared an interest in item 2(b) Support for businesses affected by the August riots, in that his wife was Justice Minister, and he left the meeting while these items were under discussion.

Councillor Brennan declared an interest in items 2(c) Update on Hardship Fund, 4(a) Summer Community Diversionary Programme Assessments 5(b) Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund and 9(a) LORAG - Youth Club Development - Council Land, in that she worked for or was associated with organisation which had applied for funding and left the meeting while these items were under consideration.

Councillors Beattie and Councillor Duffy declared an interest in item 2(d) Social Supermarket Fund in that they were associated with organisations which applied for funding and left the meeting while this item was under discussion.

Councillor McDonough-Brown declared an interest in item 2(c) – Update on Hardship Fund in that his partner was employed by Save the Children, and he left the meeting during discussion of the matter.

Restricted Items

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

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

The Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

In- housing of external security services

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 25th October 2024, it had rejected a request to proceed with a tender of up to 5 years for Security Guarding Services at a maximum value of £5,000,000. The Committee had instead requested a report into the introduction/delivery of an in-house model. Accordingly, the City Solicitor/Director of

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Legal and Civic Services submitted a report which provided an update on analysis undertaken to date in respect of the request and which set out the proposed next steps.

The Committee agreed the following:

- A review of the level of manned guarding generally across the Council estate to ensure that it remained appropriate, necessary and fit for purpose;
- An update on the planned review of security arrangements for the City Hall to be provided to Committee in the coming months; and
- As the current contract ends in July 2025, to proceed with a tender for an interim short- term contract (for 1 year plus the possibility of a further extension, subject to a review being undertaken after six months) for external security support for the four areas outlined in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

**Support for businesses affected by
August disorder – update**

The Committee deferred consideration of the report until its next monthly meeting.

Update on Hardship Programme 2024/25

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the implementation of the 2024-25 Hardship Programme, which sought to help alleviate the impact of poverty and to support those vulnerable people impacted by the cost-of-living crisis across the city. The report also provided an update on the establishment of a Belfast Anti-Poverty Network.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the implementation and impact to date of the 2024/25 Hardship Programme;
- ii. agreed to the recommendation of the Cost-of-Living Working Group to realign £12,500 from the South Belfast Food Bank to the Schools Hardship Programme as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report; and
- iii. noted the summary report from the Anti-Poverty Networking event held in October 2024 and agreed that officers work with partners to establish an Anti-Poverty Network for Belfast.

Social Supermarket Fund

The Committee agreed to defer to a special meeting consideration of a report on the Social Supermarket Fund 2025/26.

Contracts Update

The Committee:

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

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- approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2);
- approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3); and
- noted the award of retrospective Single Tender Actions in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 4).

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Committee was reminded that in, June 2024, it had agreed that a review of the allocations of the Council's Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) would be carried out in March 2025, a year after the first round of in principle allocations under the programme were confirmed. The programme was in progress, with 20 projects receiving in principle allocations. Accordingly, the Committee considered a report which provided a review of those allocations to date.

The Committee noted:

- the update provided on projects under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund;
- agreed that a review of the process be undertaken, with a report to be submitted to a future meeting; and
- that further detailed updates be taken to the next round of meetings of the Area Working Groups for Members' consideration, with updates on the Local Investment Fund (LIF) and the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF) projects also to be included.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Notice of Motion – Action to Address Empty Homes

The Committee was advised that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 20th February, had referred the following motion to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration:

“This Council notes with concern the growing number of households (48,000) on the housing waiting list.

The Council also notes with concern that despite the huge demand for public housing: there remains a substantial number of homes in Belfast which are empty. According to Land and Property this figure sits at 3,694 for the Belfast area.

As a local authority, the Council commits to working with the relevant departments to try to bring empty homes back into use as affordable and social housing. Council notes that the DFC Empty Homes strategy, which aimed to do this, ended in 2018.

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The Council therefore commits to developing a strategy alongside DFC, the Housing Executive and other statutory bodies to ensure there is a coordinated action plan to bring disused homes into public use. This action plan will be funded and appropriate measures such as an empty homes rates premium, strengthened compulsory purchase powers and financing support for converting empty homes into social housing are brought forward to ensure it is able to be delivered.

The Council will seek to establish an Empty Homes Partnership, similar to the Scottish model, which will coordinate these efforts with the relevant bodies.

The Council will also seek funding from DFC to appoint an Empty Homes Officer in order to liaise directly with the owners of empty homes, to understand why the home is empty, and to offer tailored solutions to turn it into a home again.”

The motion had been proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor Groogan.

The motion calls upon the Council to undertake a number of actions in relation to empty homes, including developing a strategy, establishing a partnership and appointing an empty homes officer - the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee was responsible for strategic policy, working with partners to lead on the Belfast Agenda and also agreeing the Local Development Plan and accordingly the motion was referred to this Committee.

The Committee noted that the Motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report be brought to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Motion and the potential costs implications.

**Notice of Motion Developing a Sponsorship and
Philanthropy Network in the City**

The Committee was informed that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 20th February, referred the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Long and seconded by Councillor McAteer to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration:

'This Council agrees to take on a lead role in developing a sponsorship and philanthropy network in the city, in order to understand how we can align and strengthen the corporate responsibility commitments of organisations and institutions to practically deliver city and community priorities.

This would encourage businesses and individuals to contribute their skills, time and financial support to building a better Belfast.'

The City Solicitor/Director of Civic and Legal Services advised that the motion calls upon the Council to develop a sponsorship and philanthropy network in the city - the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for strategic policy and working with partners to lead on the Belfast Agenda and also agreeing the Local Development Plan

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and therefore the motion was referred to this Committee. However, this Notice of Motion aligned with ongoing work by the Social Value Policy Working Group, which considered a report on Corporate Social Responsibility and Tackling City Challenges and Maximising Social Impact at its most recent meeting on 11th February, 2025. The Committee might therefore wish to refer this Notice of Motion to the Social Value Policy Working Group to be taken forward.

The Committee noted that the Motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report be brought, in the first instance, to this Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Motion and the potential costs implications.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Summer Community Diversionary Programme Assessments

The Committee agreed to defer to a special meeting consideration of a report on the Summer Community Diversionary Programme Assessments.

Community Support Plan (CSP) 25/29 including a Review of Community Support Large Grants

The Committee considered the undernote report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To update members on the Community Support Plan and associated timeframe to develop the funding programme contained within the Plan which was deferred by P&C Committee on 4th March 2025.

1.2 This report will outline a suggested way forward to undertake engagement with current funded groups and a public consultation on the overall Community Support Plan.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the contents of the report.**
- ii. Note the March P&C committee report and appendices (appendices i, ii, iii).**
- iii. Note the specific questions that are suggested as part of Stage 1 Engagement that was agreed at March P&C committee.**
- iv. Advise if members are content that the proposal for one large funding programme as outlined in the draft CSP that will replace the current Capacity and Revenue**

grants and that this is consulted on in the coming weeks as Stage 2 of the process.

- v. Consider the options for what officers include in the public consultation process with regards to possible funding amounts and maximum limits for the Community Support Large Grants Programme.
- vi. Agree that a detailed update on the 2 stage engagement process findings is brought back to SP&R Committee in June.
- vii. Agree that the June report should also include information on the programming, footfall and activity in our community centres, as well as the total cost for running each council and independently managed community centre.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

The background to the development of the new Community Support Plan is included in the following appendices;

- I. March P&C Committee report
- II. Community Support Grant options
- III. Draft community support plan

3.2 The decision register from People and Communities March Committee states:

- 1. Members did not agree a financial budget for 2025/26 year and requested that officers engage with 30 community organisations, already funded through CSP, to ascertain their current revenue costs.
- 2. Members proposed to change the application assessment to complete by December 2025, and to change the timeline for Committee approval to January 2026;

Following further political engagement officers are requesting that we complete the above two processes in tandem.

3.3 Stage 1 Engagement with Current Groups

Action	Date by
Engagement with selection of current grant recipients (sample of 30 across city,	April 25

Capacity and Revenue grants) and collation of findings as requested by March P&C	
Incorporate findings with public consultation findings and bring final draft CSP back to SP&R.	20 June 2025

3.4 Questions for Funded Groups

During this Engagement with 30 Community organisations who are currently receiving either capacity or revenue grants we are seeking approval to ask the following 4 questions:

1. How much were your running costs for 24/25?
2. How much did you receive from Council for these costs in 24/25?
3. How much did you receive from other sources for these costs in 24/25?
4. What was the deficit you faced in 24/25 in relation to these costs?

Officers will ask for evidence of the above information.

3.5 Stage 2 - Consultation

At P&C Committee members changed the application assessment timeline to completion by December 2025, and changed the timeline for Committee approval to January 2026.

Officers are required to complete a formal consultation process. However, due to the tight timeframe to complete the process for January 2026, we request that the consultation process is reduced from the recommended 12 weeks to 7 weeks (this will include Easter holidays).

The consultation process will seek views on the following elements within the CSP:

- One large community support grant for ongoing activity/programmes in community-based facilities that contribute to CSP outcomes
- Small community support grant for projects that contribute to CSP outcomes
- Community Support Plan Outcomes Framework

3.6 Funding limit options for consultation

Members are asked to consider the options below and recommend one approach that will be used in the consultation documents.

1. No proposed upper or lower limit financial information for a new funding programme.
2. Include information on previous capacity (£50k) and revenue (£20k) and advise that this will be amalgamated into one large community support grant and ask for feedback on possible upper limits.
3. Include a range of upper limit funding between £40 and £60k

3.7 Consultation Timeline

Action	Completion Date
Report to March SP&R seeking permission to carry out consultation on draft CSP plan	21 March 25
Stage 2: Consultation on draft CSP (following April Council ratification and call in)	14 April – 30 May 25
Consultation feedback reviewed, required changes included in draft CSP (3 weeks normally 6-8 weeks) and presented to SP&R committee	20 June 25
Final plan approved by Council (subject to call in)	1 July 25

3.8 Community Centre Scoping exercise

Through recent Member engagement, officers have been asked to undertake an analysis of current council investment in council run community centre assets and bring this back to members as part of the overall work to develop the community support plan.

This analysis will include;

- The cost of running each community centre and total amount across the city
- The number of programmes that are delivered in each centre

- The footfall / number of people who are using each centre

3.9 Presentation of Consultation, Engagement & Scoping exercise

SP&R committee will receive a report in June which will outline the results of:

Process 1 – Finding from the engagement with the 30 Organisations

Process 2 – Finding from the consultation including the question around the protentional funding allocation.

Process 3 – Findings from the Community Centre Scoping Exercise

Members will be asked to review the above evidence and agree a final Community Support Plan and the financial amount which community organisations can apply for the new large community support grants and small grants.

3.10 Timeline for implementation

Members should note that there are significant tight timeframes around the delivery of above, should these timescales be met, there will be further tight timeframes for implementing a new funding programme (see below).

Members should note that there is no scope for delay in the current timescale if officers are to meet the deadline of December 2025 for completion of assessments to the new grant programme.

Action	Completion Date
Open call for application submissions (following call in period)	28 July
Submission deadline for application	26 September
Eligibility check applications by CGU	19 September – 17 October
Applications passed by CGU to Officers for scoring	26 September – 24 October

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Action	Completion Date
Officer Scoring (including internal Unit moderation panelling)	29 September – 28 November
CGU check of final recommendations and duplicate check	2 December
CGU Independent Assessment Panel	5 December
Committee Approval of awards	January 26

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.11 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 LoO.
- 3.12 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. This combined amount provides the overall budget of £3,278,110.
- 3.13 A one off annual increase to the Revenue Programme totaling £1.5million was included for the 25/26 year.
- 3.14 Members should note that any increases to the recurrent budget would impact on the rate. These impacts would be approximately as follows for 26/27; £1m 0.45%, £1.5m 0.675%, £3m 1.35%, £4.5m 2.025%

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.15 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

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additional equality considerations have been factored into the timeline.”

The Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the report;
- ii. noted the report (and appendices i, ii, iii) which had been considered at the March meeting of People and Communities Committee;
- iii. noted and agreed the specific questions that were suggested as part of Stage 1 Engagement that was agreed at the March meeting of the People and Communities Committee;
- iv. agreed to the proposal for one large funding programme as outlined in the draft CSP that would replace the current Capacity and Revenue grants and that this be consulted on in the coming weeks as Stage 2 of the process;
- v. agreed Option 1 - No proposed upper or lower limit financial information for a new funding programme be included in the public consultation process with regards to possible funding amounts and maximum limits for the Community Support Large Grants Programme;
- vi. agreed that a detailed update on the 2 stage engagement process findings be brought back to the Committee in June; and
- vii. agreed that the June report should also include information on the programming, footfall and activity in our community centres, as well as the total cost for running each Council and independently managed community centre.

Planning Update

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update on major planning applications and applications which had been determined by the Planning Committee.

Proposed Planning Application Validation Checklist

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 **The Council has completed consultation on its Draft Planning Application Validation Checklist. The checklist has been amended to take account of consultation responses, where appropriate, and is proposed for adoption by the Council.**
- 1.2 **This report provides a summary of the consultation responses and sets out the proposed changes to the checklist, with the proposed Planning Application Validation Checklist appended (Appendix 3). The proposed checklist is to be considered by the Planning Committee on 18th March 2025 for notation and**

comment, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for agreement and Full Council for ratification and adoption.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- approve the proposed Planning Application Validation Checklist at Appendix 3 for adoption.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1** The Council has completed consultation on its Draft Planning Application Validation Checklist. The Validation Checklist, once adopted, will set out additional statutory information requirements for applications for full planning permission, outline planning permission and approval of reserved matters over and above the current minimum statutory requirements (which remain unchanged).
- 3.2** The Committee agreed the preparation of and consultation on the draft Planning Application Validation Checklist at its meeting on 25th October 2024. The report to that Committee sets out the reasons for the Validation Checklist and background to the consultation, and can be viewed [here](#) (item 5f).
- 3.3** The purpose of the Validation Checklist is to ensure that all the information that the Council needs to fully consider an application is provided at the beginning of the process when it is submitted. The checklist will provide certainty and clarity to applicants as to the information that is required and improve the quality of applications on submission, resulting in quicker decisions against statutory KPIs and more efficient consultation responses.
- 3.4** The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has recently published [Development Management Practice Note 8: Planning Application Validation Checklists](#), which provides guidance to councils on their preparation and implementation of validation checklists. The proposed checklist is consistent with this guidance.

Format of Public Consultation

- 3.5** The public consultation ran from 03 December 2024 to 10 February 2025 (10 weeks). It included the following:

- Online survey on the Council's website (promoted directly to customers, in staff email banners and through the Council's various multimedia channels).
- Engagement workshops with non-statutory consultees on 22nd January 2025 and statutory consultees on 23rd January 2025 (both online).
- Customer workshop with planning agents, architects and applicants on 31st January 2025 (in person in City Hall).
- One-to-one meetings with Shared Environmental Services (SES), DfI Rivers and NI Water on 10th February 2025 (online).
- Discussion at the Planning Committee meeting on 11th February 2025.

- 3.6 A copy of the Draft Planning Application Checklist that was subject to the public consultation is provided at Appendix 1.

Consultation Responses

- 3.7 There were 31 responses to the online survey and eight responses received outside the online survey. A consultation report is provided at Appendix 2, which includes:

- background to the consultation
- overview of the consultation process
- summary of the respondents and key themes raised
- detailed summary of each response, together with officer commentary and proposed changes to the final checklist.

Summary of representations

- 3.8 The main themes arising from the consultation included:
- Broad agreement that the checklist is relevant and necessary.
 - No consensus on how user friendly the checklist is – some felt that it was user friendly, others not, and most neither agreed nor disagreed.
 - Some criticism as to the complexity of the checklist and that the information requirements may be onerous. In contrast, views that the information is needed, provided that it is reasonable and proportionate.
 - Recognition that the indicative guide as to information requirements by type of planning application is overall very helpful.

- Some views that it would be useful to have some best practice examples of some of the requirements
- Desire for information requirements to be discussed with the Planning Service through a Pre-Application Discussion (PAD). Also, that information can be discussed and negotiated where appropriate as part of the validation process.
- Queries as to whether the various statements and assessments can be provided as part of another document (such as a planning statement or Design and Access Statement) or whether standalone documents are required – officers advise the former.
- General view that there should not be additional validation requirements for Householder applications (for example, neither a Biodiversity Checklist nor Climate Change Statement should be required).
- Assertion that information should only be required by the Council where it is relevant, reasonable and proportionate
- Specific suggestions on how parts of the checklist can be improved to make its implementation clearer and more reflective of planning policy.

Planning Committee

- 3.9 The draft checklist was discussed by the Planning Committee at its 11th February 2025 meeting. The Planning Committee suggested that it would be beneficial for the Council to provide an example of a Climate Change Statement to help Householders prepare their applications. As the Committee will note from this report, it is recommended that additional validation requirements for Householder applications are removed. Nevertheless, the Planning Service intends to make available clearer guidance for householders on the planning process generally, including the circumstances when planning permission is required and not needed (permitted development), how to make a planning application and examples of plans and supporting documentation with applications.
- 3.10 The Chair of the Planning Committee asked that a glossary be included with plain language explanation of technical terms; this will be included in the final checklist.

Proposed Validation Checklist

- 3.11 In response to the consultation, the following main changes are proposed in the final checklist.

- i. The final checklist makes it clear that information can be provided in different formats, either as a standalone document or part of another document such as a Design and Access Statement or Planning Statement.
 - ii. The final checklist is explicit that information requirements will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and that information will be sought where it is relevant, reasonable and proportionate. Furthermore, that the checklist does not preclude the requirement for further information during the application process.
 - iii. Establishment of service standards around timeliness of the validation process.
 - iv. Removal of specific additional validation requirements for Householder applications.
 - v. Inclusion of a non-technical glossary of terms and use of plain language throughout the checklist where possible.
 - vi. Amendments to the indicative guide of requirements by type of planning application.
 - vii. Various amendments to some of the specific information requirements.
 - viii. Additional information requirement of a Waste Storage Plan.
- 3.12 The final checklist recommended for agreement and adoption by the Council is provided at Appendix 3. The proposed changes to the draft checklist are highlighted in yellow for ease of reference.

Next steps

- 3.13 Subject to approval by the Committee, adoption of the Planning Application Validation Checklist will be ratified by Full Council on 1st April 2025 to coincide with the beginning of the Planning Service's new performance year 2025/26.
- 3.14 The Planning Application Validation Checklist will be implemented from its publication on the Council's website, expected to be from 2nd April 2025. This will be formally announced through the website, social media and directly to customers on the Planning Service's customer list.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.15 The Council's ability to specify information requirements for particular types of application will have a beneficial impact on efficiency and timely processing of planning applications.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.16 The draft Validation Checklist has been subject to a Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment. The consultation on these has informed the proposed final Planning Application Validation Checklist.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Portfolio Manager presented the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Council’s Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council’s Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents requests for approvals under the Capital Programme.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Capital Programme:
 - **IT Programme – Electronic Document Management System (EDRMS)** – Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme and moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
 - **Fleet Programme – Small Vehicles Service** – agree to move the project to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to

allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

- Duncrue Masterplan - Agree that the Duncrue Masterplan is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.
- Leisure Programme - Agree that the Leisure Programme is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* as a programme of works to allow business cases to be developed.
- City Hall Preservation - Agree that the City Hall Preservation is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* as a programme of works to allow business cases to be developed.
- Bridges Improvement Programme - Agree that the Bridges Improvement Programme is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* as a programme of works to allow business cases to be developed.
- Beacon Programme - Agree that the Beacon Programme is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.
- Girdwood H&S Works - Agree that Girdwood H&S Works is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* as a programme of health and safety works and that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver; and,
- Fleet Replacement Programme 2026/27 – Note the Fleet Programme for 2026/27.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

Physical Programme

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. The Council also delivers externally focused funding streams such as Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Local Investment Fund (LIF), Social

Outcomes Fund (SOF) and Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF), as well as numerous physical programmes and standalone projects that we deliver for central government. Our funding partners include National Lottery Heritage Fund, SEUPB PeacePLUS, the Executive Office, DfC, DfI including the Living with Water Programme, DAERA, Ulster Garden Villages, Levelling Up Fund (LUF), UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and others. When appropriate, the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange site visits to any projects that have been completed.

Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

- 3.2 Members are aware of the scale of the Council's Physical Programme via a range of internal and external funding streams. Members have agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme:

Project	Overview	Stage movement
IT Programme – EDRMS	Implementation of a new centralised approach to the storage, retrieval, sharing and retention of electronic records and information.	Move to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> – held at risk
Fleet Programme – Small Vehicles Service	Procurement of two smaller collection vehicles to improve collection performance in narrow and restricted streets.	Move to <i>Stage 2 - Uncommitted</i>
Duncrue Masterplan	Redevelopment of the whole Duncrue site aimed at improving the efficiency of the site.	Add at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i>
Leisure Programme	Delivery of the next stage of the Leisure Programme.	Add at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i>
City Hall Preservation	Programme of works to ensure the preservation of the City Hall building	Add at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i>
Bridges Improvement Programme	Programme of remedial works on bridges across the Council estate.	Add at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i>

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Beacon Programme	Provision of beacons as an alternative to traditional bonfires.	Add at Stage 1 – <i>Emerging</i>
Girdwood H&S Works	Urgent works to the roof of the Girdwood Community Hub building.	Add at Stage 1 – <i>Emerging</i>

IT Programme – EDRMS

- 3.3 The Electronic Document and Records Management System (EDRMS) is a new centralised approach to the storage, retrieval, sharing and retention of electronic records and information. This project is part of the overall IT Programme and a business case has been submitted. Members are asked to agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme and moved to **Stage 3 – Committed** and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

Fleet Programme – Small Vehicles Service

- 3.4 This project was added to the Capital Programme as a **Stage 1 – Emerging** project in December 2024. It forms part of the Council’s Waste Collection service and seeks to address issues around difficult to access streets via the introduction of smaller refuse collection vehicles. Following a successful trial utilising lease vehicles it is proposed to procure the small vehicles. Members are asked to agree to move the project to **Stage 2 – Uncommitted** to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

Duncrue Masterplan

- 3.5 The Duncrue facility requires significant physical investment as well as strategic consideration of what is situated on this site and how it operates. A significant number of other key council projects and strategies will directly impact on this project. Members are asked to agree that the Duncrue Masterplan is added to the Capital Programme at **Stage 1 – Emerging** to allow a business case to be developed.

Leisure Programme

- 3.6 Members will be aware of the £105m Leisure Transformation Programme which was a ten-year programme designed to improve the Council's leisure centres, programmes and services. The remaining centre under LTP is Girdwood which is on the Capital Programme at *Stage 2 - Uncommitted*. Members will also be aware that consultants are continuing their work looking at other centres, and also that there are a number of other inter-linked pieces underway which relate to leisure including the Sports Development and Physical Activity Strategy and the development of the new Pitches Strategy. Members are asked to agree that the Leisure Programme is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* as a programme of works to allow business cases to be developed.

City Hall Preservation

- 3.7 In November 2024, Members agreed to add several heritage schemes to the Council's Capital Programme and developmental work is underway on those projects. The City Hall is one of the 70+ listed assets the Council owns and requires a programme of works in order to preserve its historical fabric, along with ensuring the delivery of its operational and civic functions. Members are asked to agree that City Hall Preservation is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* as a programme of works to allow business cases to be developed.

Bridges Improvement Programme

- 3.8 Bridges surveys have been carried out across the council estate and a programme of necessary remedial work on a number of sites across multiple years is now being prepared. Members are asked to agree that the Bridges Improvement Programme is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* as a programme of works to allow business cases to be developed.

Beacon Programme

- 3.9 For the last number of years, the Council has been providing Beacons as a managed, environmentally more acceptable alternative to traditional bonfires, where these are requested. The programme has grown and is expected to continue to do so in the year 2025/26. Members are asked to agree that the Beacon Programme is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.

Girdwood Hub H&S Works

- 3.10 It is proposed that immediate health and safety works are undertaken to the building. Members are asked to agree that Girdwood H&S Works is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 - Emerging* as a programme of health and safety works and that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

Capital Programme - Fleet Programme 2026/27

- 3.11 Members will know that the Council needs to run and maintain a substantial fleet in order to deliver its services and that the Committee noted the programme for the next financial year 2025/26 last month. To assist with financial planning and in recognition of lengthy lead-in times for this industry, the programme for the following financial year, 2026/27, is now also presented for Members to note. There is a rolling allocation of £2.2m towards the Fleet Programme for 2026/27. The Fleet Programme has been developed in conjunction with Council departments and reflects the service needs of the organisation, and there are ongoing issues caused by the high age profile and condition of the fleet operating well beyond its recommended operational life cycle. The agreed Fleet Programme for 2026/27 is attached at Appendix 1. Members are asked to note the agreed Fleet Programme for 2026/27.

3.12 **Financial & Resource Implications**

Financial Implications – Fleet Replacement Programme 2026/27 – this is an existing rolling allocation of £2.2m on the Capital Programme relating to the Council's fleet.

Resource Implications – Officer time to deliver.

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

All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Update on Area Working Groups

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of the South Area Working Group of 24th February, the North Area Working Group of 25th February, the West Area Working Group of 27th February and the East Area Working Group of 6th March 2025.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

CIPFA Prudential Code Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Indicators 2025-26

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

"1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 and the supporting Prudential and Treasury Codes produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), require the Council to consider the affordability and sustainability of capital expenditure decisions through the reporting of prudential and treasury management indicators.**
- 1.2 The Prudential Code requires the Council to produce a Capital Strategy for 2025/26. This report provides information for Members on the Capital Strategy, incorporating the prudential indicators for Belfast City Council for the period 2025/26 to 2027/28, and the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**
 - note the contents of this report and the prudential and treasury management indicators included within the appendices to the report.**

And agree:

- The Authorised Borrowing Limit for the Council of £119m for 2025/26.**
- The Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26, which has been included as Appendix B to this report.**

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 The Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 requires the Council to adopt the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. In doing so, the Council is required to agree a minimum revenue provision policy annually and to set and monitor a series of Prudential Indicators, the key objectives of which are to ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of the council are affordable, prudent and sustainable.**
- 3.2 At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 9 December 2011, Members approved the Council's Treasury Management Policy which is based on the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice. The Treasury Management Policy requires that a Treasury Management Strategy be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on an annual basis and that it is supported by a mid-year and year end treasury management reports. Recent changes in the CIPFA Prudential Code recommends best practice that treasury management reports are submitted on a quarterly basis.**
- 3.3 The Capital Strategy, incorporating the prudential indicators, is included as Appendix A, while the Treasury Management Strategy and treasury management indicators have been included as Appendix B.**
- 3.4 The comparison of 'Gross Debt' to 'Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)' is the main indicator of prudence when considering the proposed capital investment plans of the Council. Estimated gross debt should not exceed the CFR for the current year plus two years. The Council's estimated gross debt position, illustrated in Table 6, Appendix A, is comfortably within the CFR in the medium term. The Director of Finance therefore considers the estimated levels of gross debt as being prudent.**
- 3.5 Table 10 (Appendix A) shows the estimated financing costs for capital expenditure as a percentage of the estimated net revenue stream for the Council, based on the medium term. These illustrate that in the medium term, capital financing costs will represent an average of 4.8% of the Council's net running costs. On this basis the Director of Finance is satisfied that the level of capital expenditure is affordable.**
- 3.6 The Finance Act requires the Council to set an affordable borrowing limit, relating to gross debt. The Prudential Code**

defines the affordable limit as the 'Authorised Borrowing Limit' and gross borrowing must not exceed this limit. Table 8 (Appendix A) sets out the recommended 'Authorised Borrowing Limit' for the Council as being £119m for 2025/26.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.7 As detailed in the report

Equality or Good Relations Implications

3.8 None."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes of
the Meeting of 4 March 2025**

That Committee noted the key issues arising at the meeting and approved and adopted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel of 4th March, 2025.

Equality and Good Relations

**Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting
on 10th March 2025**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 10th March, 2025 including:

Segregation and Environment Report - Update

The Partnership recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it notes the contents of the report, including the activity that has taken place across Council and externally to progress the Actions contained in the report.

**Refresh Good Relations Strategy and
Development of a 3-year Action Plan in 2025/26**

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

PEACE IV – Secretariat Update

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

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**PEACEPLUS Belfast City Council Local
Community Action Plan – Update**

- The Partnership noted the contents of the report and agreed: -
 - Option i data collection approach whereby Council retains Participant IDs only,
 - the M&E Framework in principle subject to approval by SEUPB.
- The Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report and agree recommendations above.

Update from Partnership Members

- Jim Donnelly – Active Community Network presented the Trauma of Inequality
- Wasif Naeem – Belfast Islamic Centre, Belfast Multicultural Association and Ramadan Tent Project, provided information regarding the Open Iftar event on the 23rd March.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Party Group
Leaders Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 13th March, 2025.

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Belfast National Graves Association	8 April 2025	Easter Lily Launch – reception and speeches to give an insight in Belfast's history. Numbers attending: 50 – 60	C	None	

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Ulster University	5 June 2025	Sustainable Innovation Challenge Celebration Reception – speeches and award presentation for University students from UUU, Liverpool and Manchester. Numbers attending: 100	A	Under review to be determined by City Solicitor under delegated authority	
British Council	9 June 2025	Reception for the British Council TVET (Technical & Vocational Education and Training) Seminar for guests attending this conference Numbers attending: 80	A & B	Under review to be determined by City Solicitor under delegated authority	
St Johns Ambulance NI	2 July 2025	West Belfast Volunteer Recognition Evening to celebrate the profound impact of our work, present service awards and express our gratitude to volunteers and encourage greater	C	None	

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
		<p>participation from the surrounding community.</p> <p>Numbers attending 50</p>			
Grand Lodge of Free Masons of Ireland	4 October 2025	<p>300 year Anniversary/ Tercentenary Celebration – Reception, Dinner, Speeches, entertainment and dancing.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 300</p>	C	None	Wine and Soft Drinks Reception as significant anniversary
Holocaust Memorial Day Trust	20 January 2026	<p>Northern Ireland regional ceremony to mark Holocaust Memorial Day 2026 - a time for all to remember the millions of people killed in the Holocaust and subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The event is the official Northern Ireland</p>	C	None	

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
		commemoration of the Holocaust. Numbers attending – 350			

Request for the use of Barnetts Demesne and the Cenotaph at the City Hall

The Committee considered a request from the County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast for the use of Barnetts Demesne to host its annual Twelfth of July celebrations; and the City Hall Garden of Remembrance and Cenotaph to hold a service of remembrance on 12th July 2025.

The Committee:

- granted authority to the applicant for the proposed events on 12th July, 2025;
- authorised the event to take place based on the submission of appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Directors of the relevant departments and on the condition that the Event Organisers:
 - resolves all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
 - meets all statutory requirements, including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and
 - shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.

The Committee noted that the above decisions were taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which was currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Council's Commercial team.

Minutes of the Meeting of the Cost-of-Living Working Group 6 March

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Cost-of-Living Working Group of 6th March, 2025.

Minutes of the Meeting of the City Centre Working Group 7 March

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the City Centre Working Group of 7th March, 2025.

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Minutes of Belfast Stories Working Group 11 March

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Belfast Stories Working Group of 11th March, 2025.

LORAG – Youth Club Development – Council Land

The Committee agreed that officers investigate the lease and administrative fees being paid by LORAG for Council-owned land and the possibility of a waiver and that a report thereon report be submitted to the Committee.

**Bi Monthly Meeting of the Strategic Policy and
Resources Committee: Efficiency/Consultancy
Paper**

It was agreed that a special meeting of the Committee be held to consider an initial report on efficiency savings/consultancy fees and fees and charges.

Chairperson

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

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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

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- 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 following 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

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- 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

Action	Completion Date
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.

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

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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

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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

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 12th March, 2025

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Deputy Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCormick;
The High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer;
Alderman Lawlor; and
Councillors Black, de Faoite, D. Douglas, Duffy,
Hanvey, Kelly, Lyons, Maskey, McCabe,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay,
R. McLaughlin, O'Neill and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Ms. E. Clark, Programme Manager;
Ms. L. Leonard, European and International Relations
Manager;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business and Research Development
Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of the Chairperson, Councillor Nelson.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 5th 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.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor O'Neill declared an interest in item 2a) 'Visit Belfast', as he was on the Board of Visit Belfast but as this was a Council appointment, he did not leave the meeting whilst the item was being considered.

In relation to item 3a) 'Vacant to Vibrant Scheme', Councillor Duffy declared an interest in that his employer had submitted an application to the scheme and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration. Councillors R. McLaughlin and Black declared an interest in the same item, as they were Members of the West Belfast Partnership Board but as these were Council appointments, they did not leave the meeting whilst the item was being considered.

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Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in item 4a) 'Response to the Department for Infrastructure Review of Trust Ports Consultation', as he was on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Presentations

Visit Belfast

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed Mr. G. Lennon, Chief Executive, Visit Belfast, and Ms. M. McGivern, Chair, Visit Belfast, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting.

The Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism, advised the Committee that the Visit Belfast representatives were in attendance to present its annual funding request for 2025/26 and to set out its strategic development and operational delivery, focused on supporting tourism growth.

She highlighted the continued growth within the tourism sector and that Belfast had hosted 1.7 million overnight trips that accounted for 31 per cent of all overnight trips across Northern Ireland. She reported that the overnight trips had generated £538 million in tourism spend, 44 per cent of all tourism spend across Northern Ireland. She explained that challenges included staffing, costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the impact of opening hours on hospitality.

She advised the Committee that the Council had worked closely with Visit Belfast, Belfast's Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO), to ensure that Visit Belfast's 2024-2027 strategy 'New Horizons for Belfast', and its year 2 business plan 2025/26, aligned with the four themes of the Council's 'Make Yourself at Home' tourism plan:

- **Grow** the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way;
- **Position** the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out;
- Enhance the **Experience** for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer, and;
- **Sustain** its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.

The representatives provided a summary of the 2024-2027 strategy 'New Horizons for Belfast', including growth targets and its key pillars.

The Committee was presented with an update on the progress of year one of the strategy, 2024/25, including performance highlights, and the economic, social and environmental impact.

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In relation to the business plan for year two, 2025/26, Mr. Lennon provided the Committee with a summary of the policy and market context, advising that work had been done to ensure the plan and strategy aligned with existing strategies, such as the Belfast Agenda and the Department for the Economy's Economic Vision and Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland, in order that the actions of Visit Belfast delivered on the objectives of all policies.

He summarised the outlook for 2025/26, including opportunities in relation to major events, strategy, investment and growth, and the challenges in relation to the economy, policy, infrastructure and experience.

He outlined the focus areas for 2025/26:

- Growing demand by leveraging major events and infrastructure;
- Expanding year-round demand - shoulder season and midweek;
- Capitalising on increased tourism demand for Belfast to spread benefits of tourism including into our city neighbourhoods;
- Demonstrating sustainable leadership and innovation;
- Promoting Belfast's emerging luxury and premium offer;
- Extreme collaboration across industry partnerships;
- Driving growth and innovation through AI, digital and data; and
- Developing our people and next-generation talent within Visit Belfast and across our industry.

In respect of delivery, he provided the Committee with a detailed breakdown of the targets, outputs and approach in relation to marketing and communications, visitor servicing and destination management, business events and leisure trade.

The representatives concluded the presentation by highlighting the economic impact of the 2025/26 plan, which would deliver £141 million to the city's economy. It was further highlighted that the plan would place an equal focus on the economic, social and environmental impact.

During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to cruise ships, the impact of Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) on tourism, business tourism and conferences, inner-city connectivity, Airbnbs, and social media.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance, and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the presentation;
- ii. noted the draft Visit Belfast Business Plan for 2025/26 and that the overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast for the financial

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year 2025/26 had been taken account of in the revenue estimates that had been approved by the Council; and

- iii. approved a funding allocation of £2,076,356 for 2025/26, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets.

Restricted Items

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

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

Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Vacant to Vibrant Scheme

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on the Vacant to Vibrant Scheme and outlined the recommendations from the Vacant to Vibrant Assessment Panel following the receipt and assessment of recent applications.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update in relation to the Vacant to Vibrant Programme and that it would be supporting up to 52 businesses to locate or expand into long term vacant units;
- ii. noted the update on the City Centre funding position, as outlined within section 3.20 of the report;
- iii. agreed the recommended city centre grant awards, as outlined within section 3.22 of the report;
- iv. noted the decision on application V2V147, as outlined within section 3.23 of the report; and
- v. agreed the recommended city-wide grant awards, as outlined within section 3.24 of the report.

Sandy Row Revitalisation Update

The Committee considered a report that provided an update in relation to the Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme.

The Committee noted:

- i. the update on the Department for Communities funded Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme; and
- ii. the eligibility criteria and timelines, as outlined within Section 4.0 and Appendix A of the report.

Markets Update and Business Plan 2025/26

The Committee considered a report that provided an update in relation to city markets and the St George's Market business plan for 2025/26.

During discussion, the Senior Manager, Economy, answered questions from several Members in relation to the Christmas Market.

After discussion, the Committee noted:

- i. the update on city markets, with a focus on St George's Market;
- ii. the priority actions for the coming quarter and that further progress updates would be brought back to the Committee at future meetings; and
- iii. the updated Markets Business Plan 2025/26.

Belfast Castle and Malone House - Scale of Charges 2025/26

The Senior Manager, Economy presented to the Committee a report that set out the proposed scale of charges, that included a new facilitation charge, for Belfast Castle and Malone House for the financial year 2025/26.

The Committee:

- i. agreed the price increases for booking fees as outlined within section 3.3 of the report, and that, subject to ratification by the Council, they would take effect from 14th April, 2025; and
- ii. approved a new facilitation charge, as outlined within section 3.4 of the report.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 3 2024/25

The Committee noted the contents of the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

Belfast 2024 Update and Evaluation (Verbal Update)

The Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism, and the Programme Manager presented to the Committee an update on the Belfast 2024 programme.

The Programme Manager outlined the programme's timeline, objectives and key principles.

She provided a summary of the programme's progress to date, including events, contracts, projects, strategic partnerships and marketing and communications activity.

She highlighted that the Belfast 2024 programme had been recognised as best practice and shortlisted for awards by local and international bodies.

She concluded the presentation by providing the Committee with feedback that had been received in relation to the programme.

During discussion, a Member suggested that a Committee Workshop be held to enable Members to consider the information that had been presented and provide feedback to inform the Belfast 2024 final evaluation report.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the update; and
- ii. agreed to hold a workshop on 26th March, 2025, to provide feedback on Belfast 2024 and inform the final evaluation report.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

**Response to the Department for Infrastructure
Review of Trust Ports Consultation**

The Committee agreed the response to the Department for Infrastructure's Review of Trust Ports consultation, as outlined within section 3.7 of the report.

Positioning Belfast to Compete

International Engagement Approach

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on work to date on developing a new approach to international

engagement activity by the council and to set out emerging thinking ahead of a final draft being presented to a future meeting of this committee, as well as to request approval for council engagement in the June 2025 New York-New Belfast event.

2.0 Recommendation

Members are asked to:

- Note the range of engagement to date and feedback from internal and external partners
- Note and consider the emerging thinking on the content and approach for the new international engagement activity
- Share any additional feedback on the emerging propositions in order to inform the final report that will be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee
- Agree to support and engage in the annual New York-New Belfast event in June 2025 at a cost of £5,000 towards sponsorship and up to a maximum of £7,500 towards travel and accommodation costs for the Lord Mayor and relevant senior officers.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 At the October 2024 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members noted and agreed a series of high-level considerations to shape the work around a new approach to international engagement and agreed that a more detailed report setting out the proposed approach would be brought back to a future meeting.
- 3.2 Since that time, officers have been engaging with teams across a number of relevant council departments as well as key external partners and have also looked at how other cities carry out this work. We have distilled the findings from that engagement and research work into a series of emerging proposals that we consider will shape the final draft report.
- 3.3 The global operating environment is obviously facing significant headwinds and is highly volatile at the present time. Macro-level factors such as these mean that it is difficult to plan activities with any degree of certainty given that changes such as the introduction of tariffs can impact directly on commitments and ambitions around trade and FDI activity. At a regional level, Invest NI has released a new business strategy, including an enhanced focus on both FDI and international trade activity.

- 3.4 More locally, the recent Belfast Agenda refresh and collective commitment to a series of agreed priority actions means that any future approach needs to align with and support these actions. Within the council, the changing operational structures – with new teams established over recent years focusing on activities such as Innovation, Climate and City Regeneration – mean that many officers are engaging in international networks and partnerships as part of their ‘business as usual’. This would not have been the case when the original international relations framework was established in 2017. In addition, the increased focus on international events such as One Young World and Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, as well as the planned investment in Belfast Stories demonstrate an enhanced focus on attracting international visitors to Belfast. This presents additional opportunities not only for developing and implementing a strong city narrative for key audiences, but also to consider opportunities for ‘layering up’ business and cultural investment opportunities.
- 3.5 Officers have now met with numerous teams across the council involved in international activity in order to understand planned activity as well as the level of financial and staff resources allocated to that activity. We have also met some of our key external partners involved in international activity (including universities; colleges; British Council; Invest NI; Visit Belfast). We noted an extensive programme of engagement in formal and informal networks, partnerships and programmes across a range of disciplines – much of which is carried out as discreet, stand-alone activity relating to those specific business areas. Teams identified some areas where they could benefit from (and contribute to) added value products and services such as improving information sharing; insights and data collation – particularly focusing on key messages and unique selling points. It was recognised that emerging investments such as the City Deal projects present an opportunity for enhancing that messaging.
- 3.6 The role of the Lord Mayor remains a key resource in ‘fronting up’ engagements with potential investors or supporting on city promotion activities. Access to the City Hall is widely valued by partner organisations and can be a very useful tool in our wider menu of investment and city promotion support.
- 3.7 Taking account of the issues raised during the engagement work, officers are of the view that there are a number of opportunities for establishing more effective ways of working across internal teams and with external partners, as well as

considering new products that can be used by all partners to generate a coherent, positive messaging around the city as a vibrant business and investment location. We also consider that there is value in focusing on a small number of areas in which we can add value – while recognising that partner organisations and internal teams will be moving ahead on a wider range of activities that are fairly self-contained or which they are able to deliver independently.

3.8 By way of areas of focus, these may include:

- Capital investment – focus on engagement at key events and targeting specific investment opportunities/funds to deliver corporate and city ambitions
- Digital innovation – focus on engagement in key events and networks – and considering how to integrate project-based opportunities (including emerging City Deal investments) into wider city promotion messaging
- Trade and investment – helping more local businesses to engage in export and supporting Invest NI in FDI promotion activity
- Education – we expect that this work will be led by universities but that there may be opportunities to add value e.g. through civic engagement.

3.9 To move this forward, it is proposed that the collective range of international engagement activity will be ‘packaged’ together and presented to the committee as a cohesive programme of work on an annual basis, but as part of a wider strategic approach. Delivery responsibility will sit across a number of council teams and partner organisations but the collaborative programme of work will give members a picture of the scale of engagement – as well as demonstrating the added value that is being generated from relevant individual connections.

3.10 New York New Belfast – request for financial support and agreement to attend

As noted above, the plan for the coming years is to present an overarching programme of work sets out the collective commitments for that coming year. Each team will be responsible for securing individual approvals – including budgetary approvals – to progress their planned activities. Ahead of this more strategic approach being implemented, it is likely that there will be a number of activities that need to come to the committee for approval, given timelines for decision. One of those activities is New York New Belfast

(NYNB). Member will be aware that this is an annual event which takes place in New York and which promotes business and investment opportunities in Belfast to a selected audience of government, private business and civic leaders. The 2025 event will take place on 12 June 2025. Over 150 delegates are expected to attend the event which incorporates discussions on the themes of tourism, innovation, infrastructure and excellence in technology.

- 3.11 While the focus to date has been on selling Belfast as an investment location, the 2025 programme will include an enhanced focus on Belfast's indigenous entrepreneurial strengths. Under the banner of 'Meet the Belfast Maker' a number of city CEOs will highlight their contribution to the capital's economy and outline opportunities for collaboration and investment from external partners. This June's event will also include a delegation of businesses from the Belfast Chamber of Commerce. Members are asked to agree to sponsor the event at a cost of £5,000 and to agree to attendance at the event by the Lord Mayor and appropriate senior officers, at a cost not to exceed £7,500.

3.12 Financial and Resource Implications

New approach to international relations: no specific resource implications at this point. The action plan that will be presented to a future meeting of this committee will include a detailed breakdown of expenditure on relevant activities.

- 3.13 New York New Belfast event: Members are asked to contribute £5,000 towards sponsorship for the 2025 event and to agree to attendance at the event by the Lord Mayor and relevant senior officers, up to a maximum estimated cost of £7,500. The above costs are set aside within the existing International Relations budget 2025/26.

3.14 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no direct Equality or Good Relations implications associated with this report."

During discussion, in response to a Member's question regarding the stakeholder groups that contribute to the international engagement work, the Senior Manager, Economy, advised the Committee that a final draft report would be submitted to a future meeting that would include further detail in relation to the issues raised.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 12th March, 2025**

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the range of engagement to date and the feedback from internal and external partners;
- ii. noted the emerging thinking on the content and approach for the new international engagement activity;
- iii. agreed to support and engage in the annual New York-New Belfast event in June, 2025, at a cost of £5,000 towards sponsorship and up to a maximum of £7,500 towards travel and accommodation costs for the Lord Mayor and relevant senior officers; and
- iv. agreed that, as part of a final report that would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee, further detail would be provided in respect of the appropriate governance and management arrangements to support the delivery of priority actions.

Events Action Plan

The Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism presented to the Committee the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the proposed approach to development of a Tourism Events Action Plan -**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this paper and subsequent next steps for the development of a Tourism Events Action Plan.
- Recommendations relate to the information contained in section 8.0 of the report, Members are asked to agree to the development of an action plan, and associated ToR with budget of up to £40,000

3.0 Main Report

Strategic Context of City Events:

Belfast Agenda:

The Council has set out a strategic mandate to develop a city for everyone in its Community Plan the Belfast Agenda, where the vision is that:

Belfast will be a city re-imagined and resurgent. A great place to live and work for everyone. Beautiful, well connected and culturally vibrant, it will be a sustainable city shared and loved by all its citizens, free from the legacy of conflict. A compassionate city offering opportunities for everyone. A confident and successful city energising a dynamic and prosperous city region. A magnet for talent and business and admired around the world. A city people dream to visit.

City Imagining:

To achieve this vision, the Council launched a ten-year Cultural Strategy in 2019 - *A City Imagining* which sets out a long-term commitment to facilitating a new integrated phase of culture-led progress and development for Belfast. The strategy brings together the culture, events and tourism functions within Council, as well as identifying areas of cross departmental working to support the Belfast Agenda.

Belfast's Cultural strategy, *A City Imagining*, recognises the importance of events and programming to the wider cultural and tourism profile of Belfast. Events can tell stories, connect people and present new perspectives on our place.

As cities move on from the impacts of COVID-19, consumer sentiment research has indicated that events will take on a new significance as motivators for travel and an opportunity for destinations to differentiate their offer. Events can also create immersive spaces for the visitor to become part of an ever-evolving story.

The benefits of events and cultural programmes to cities are considerable. Many cities have used events to engage with local people, build civic pride and transform their reputation internationally. Events are one of the best ways to measure the economic, social and environmental impact of tourism as they bring together a cross-section of city stakeholders. Importantly they also have the ability to create legacy.

Make Yourself at Home:

To realise the ambitions of the Cultural Strategy, Council developed the Tourism Plan *Make Yourself at Home*, which is a ten-year blueprint to develop and grow tourism in the city with its four directional themes – Grow, Sustain, Experience and Position.

The plan recognises the need to expand the city's experience mix that will encourage visitors to stay longer and increase dwell time to increase economic development and support the environment.

Events also have a key role to play as a motivator to travel as well as delivering direct economic impact

Make Yourself at Home also states that a sustained programme of activity including an annual calendar of signature events, will help attract visitors back to our city following Covid, providing a much-needed boost for citizens as well as the cultural and hospitality sectors and the wider tourism industry.

It further recognises that events will be an exemplar for the four strategic themes of the plan: Grow, Position, Experience and Sustain. These events will:

- Directly contribute to the growth of the tourism industry in Belfast through an increase in out-of-state visitors, dwell time and spend
- Challenge perceptions of Belfast and raise awareness of the diversity and richness of the city's culture, arts and heritage
- Create authentic and contemporary Belfast Experiences of quality
- Establish a model for carbon neutral activity.

Finally, *Make Yourself at Home* notes that events of ambition within the city have the potential to be truly transformative. They will tell contemporary Belfast stories with an unprecedented international reach by fusing digital and real-life experiences. They will leave a lasting legacy of skills and capacity, that will support future generations of tourism ambassadors, creative talent and storytellers.

4.0 Impact of Covid 19:

The Covid-19 pandemic had a considerable impact on events across the globe:

- Mass gatherings were unsafe for an extensive period
- Public confidence in events was affected
- Considerable negative impact on suppliers to the event industry - staff shortages, redundancies, business closure
- Spiralling costs.

Within Council, all events were cancelled during 2020, and in 2021, those which returned were delivered differently, recognising the on-going need for social distancing.

Council events have now in - large returned to pre - pandemic delivery levels, however that is not withstanding the fact that events staff, suppliers and providers are now more difficult to source, with many moving to work in other sectors during the pandemic, infrastructure and ancillary costs have as a result increased substantially and the Council events budget does not currently fully reflect this 'new world' of event delivery post - Covid.

5.0 Status Quo - Current Delivery:

Traditionally the Events team within the Tourism and Events Unit are responsible for a range of event activity which can be largely categorised below:

- Delivery of civic events in the city - the St Patrick's celebrations, Lord Mayors Day, and Christmas Lights Switch on. This would also include ad hoc events of this scale, recent examples being Operation Shamrock and the King's Coronation
- The development and delivery of the Belfast Maritime Festival – a signature event for Belfast – now on a biennial basis as a result of a major strategic review
- Thirdly, the team have a multitude of roles in respect of major or mega events. Often, these are events involving NI wide stakeholders with a number currently in the pipeline, namely; The Oireachtas in 2025 and Ongoing Bidding for the All Ireland Fleadh Cheoil in 2026/27 Past examples included the Giro D'Italia, World Police and Fire Games, MTV Music awards, Tall Ships, One Young World

Delivery of these events, no matter the scale, involves a vast spectrum of tasks which range from stakeholder liaison, consultation, managing contractors, health and safety, legal and insurance, traffic management, community co-design, and significant procurement. Whilst ensuring strategic alignment and maximising the opportunities presented for the city.

Whilst the cultural strategy recognises the opportunity that hosting of major events has for city positioning it recommends delivery of 1 major event every 5 years, and should we be successful in our current bidding we could be in the position of one major every year for the next 3 years.

The remit of the Events team also includes management of funding streams (Support for Sport) and oversight and contract management of the City's Festive Lighting Scheme.

6.0 Other events associated with Council:

Managed by the Culture Unit in Council, the CMAG budget is £2.43m annually. This is broken down as:

- £473,425 to 16 Festivals and Events organisations for two years (minimum audiences of 10,000)
- 600,240 to four Festivals and Events organisations for four years (minimum audiences of 65,000)
- £791,783 to nine Arts and Heritage organisations for four years (audiences over 50,000).
- £564,562 to 27 Arts and Heritage organisations for two years

Finally, City and Neighbourhood Services also deliver a series of community and parks events throughout the year, with key projects being the Spring and Autumn Fairs.

These events make up the calendar of city events and present an opportunity for cultural vibrancy and visitor experience but also opportunities for closer alignment of delivery, coordinated marketing and initiatives on sustainability and inclusivity.

7.0 Previous development work

In July 2017, Council commissioned Festivals and Events International (FEI) to undertake a review of our investment in and support for Events and Festivals, with a view to developing a new Events strategy for the Council and its strategic partners.

In March 2018, a Committee paper to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee presented the key FEI recommendations and proposed a way forward, in conjunction with key partners.

The consultancy team's key recommendations focused on a number of areas including Funding Streams, Capacity Building Support, Evaluation and Measurement and Governance and Delivery.

CG&R adopted the recommendations within the report on 7th March 2018, these were subsequently integrated into the

long term cultural strategy 'A City Imagining'. While these reports refer to the 'integration' of the recommendations within the FEI report, there was a definitive shift in strategic direction which resulted in no stand-alone 'Festival and Events strategy' or Action plan being developed at that time.

That decision was also taken within the context of a number of important developments and milestones, such as the cessation of the European Capital of Culture bidding process, initial recommendations arising from the draft Festival and Events Strategy and the conclusion in March 2020, of the current Cultural Framework and Tourism Strategy.

It is important to also remind Members that the subsequent period of strategy development took place against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic and there has been significant change in market demand as well as delivery models, supplier infrastructure and costs.

Tourism currently has a stand - alone plan to underpin 'A City Imagining' in the form of 'Make Yourself at Home' while City Events does not.

8.0 Need for an Updated Events Action Plan

After significant scoping work, Officers are now of the view that while the FEI report still contains important and relevant information which needs reflected in an updated Events Action Plan to underpin both 'A City Imagining' and 'Make Yourself at Home' through the remainder of their life span (2029 / 2030), a new Events action Plan should be considered

Additionally, Officers have experienced key 'Lessons Learned' in the period since both *City Imagining* and *Make Yourself at Home* began operational roll - out in relation to Council Managed Events - these should be reflected in an updated resourced Events Action Plan with review milestones, KPI's and associated ownership.

This Events Action Plan will require in its formation a period of sectoral, strategic and Elected Member engagement to ensure future 'best fit' of Council - managed events and will address the following points,

Strategic Context:

- Strategic alignment to Belfast Agenda, City Imagining and Make Yourself at Home as well as other regional

strategies (eg DfE Tourism strategy, ACNI strategy) is needed,

- Ensure that Council city events delivered align to the strategic ambitions and priorities of Council
- Consideration of the Council city events portfolio within the context of the events life cycle and rejuvenation points needed at specific future gateways
- Clear articulation and rationalisation needed on what events Council should deliver - 'who, what where, when and why' approach
- Horizon scanning is needed for Officers to identify emerging trends and opportunities for new events
- An aligned approach to ensure that Council events align to the new Tourism NI Events Strategic Vision.
- Consideration of bidding process and decision making frameworks for major/bid for events

Filtering Mechanism:

- Review and rationalisation of both the quality and quantity of Council events currently being delivered and to be delivered in the future
- Consideration is also required as to the appropriateness of Council as the delivery agent for each event in the portfolio or whether other city stakeholders are best placed to deliver certain events or city animation e.g. ongoing work to consider councils role in delivery of culture night.

Development Plans:

- Developmental pathway for each Council event with a Tourism lens and associated budget profiling is needed to ensure tourism and positioning potential is fully exploited.

Budget / Procurement:

- The Council Events Team has a developmental remit, which is not being fully exploited due to constraints on current resources – multi-annual budget consideration is required to allow for developmental pathways- annual budgets present developmental challenges meaning that focus is often on in year delivery.
- The Council events budget has been 'stand still' without 'year on year' developmental or inflationary increases –
- Cultural co-design capability requires enhancement

- Lead-in time for the sector needs to be longer and 2 - 3 year procurement deals are required to allow events to develop / grow

Segmentation:

- Clear visitor segmentation for events is required for each event and Council delivery approach tailored accordingly - much of the portfolio is currently a 'Family Fun' segment, with a limited offering for other identified market segments – there are opportunities to reach some of the more targeted segments.

Programming:

- Balance is needed between cultural co-design / commissioning and 'buying in' programming content as needed for event standout (capacity and capability to deliver must be reviewed). Local input on programming v international input needs considered.
- Internally, a balance is also needed on robust event governance, event development and operational delivery for Officers - all of which are functions associated with the internal Tourism and Events Unit.

Events Team Resourcing:

- The role of the Events Team is currently varied - Event Delivery Agents v Event Development v Major Event / Bidding, a clear resource plan is needed and staffing structure allocated accordingly
- Contingency / flexibility is needed in future event resource planning, especially in relation to major event planning and delivery, as period of high / peak season.
- Flexibility to deal with and respond to ad hoc opportunities

Major Events:

- A new approach needs developed for Major Event Bidding in the City - this is currently reactive for Officers
- A direction is needed on the number of major events to be delivered over the coming years with associated resourcing

Alignment between Culture and Events:

- Further integration on how CMAG events and Council-managed events can best deliver for the culture and tourism offering within the city
- Benchmarking of synergies between tourism and cultural events with other Local Authorities is required reflecting 'best practice' – beyond NI
- The role of city events within the existing Festivals Forum
- The legacy impact of Belfast 2024 on cultural / tourism event delivery. Belfast 2024 puts Belfast on an international stage as a culturally vibrant destination and this will present ongoing opportunities to deliver a compelling proposition for the city as a home of events.

Delivery Structures / Governance:

- Streamlining of governance arrangements across events in the City events calendar across delivery partners
- The potential establishment of new Events Forum for the city needs explored

Belfast Event Positioning:

- The status of Belfast as gateway events destination for the region needs further exploration - to include benchmarking within the NI context and beyond
- Event themes aligned to our tourism positioning require further analysis - UNESCO City of Music, Maritime etc, ensuring Belfast can position itself as a 'Home of Events' and international events destination
- An updated events SWOT for the city and event gap analysis against thematic areas is required. This will inform event development as well as funding and bidding strategies
- New and emerging event 'hooks' through the ongoing 'Belfast Stories' project needs to be considered, including developing accessible and sustainable events
- The consideration of how new tourism product is developed around the city managed events portfolio requires further exploration, as well as how visitor experience can be maximised.

Categorisation / Events Criteria:

- A clearly defined event criteria and purpose is required- tourism, civic, community, cultural, business, corporate (or a combination of these) and the associated hierarchy of city events and subsequent growth potential
- This new pyramid structure should include definitions and criteria for segmentation, programming, categorisation of events which best lend themselves to co-design / commissioning as well as measuring impact / success
- Consideration of event city centre and geographic dispersal across the city centre and neighbourhoods is needed, in line with Neighbourhood Tourism
- A resourced evaluation / monitoring mechanism is required for each category and tier of event and metrics need considered in light of existing models, such as eventIMPACTS and emerging industry updates, while considering Council's own bespoke evaluation, monitoring and reporting needs that take into account social and cultural impact in addition to economic.

Marketing:

- An analysis is needed of the Communications, PR and MARCOMM's approach to each Council-managed event and 'best fit' future direction on the consumer / corporate approach with associated budget requirements.
- Consideration to opportunities to leverage international marcomms opportunities

Funding Synergies / Sponsorship:

- Consideration is needed as to how Council aligns with other event funders in terms of maximising budgets in the current economic climate – the use of co-investment models
- Sponsorship options for Council events also need consideration within the context of financial sustainability.

Policy Context:

- An analysis is needed in terms of gaps on current event policy such as Charity and Community / Business

Engagement - considering benchmarking data and recommendations for future approach.

Training / Education:

- A review of current and future training, networking and advocacy needs of the city events sector is needed to consolidate Council's role as 'leaders' in 'best practice' tourism / cultural event delivery.

To this end, Council Officers are proposing the development of an Events Action Plan for City Events which would underpin both *City Imagining* and *Make Yourself at Home*, which would consolidate the previous findings of the FEI report from 2018, while incorporating new recommendations from the 'Lessons Learned' of Officers, and delivery partners, over the last two plus years.

This would include an assessment on issues highlighted as above, while detailing a future approach to events, including internal resourcing requirements and associated staff skills, governance arrangements and budget requirements to ensure city events are maximised to their full potential in the years ahead.

This Action Plan would allow Officers to agree formalised developmental pathways for the Council-managed portfolio. Findings will be brought back to Committee for consideration in due course. This will inform the Events Unit business planning over the period of the new Action Plan.

Officers are therefore requesting permission to develop a Terms of Reference for issue to market in the coming weeks, for providers to assist with the development of this Events Action Plan, with an associated budget requirement of up to £40,000 to be financed within core budgets.

The commissioned work will incorporate a process of sectoral consultation with relevant stakeholders and Elected Member engagement to inform the Action Plan.

9.0 Financial and Resource Implications:

The development of an Events Action Plan has a budget of up to £40,000 to be allocated for existing budgets.

10.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment:

Any future Events Action Plan will be screened as required.”

The Committee:

- i. agreed to the development of a Tourism Events Action Plan;
- ii. agreed that a Terms of Reference would be issued to market for providers to assist with the development of a Tourism Events Action Plan, with an associated budget requirement of up to £40,000, to be financed within core budgets; and
- iii. noted the contents of the report and the subsequent next steps for the development of a Tourism Events Action Plan.

Growing Businesses and the Economy

Sub-Regional Economic Growth Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on progress with the development of the Local Economic Partnership (LEP) – a key element of the Department for the Economy’s (DfE) sub-regional economic plan.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- Note the update on the Department for the Economy’s [Sub-Regional Economic Plan](#)
- Note the agreed financial allocations for Belfast City Council
- Note the emerging priority areas of focus, subject to further engagement with internal and external partners
- Agree to renew the council’s membership of and contribution to the work of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre for a 2-year period at a cost of £40,000 per year
- Consider the merits of engagement in the Local Enterprise training being delivered via NAC (NI) and, if there is agreement to participate, nominate elected members to take part in this training.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 At the 6 December 2024 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members were updated on the Department for the Economy's 'sub-regional economic plan', including the commitment to establish Local Economic Partnerships in each council area with an overall financial allocation of £45million over three years.

3.2 Since the December meeting, the Department has made some progress on both finalising the financial allocation to each council area and also on agreeing broad areas of eligible spend and metrics to track progress.

3.3 Financial allocations

The financial allocations for each council area have now been confirmed. Belfast City Council will receive up to £956,000 per year – a total of £2,868,000 over three years. DfE is currently in the process of finalising the business case for the funding. Based on feedback from councils, it is expected that the spend profile in year one will be lower than in other years – given the time taken to mobilise partnerships, agree priority projects and recruit staff to lead and oversee project development and delivery.

3.4 As previously noted, it is disappointing that the narrative on sub-regional growth appears to start from the premise that the recent economic progress in Belfast means that additional investment should be focused in other parts of the region. As members will be aware, Belfast is a major economic generator for the rest of NI – almost half of the people that work in Belfast do not live here. However, Belfast also has significant economic inclusion challenges - 6 of the top 10 most deprived wards in NI are in Belfast while the top 15 most deprived wards for the Education, Skills and Training domain are all in Belfast. Officers will be actively working to develop proposals to help ensure that the economic importance of the city and the challenges facing many of our citizens are more clearly understood and to develop approaches to inclusive innovation that maximise benefits across society.

3.5 Eligible activity

In line with the Minister's vision and the sub-regional economic plan, the priority outcome for activities supported through the Local Economic Partnerships funding is higher

productivity. The guidance notes suggest that there are a range of categories that are eligible for support including:

- Commercial property/land development
- Entrepreneurship support
- Sectoral entrepreneurship support
- Scaling support
- Sectoral scaling support
- R&D investment
- Energy efficiency
- Upskilling/reskilling in digital/engineering skills
- Sectoral cluster development

3.6 In order to maximise the available resources, there will be a requirement on LEPs to consult and where possible to work in partnership with bodies doing existing work in an area they are seeking to address. There is potential therefore to supplement funding for existing programmes to drive additional impact in a local area.

3.7 Each LEP will be required to submit an annual action plan outlining priority areas for action in the year ahead. As previously noted, DfE have made a number of stipulations as to mandatory representation on any Local Economic Partnership (including from Local Enterprise Agencies, Chambers of Commerce and FE Colleges). They have also confirmed that DfE and Invest NI are to be involved in each partnership to provide advice on project selection and delivery and to ensure alignment with wider activity and investment.

3.8 Potential approach to partnership

As previously advised at the December 2024 meeting, officers considered a number of options as to the most appropriate structure to perform the role of the LEP. This included utilising existing structures such as the Labour Market Partnership, the 'Our Economy' Board for Community Planning or the Innovation City Belfast Board or alternatively, creating another structure for this specific purpose. Given the available resources, the alignment with existing work and the constraints on partner resources, our initial proposal was to utilise the Labour Market Partnership structure as the 'partnership' – through which priority projects would be developed and to which progress would be reported. Having had further clarification as to eligible areas of spend and available resources, officers remain of the view that the most appropriate, expedient and effective conduit to act as the local LEP is the Belfast Labour Market Partnership – in the interim

at least. It is our understanding that this approach is to be used in a number of councils. If this is agreed, officers will work with both DfE and DfC to consider how the partnerships can align most effectively and also to ensure that the governance requirements for both funders can be met. Our proposal is that we explore this option as an initial way forward – but that we keep it under review in order to ensure that it remains appropriate for the priority work areas agreed. Regular updates will also be provided to committee and the final action plan for each year will be brought to the committee for endorsement.

3.9 Potential priority work areas – initial considerations

At the December 2024 meeting, a number of indicative work areas were set out for consideration. These included:

- **Inclusive employment pathways to high value roles:** through the council's employability and skills work, we have been able to develop targeted responses to meet employer needs across a range of sectors. In more recent years, we have explored opportunities to move up the value chain and create better paid roles with opportunities for career progression. There is currently engagement work underway with DfE to develop a new 'inclusive apprenticeship' approach and this would enable us to provide a seamless transfer from the employment academy into an apprenticeship. While these activities are working well at a small scale, there may be an opportunity to scale up much more significantly, with the potential to make an impact on our economic inactivity levels which have remained stubbornly high over decades
- **Maximising the impact of City Deal investments for local SMEs:** the original business case for the City Deal identified the potential to create 20,000 new and better jobs. As the projects begin to come forward, there are opportunities to consider how our local businesses can access the research expertise and facilities established through the City Deal funding – helping them develop new products and increase their employment numbers. This may include innovation and technology transfer activities; access to challenge programmes and funds and use of the specialist facilities and equipment
- **Enhancement of 'Go Succeed' activities:** Go Succeed is the core business support offer for those starting or growing a business. Over the last year, the service has been funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF).

Following the recent budget statement, the government has announced a one-year extension of SPF – albeit with a 40% reduction in the overall budget. Officers are still working through the implications for Go Succeed but, as a collective, councils are considering whether there is an opportunity to use their LEP resources to ‘top up’ any budget shortfall.

- 3.10 Officers have undertaken some engagement work with key partners over recent weeks to validate this early thinking and to test other potential actions that may emerge, in keeping with the priority areas for action identified by the Department. It is our view that these indicative areas remain valid. There may also be an opportunity to consider net zero interventions given that this is one of the key areas of focus within the Sub-regional Economic Plan. Subject to member agreement, we will use these early concepts as well as the economic insights generated through both the Community Planning refresh process and the development of the annual labour market assessment for the Labour Market Partnership, supplemented by wider research, to work towards a draft final action plan. One of the key principles that we are considering is that we should focus on a smaller number of impactful interventions – rather than having a range of small schemes. This aligns with the Department’s requirements around impact measurement. It also recognises that the financial allocation to Belfast is the smallest of all council areas (alongside Antrim and Newtownabbey).

3.11 Support for UU Economic Policy Centre

Ulster University’s Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) has provided research and insights to the council over many years to develop the underpinning monitoring framework of the Belfast Agenda, undertake research for the Local Development Plan and more recently Local Policies Plan. The Centre has also supported our work on addressing economic inactivity, including undertaking the Belfast-level analysis that formed the foundation pillar of the large-scale event that we hosted in UU Belfast last year. To support the development of local actions for the Local Enterprise Partnership, alongside wider insights relating to skills, planning and regeneration issues, it is proposed that the Council renews its membership and contribution to the work of the UUEPC for a further 2-year period.

3.12 NAC training on Enterprise issues

The Chief Executive has recently received correspondence from the NI branch of the National Association of Councillors (NAC) regarding a series of four training workshops that they are organising for local councillors and officials involved in enterprise issues. The objective of these sessions is to enhance participants' insights and knowledge of these matters and create a council-wide network of 'Local Enterprise Champions'.

3.13 The dates and themes for each of the workshops have been set and are as follows:

- Friday 25 April, 12pm-4pm, Belfast – Overview of the Local Economy
- Friday 30 May, 12pm-3.30pm, Derry/Londonderry – Strategies, Funding and Key Partners
- Friday 20 June, 12pm-3.30pm, Craigavon – Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors
- Friday 5 September, 12pm-4pm, Mallusk – Enterprise site visit and forward planning.

3.14 In order to maximise the learning opportunities, NAC (NI) is keen that all participants share, learn and develop their own enterprise insights, using the principle of co-design. As such, the workshops will be interactive, collaborative and outcomes driven via core, specialist facilitation rather than 'top-down' presentations. To ensure the very best outcome for all proposed Local Enterprise Champions, they are encouraging councils to nominate up to four elected members including – at council's discretion – a senior support officer. Members are asked to consider the merits of engagement and, if there is agreement to participate, nominate elected members to take part in this training.

3.15 Financial and Resource Implications

DfE have now confirmed that the resources for the Local Enterprise Plan in Belfast are £956,000 per annum over three years. This includes an element of staff resources to manage the programme of work.

UUEPC: The annual £40,000 contribution to the UUEPC has been included in Departmental estimates.

Local Enterprise training – the cost per participant for attendance at the four workshops is £395. This can be met within existing budgets.

3.16 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

All activities to be undertaken will be subject to equality screening. This funding formula was determined by the Department for the Economy.”

During discussion, a Member highlighted the establishment of the Local Economic Partnerships and suggested that it would be appropriate for each of the Area Working Groups to be provided with further information in respect of the development of the Local Economic Partnerships.

During further discussion, in relation to the Local Enterprise training that had been organised by the National Association of Councillors (NAC) NI, a Member suggested that, should Members wish to attend the training, they use their training allowance.

In response to a Member’s question, the Business and Research Development Manager provided the Committee with further information in respect of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC).

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the update on the Department for the Economy’s Sub-Regional Economic Plan;
- ii. noted the agreed financial allocations for Belfast City Council;
- iii. noted the emerging priority areas of focus, subject to further engagement with internal and external partners;
- iv. agreed to renew the Council’s membership, and contribution to the work, of the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre for a 2-year period at a cost of £40,000 per year;
- v. agreed that a report be presented to each of the Area Working Groups in respect of the development of the Local Economic Partnerships; and
- vi. agreed that Members would consider the Local Enterprise training organised by the National Association of Councillors (NAC) NI, and that, should they wish to attend, Members would use their training allowance.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Notice of Motion Update

The Committee noted the update to all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that the Committee was responsible for, as outlined within Appendix 1 of the report.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

**Closure of Connswater Shopping Centre - Support
for Tenants (the High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer
to raise)**

The High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer, raised the issue of the recent announcement that Connswater Shopping Centre was set to close. She highlighted the financial and operational challenges that the independent businesses and charities faced, following the short notice of the closure. She further highlighted the need for the Council to support, where possible, the independent businesses and charities that had been affected.

With the permission of the Deputy Chairperson, Councillor R. Brooks addressed the Committee in relation to this issue.

During discussion, a Member suggested that the issue be raised at the next meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Forum.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed:

- i. that a report would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee that would outline potential areas of support that the Council could provide to the charities and independent businesses that had been affected by the closure of Connswater Shopping Centre; and
- ii. that the issue would be raised at the next meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Forum.

**Impact of Belfast Grand Central Station on
Grosvenor Road and Durham Street (Councillor
Black to raise)**

Councillor Black raised the issue of the impact of the works to Belfast Grand Central Station on retailers, hospitality and service providers within the areas of the Grosvenor Road and Durham Street.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 12th March, 2025**

At the request of Councillor Black, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to request:

- i. that, given the impact of Belfast Grand Central Station on retailers, hospitality and service providers, a Revitalisation Scheme be funded for the areas of the Grosvenor Road and Durham Street; and
- ii. an update on the establishment of a multi-agency taskforce that the Minister had proposed to address the wider impact of the works to Belfast Grand Central Station on Sandy Row, Grosvenor Road, Durham Street and other impacted areas.

Committee Workshop

The Committee noted that the Special Committee meeting, scheduled for 26th March, would be used as a workshop to consider the 2025/26 Committee Plan and Belfast 2024.

Chairperson

Licensing Committee

Wednesday, 19th March, 2025

MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

- Members present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson);
Alderman McCullough;
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bradley,
T. Brooks, Collins, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly,
Doran, D. Douglas, Kelly, McCann, McDowell,
McKay, McKeown and Ó Néill.
- In attendance: Mr. K. Bloomfield, HMO Manager;
Mr. S. Hewitt, Building Control Manager;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning); and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Mr. Stephen Hewitt

The Chairperson advised the Committee that this would be the last meeting which would be attended by Mr. S. Hewitt, Building Control Manager, who would be retiring from the Council at the end of the month, after thirty-five years of service.

Members from all parties paid tribute to Stephen for the contribution he had made to the work of the Council and they wished him well in his retirement.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd January, 2025 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 February, 2025, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Delegated Matters

**THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN
PURSUANCE OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT UNDER
STANDING ORDER 37(d)**

Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee noted a list of applications for licences which had, since its last meeting, been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licences
Issued Under Delegated Authority**

The Committee noted a list of applications which had been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation during January and February, 2025.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following two items was 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 item as, due to the nature of the item, 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.

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

**Application for a Renewal Licence to
operate a House of Multiple Occupation for
60 Sandymount Street; and**

**Application for a Renewal Licence to operate a
House of Multiple Occupation for 29 Colenso
Parade**

With the agreement of the Committee, the HMO Manager presented the details of the two applications together.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 19th March, 2025**

The HMO Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory;
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and –
 - i. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
 - ii. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

The Committee was advised that, when considering the fitness of an applicant, the Council must have regard to any offences concerning fraud/dishonesty, violence, drugs, human trafficking, firearms, sexual offences, unlawful discrimination in, or in connection with, the carrying on of any business; or any provision of the law relating to housing or of landlord and tenant law. It also permitted the Council to take into account any other matter which the council considered to be relevant.

The HMO Manager provided the Committee with the details of the application and the relevant background information.

The Members were advised that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with the Environmental Protection Unit (“EPU”), the Public Health and Housing Unit (“PHHU”) and the Enforcement Unit (“EU”), who had all confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of either HMO in the last 5 years in relation to nighttime noise, day-time noise, rubbish accumulation/filthy premises or waste.

A number of Members stated that they wanted to defer the applications and requested that officers would bring the proposed wording of the conditions to be attached to the licences to a future meeting.

The HMO Manager advised the Committee that, if it was to defer the applications, it was required to have the permission of the owner/landlord before applications could be made to the Court.

The applicant and owner of the two properties was in attendance and confirmed that she was content for the applications to be made to the Court.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 19th March, 2025**

After further discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor O'Neill,
Seconded by Councillor McKay and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees:

- to defer the two applications and to apply to the Court for the required extension of time; and
- that officers would submit the proposed wording of conditions to be attached to the licences to the next meeting.

Chairperson

Planning Committee

Wednesday, 18th March, 2025

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Carson (Chairperson);
Aldermen Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers;
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bell, Brennan,
T. Brooks, Doran, S. Douglas, Ferguson, Garrett,
Groogan, Magee, McCabe, McCann,
Murphy and Whyte.
- In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning);
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management),
Mr. D. O’Kane, Planning Manager (Plans and Policy)
Ms. C. Reville, Principal Planning Officer;
Mr. M. Whittaker, Acting Principal Planning Officer;
Ms. L. Walshe, Principal Planning Officer;
Mr. R. Kennedy, Senior Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported for Councillor Hanvey.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th February, 2025 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, 2025, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Brennan declared an interest in item 3a - “Notification of Abandonment/Extinguishment”, in that her employer had requested the extinguishment, and item 9d – “LA04/2024/0626/F - Erection of 104no. social rented residential units (comprising a mix of General Social Housing and Category 1 over 55’s accommodation) across two detached blocks [ranging between 3 and 5 storeys], landscaping, communal and private amenity space, ancillary cycle and car parking provision, and other associated site works – 1 Havelock House Havelock Place”, in that she had met with the applicant regarding the development, prior to becoming a Council Member.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2025**

Withdrawn Item

The Committee noted that the following item had been withdrawn from the agenda:

- LA04/2021/0547/F - Demolition of the existing buildings and redevelopment of site for 2 no. commercial units on ground floor; 11 no. 1 & 2 bed apartments; landscaped communal courtyard; and all associated site works. - Lands at 124-126 Lisburn Road

Notification of Provision of Loading Bay

The Committee noted the notification of the proposed loading bay at Nelson Street.

Notification of Abandonment/Extinguishment

The Committee noted the notification of Extinguishment for the grassed area at River Terrace.

Planning Appeals Notified

The Committee noted the appeals decisions.

Planning Decisions Issued

The Committee noted the planning decisions issued in February, 2025.

Live Applications for Major Development

The Committee noted the list of live applications for major development.

Committee Decisions that have yet to issue

The Committee noted the list of Committee decisions which had not yet been issued.

Miscellaneous Reports

Advance Notice of Listed Buildings: 119 University Street, 121 University Street and 21 Wellington Park

The Senior Planning Officer informed the Committee that notification had been received from the Historic Environment Division (HED) with regard to the proposed listing of the following buildings:

- 119 University Street;
- 121 University Street; and
- 21 Wellington Park.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2025**

The Committee noted and supported the proposed listings.

Proposed Final Planning Application Validation Checklist

The Planning Manager summarised the consultation responses and proposed changes to the draft Planning Application Validation Checklist and outlined the next steps.

The Committee noted the report.

Delegation of Local applications subject to a NIW objection

The Committee agreed to delegate to the Director of Planning and Building Control those Local planning applications to which NI Water had objected.

Planning Applications previously considered

LA04/2017/1991/F - Construction of a new 5 storey office development for science and I.T. based business and associated car parking and public realm works. - Land adjacent to Concourse Buildings, Queens Road

The Planning Manager outlined the planning history of the application and explained that the Section 76 planning agreement had not yet been completed.

He informed the Committee that the remaining obligation to be secured through the planning agreement was vibration monitoring of the adjacent Scheduled Thompson dock during construction and explained that following discussion with the applicant, officers had explored the option of vibration monitoring being dealt with by condition rather than through a Section 76 planning agreement.

He reported that DfC HED had recently confirmed that it was content that a planning condition be applied and advised that this would be consistent with the approach taken to other proposed developments in the area.

The Planning Manager recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions, to include a condition to deal with the vibration monitoring requirements, rather than a Section 76 planning agreement.

The Committee approved the application, subject to conditions, to include a condition to deal with the vibration monitoring requirements, rather than a Section 76 planning agreement and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the condition and to deal with any other matters that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2025**

**LA04/2022/1924/F - Mixed-use proposal
comprising 13 apartments (with 13 car parking
spaces) and coffee shop. - 160-164 Kingsway,
Dunmurry**

The Planning Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application and pointed out that the application had previously been approved by the Committee at its meeting in June, 2023.

He explained that the Committee had granted planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement and that the Section 76 planning agreement, required to secure three of the proposed thirteen apartments as affordable housing, had not been completed.

He stated that the provision of three affordable housing units was necessary to make the development acceptable, in compliance with Policy HOU5 and that, without the Section 76 planning agreement to secure the affordable housing, the proposal was considered to be unacceptable.

The Committee agreed that, should the Section 76 planning agreement, required by the planning permission granted by the Committee at its meeting in June, 2023, not be completed by 30th April, 2025, the application be deemed refused.

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to, in the event that the Section 76 planning agreement was not completed by 30th April, 2025, finalise the wording of the reasons for refusal.

**LA04/2024/0626/F - Erection of 104no. social
rented residential units (comprising a mix of
General Social Housing and Category 1 over
55's accommodation) across two detached
blocks [ranging between 3 and 5 storeys],
landscaping, communal and private amenity
space, ancillary cycle and car parking
provision, and other associated site works –
1 Havelock House Havelock Place**

The Planning Manager outlined the planning history of the application and explained that a Pre-Action Protocol letter had been received by the Council in February, 2025 which set out a range of concerns, that included the adequacy of the consultation process, that objections from local residents had not been adequately reported to the Committee, the interpretation of planning policy and procedural matters.

He explained that, due to concerns raised over procedural matters, the application was being reported back to the Committee, that included the opportunity for a deputation from the Donegall Pass Residents Association to make representations to the Committee.

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He provided an overview of the application and highlighted the consultations responses that included a further response from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) in which it objected to the amended description of a fully social housing scheme and maintained its position that the scheme should provide no more than 80% of the residential units as social housing to avoid a mono-tenure and to promote sustainable and balanced communities.

The Planning Manager referred to the addendum Committee report which included an updated assessment of the scheme that addressed a proposal for mono-tenure housing and whether it would deliver sustainable and balanced communities. He stated that the advice of the NIHE, as the housing authority, should be given due weight and pointed out that it was unsupportive of a 100% social housing scheme. He added that the applicant had not provided evidence that a mixed tenure scheme would not be viable but stated that a stipulation that all 104 residential units must be provided as social housing could result in deliverability issues.

He stated that it was recommended that planning permission was granted, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement, and that the social housing requirement be set at a maximum of 84 units (80%), with the potential allowance of up to 100% social housing, should the issues be satisfactorily addressed at a future point and subject to approval by the Council, in consultation with NIHE.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. O Muirigh, Mr. E. Purvis and Mr. P. McDonald to the meeting.

Mr. McDonald referred to a local resident who had a high needs autistic son who had been greatly affected by the demolition works that had taken place on site and explained that she had asked him to communicate to the Committee that the site was 50 metres from their residence and would have a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of her son.

Mr. Purvis explained the strong opposition from the local community to the proposed development, that included a petition of opposition that had been signed by 462 local residents, he said equated to every household within the district declaring opposition to the current plans.

He stated that there had been 52 comments of objection posted on the online Planning Portal, with no comments in support of the scheme and that local residents had attended two public consultation meetings to convey their concerns and objections.

He stated that the social housing apartment cluster blocks had proven to be a failure in inner city Belfast and that the residents of Donegall Pass wished to place on record their support for the correct type of social housing, such as low-level streets of two and three bedroom family houses that would complement the surrounding housing in the area.

Mr. Purvis outlined points which had been made by the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG) to Clanmil Housing and referred the Committee to an article in the Belfast Telegraph about major builds adjacent to working class communities, he asked the Committee to have regard to the settled communities who would be affected most by the development and to reject the planning application.

Mr. McDonald stated that the residents of Donegall Pass were in favour of social and affordable housing and had waited for 43 years for sustainable housing in the area, that the

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proposal was unsustainable and had been developed without any meaningful engagement with the community and asked the Committee to defer consideration and undertake a site visit to the application site to gain a better appreciation of the residents' concerns.

The Planning Manager explained that the location of the site compound was not something that the Planning Service would address but could discuss the concerns raised with the applicant.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. T. Stokes to the Committee who attended in representation of the applicant.

Mr. Stokes stated that Genova North West had acquired the site with the objective of bringing forward, in conjunction with Clanmil Housing Association, a pragmatic scheme aimed at tackling the growing social housing need in the locality.

He explained that, initially, the suggested housing mix had included a sizable proportion of one-bedroom units, however, through active engagement with the community, the proposals had been revised to reduce the number of smaller units and increase the number of larger units, that included own door family maisonettes.

He stated that the scheme provided for 104no units which had been broken down into five distinct blocks and set with generous landscaped amenity courtyards for the active and passive enjoyment of residents.

Mr. Stokes stated that the proposed buildings scaled down in height towards the rear of the site which would be gable ended and no greater than three storeys in height and that separation distances had been maintained through location of the parking area to the rear of the site. He added that the final design feature to the rear was at the request of the neighbouring community and that the number of window openings had been minimised.

He explained that the proposal was initially for a 100% social housing scheme that would cater for a mix of General Needs and CAT1 accommodation; however, this had been amended during the course of the application to allow for ongoing discussions between the applicant, the housing association and the Housing Executive in terms of final tenure mix.

He pointed out that the subject site straddled two Housing Needs Areas, the Donegall Road Housing Needs Area and the Lower Ormeau Housing Needs Area, and he highlighted the increase in housing need in comparison with allocations.

He concluded by stating that the intention remained for the full scheme to be social housing and that with the support of the Planning Service and NIHE and that a proposed clause on the Section 76 planning agreement would secure a minimum of 80% of the scheme being social with the potential of becoming 100%, following discussions and he asked the Committee to endorse the officers' recommendation.

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Proposal

Moved by Councillor Magee
Seconded by Councillor Garrett,

“That the application is approved on the basis that all 104 residential units be provided as social rented housing (100%) and that this shall be secured by the Section 76 planning agreement.

That the Committee grant planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement and delegates authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement and deal with any other matters that arise, provided that they are not substantive.”

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

Accordingly, the Committee affirmed its decision of 10th December, 2024, to approve the application, subject to conditions and on the basis that all 104 residential units shall be provided as social rented housing (100%) and that this shall be secured by the Section 76 planning agreement.

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement and deal with any other matters that might arise, provided that they were not substantive

New Planning Applications

**LA04/2024/0126/F & LA04/2024/0138/LBC -
Conversion of existing buildings into Hotel,
comprising of 102 no. bedrooms with public
bars and restaurants. Development includes
ground floor extension, staff and service
elevator, interior and exterior alterations and all
associated works. Proposed ground floor
extension, staff and service elevator, interior and
exterior alterations and all associated works to
facilitate conversion of the existing building into
a hotel. - 15-16 Donegall Square South and 2-14
Bedford Street; and No. 7 James Street South**

The Principal Planning Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the application and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- Background;
- Principle of hotel use;

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- Impact on the listed building;
- Impact on the conservation area;
- Archaeology;
- Design and placemaking;
- Climate change;
- Access and transport;
- Health impacts;
- Environmental protection;
- Flood risk and drainage;
- Waste-water infrastructure;
- Waste management;
- Natural heritage;
- Section 76 legal agreement; and
- Pre-application community consultation.

She stated that, having regard to the Development Plan and material considerations, it was recommended that planning permission and Listed Building Consent were granted, subject to conditions.

The Chairperson informed the Committee that Mr. T. Stokes was present at the meeting on behalf of the applicant.

Mr. Stokes stated that the proposal would secure the restoration and upkeep of the prominent, vacant Listed Building and would bring it back into use. He added that the proposed hotel would be a great addition to the city and would bring life back into the area.

The Committee granted planning permission and Listed Building Consent, subject to conditions, and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other matters might that arise, provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2022/1046/F - Proposed demolition of existing building and construction of a residential development consisting of 14 No. units (9 No. apartments within a three storey building and 5 No. two storey terraced dwellings) with associated landscaping and car parking (amended description). - 18 Annadale Avenue

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report and to undertake a site visit to the application site.

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**LA04/2024/1281/F - The development plans
for the site include the construction of a new
3G football pitch on existing grass football
pitches and associated site works - 60
Carnanmore Park**

The Principal Planning Officer summarised the application and referred to the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of the proposed uses;
- Impact on amenity;
- Climate change;
- Open space;
- Access and transport;
- Health impacts;
- Environmental protection; and
- Natural heritage.

She explained that the site was within a highly sustainable location that offered convenience to the end user of the development and would provide surface for all-weather conditions which would benefit the community.

The Committee approved the application, subject to conditions, and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other matters that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

**LA04/2024/1869/F - Temporary Change of Use of
92 No. Student Bedrooms to Short Term Let
Accommodation - The Edge, 48-52 York Street**

The Principal Planning Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the application and explained that the Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA) had suffered some delays towards the end of the building programme which had resulted in an abnormally high number of vacancies within the building for the 2024/25 academic year.

She stated that the application sought full planning permission for a temporary change of use of 92 (30%) of the 307 student bedrooms to short term let accommodation until September 2025.

She reported that no representations had been received, that consultation was not necessary and that a Section 77 to vary the Section 76 planning agreement of the host was necessary and had been agreed in principle with Legal Services.

The Principal Planning Officer stated that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered acceptable and it was recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

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The Chairperson informed the Committee that Mr. T. Stokes, TSA Planning, was present at the meeting, together with the applicants, Mr. S. Crawley and Mr. D. Lindsay to answer any questions that Members might have.

In response to several questions from the Committee with regard to the existing students availing of the accommodation, Mr. Lindsay explained that the 92 units were contained on three floors of the building and were self-contained units that would limit interaction with existing students. He stated that they hoped to target corporate clients that would prefer longer stays.

He cited other comparable cities, such as Edinburgh, which operated a similar scheme during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and explained that, whilst not typical during term time, it was during the summer months.

A number of Members raised concerns with regard to rate relief applied to PBMSA and whether that would still apply to commercial use. In response, officers agreed to write to Land and Property Services to clarify whether the Council had the ability to draw down rates on the temporary use of the PBMSA.

At the request of a Member, officers agreed that the potential for consultation with the existing students would be discussed with the applicant.

The Committee agreed to approve the application, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 77 (amendment to the original Section 76 planning agreement) and to deal with any other matters that arise, provided that they were not substantive.

**LA04/2025/0140/LBC - Installation of new
stained-glass window within City Hall - Belfast
City Hall, 2 Donegall Square**

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to remove an existing stained glass window and install a new stained glass window on the ground floor of City Hall.

She stated that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered acceptable.

The Committee granted Listed Building Consent and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other matters that arise, provided that they were not substantive.

Restricted Items

Outstanding Accounts Report

The Director of Planning and Building Control outlined two outstanding debts that Legal Services had advised that, it would not be economically viable to incur the costs of obtaining a judgement and enforcing the debt and explained that every effort to recoup the debts and

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
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the methods adopted had been in accordance with the Council's Accounting Manual procedures.

The Committee authorised the writing off of the outstanding accounts in accordance with Section M12 of the Council's Financial Regulations.

Quarter 3 Finance Report

The Director of Planning and Building Control presented the Quarter 3 financial position for the Planning Committee.

The Committee noted the report.

Public Local Inquiry for Dalradian Gold Application

The Director of Planning and Building Control outlined a response to the Notice of Motion for the Council to intervene in the Public Inquiry to the Curraghinalt Project (Dalradian Gold Mine) applications being held by the Planning Appeals Commission.

The Committee agreed that the report be referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

Chairperson

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Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Monday, 10th March, 2025

MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BELFAST WATERFRONT AND ULSTER HALL LTD. SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Ferguson (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Bell, Bower, Brennan, R. Brooks,
Collins, S. Douglas, Flynn, Maghie, McCabe,
McCallin, McCann, McDowell, McKay,
Ó Néill and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Mrs. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Canavan and Doherty.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th January were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3rd February.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Capital and Maintenance Update

(Mr. C. Shields, Programme Delivery Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 Members have requested regular updates on capital and maintenance works at the ICC Waterfront and Ulster Hall. This paper provides an update since the last report to Committee.**

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to note the update on capital and maintenance works including the completion of a programme of toilet refurbishments/upgrades in the Waterfront.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Waterfront Hall Toilet Refurbishment/upgrades

Members will be aware that this project is at *Stage 3 - Committed* on the Capital Programme. Members are advised that this work is now completed.

3.2 Waterfront Hall Chiller Units

Members will be aware that this project is at *Stage 2 - Uncommitted* on the Capital Programme. Approval has been received to proceed with the detailed design. The Consultants are currently working on the designs which are due to be completed by May 2025. Members are asked to note that officers from Property & Projects are currently liaising with management from the ICC Waterfront to confirm when the works can be carried out to minimise impacts from an operational perspective. Once the business case is complete the project can be taken forward to the next stage.

3.3 Waterfront Hall Smoke Curtains

Members are reminded that this project is at *Stage 1 - Emerging* on the Capital Programme. Consultants have begun work on a modelling exercise. This exercise should be completed by the end of March and will help inform the extent of works required to the auditorium and the required next steps. This remains a priority for BWUH.

3.4 Financial and Resource Implications

Financial – None at this time; *Resources* – Officer time to deliver as required.

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

All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process.”

The Committee noted the update provided.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following five items are 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 items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Contracts Update

The Senior Manager (Economy) outlined that three public tender competitions had been completed for the following essential operational services at BWUH Ltd.:

- Provision of Cleaning Services;
- Provision of Control Room Security Services; and
- Provision of IT Managed Services.

During discussion, a number of Members stated that they would like to see the company consider in-house models for some of the operations, in future years.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and approved the awarding of the contracts to the three winning bidders, in line with the requirements of the Shareholders' Agreement.

(Mr. R. McConnell, Chief Executive of the BWUH, and Mr. I. Bell, Finance Director of the BWUH, attended in connection with the next 5 items)

Q3 Performance Report

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. R. McConnell, the newly appointed Chief Executive of BWUH Ltd., to his first Shareholders' Committee meeting.

Mr. McConnell provided the Committee with a detailed presentation on the performance of the company from 1st April to 31st December, 2024. He outlined that quarter three had been much busier than the second quarter of the year, as expected. A large number of business and entertainment events had taken place during the third quarter, including the pantomime and the NI Chamber President's Banquet, which, with 1031 patrons, was the largest dinner ever held in their venues.

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee
Monday, 10th March, 2025

He outlined that the customer satisfaction levels were at an all-time high for the venues and that they provided a diverse range of entertainment. The Committee noted that entertainment made up 30 to 40% of their business. He highlighted that Snow Patrol had recently launched their new album to 1,600 persons at the Ulster Hall and that it had been very well received by the audience.

Regarding sustainability, he outlined that they had been working hard to eliminate single use plastic, installed hydration stations throughout the venue and had increased use of reusable cups, plates and lanyards. He reported that the BWUH led the Venue Sustainability Forum (VSF), which represented the 14 main entertainment venues in the city. The VSF had worked to develop a city-wide reusable cup scheme which would eliminate approximately 1 million single use plastic cups, reduce carbon emissions by 50 tonnes and remove 20 tonnes of plastic waste over six months.

The Committee was provided with an overview of the company's corporate social responsibility, which had included the privilege of welcoming six exceptional students from Mitchell House School to the Waterfront Hall for a unique work experience opportunity, gaining hands-on exposure to the event and entertainment industry. This had been the second year working with Mitchell House School. The Members were also provided with details of the company's money raising events for charity.

The Committee was advised of the Team Engagement survey results which remained high when benchmarked against averages across the world. He outlined that the lowest performing areas had highlighted matters for improvement.

Since joining Diversity Mark NI in September 2022, and having achieved Bronze Award accreditation in May 2023, focusing on gender equality, the company had been dedicated to embedding diversity and inclusion within its organisational culture. The Committee was advised of a number of its key achievements in that regard.

Mr. Bell provided the Committee with an overview of the financial results for the company, including its performance against its targets and the Strategic Outcomes.

Mr. McConnell provided the Members with an update on the Company's governance and the risks and the opportunities that lay ahead for the company.

A number of Members thanked the representatives for the comprehensive presentation and wished Mr. McConnell well in his new role.

The Committee noted the update which had been provided.

Annual Business Plan 2025-26

Mr. McConnell advised the Committee that the company was one year into its five-year Business Plan. He outlined that, since he had only been in post for a number of weeks, he intended to bring an updated Business Plan to the Shareholders' Committee meeting in June, confirming the short to medium-term direction of the company, with achievable goals.

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During discussion, he provided details of a number of different opportunities and event types for the company to get involved with, going forward.

Mr. McConnell agreed to go back to individual Members on queries relating to use of the venues by inner-City communities, arts sector support, autism friendly spaces and apprenticeships on Technology Production.

After further discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the content of the report and the BWUH Business Plan, noting the adjustments and direction of travel for 2025/2026 to fully realise the potential of the venues;
- Approved the plan; and
- Agreed to receive an updated plan at its meeting in June 2025.

Overdraft Facility

The Committee was advised that approval was being sought, as per the Shareholders' Agreement, for the company to draw down from an overdraft facility.

During discussion, a number of Members pointed out that Barclays Bank was on the "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)" list, a movement promoting sanctions against Israel.

A Member also stated that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee had considered a Motion, in February 2024, to consider adopting a "Rights-based Ethical Procurement Policy". It was noted that a subsequent report was to be brought back to that Committee, outlining a detailed consideration of the Motion and the potential cost implications.

The Director of Finance advised the Committee that BWUH Ltd. had used Barclay's Bank since the company had been set up. He also advised that the request for an overdraft had not been taken lightly.

A number of Members requested that officers would investigate and consider changing the company's choice of bank.

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy requested that the Shareholders' Committee would separate the company's overdraft request from the wider issue of the bank being used, at this stage.

After discussion, the Committee approved drawing down an overdraft, with a value of up to £3million, for BWUH Ltd.

Intention to recruit a new Non-Executive Director

The Committee was advised of the company's intention to recruit a new Non-Executive Director (NED) to its Board, to replace Mr. J. Ward who had recently resigned.

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It was reported that the details of the successful candidate would be brought to a future Shareholders' Committee meeting for ratification.

Next Meeting

The Committee agreed that it's next meeting would take place in the Waterfront Hall.

Chairperson

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 13th March, 2025

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland and McCoubrey; and
Councillors Anglin, Bower, R. Brooks,
T. Brooks, Bunting, Collins, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
P. Donnelly, S. Douglas, Flynn, Harvey,
Long, Lyons, Magee and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Ms. A. Diver, Climate Programme Manager;
Ms. B. Roddy, Project Support Officer (Climate); and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Brennan.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 16th January, 2025 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 February, 2025.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Presentation - SONI (System Operator for NI)

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. G. Carlin, Director of Networks and Innovation, Mr. R. Davison-Kernan, Senior Engineer, and Mr. J. Fullwood, Project Manager, all SONI, to the meeting.

Mr. Carlin explained that SONI was Northern Ireland's electricity Transmission System Operator and that it was responsible for the safe, secure supply of electricity in Northern Ireland. From its control centre in Belfast, it ensured that power flowed from where it was generated to where it was needed.

Together, the representatives from SONI outlined that, as SONI enhanced the electricity grid, it was leading the way for a more secure and sustainable energy future. The Committee was advised that SONI also operated the all-island wholesale electricity market through the Single Electricity Market.

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The Committee was presented with an overview of “Energising Belfast”, to deliver a cleaner and more secure energy future for the City. They outlined plans to upgrade the electricity distribution network around Belfast by 2050, which would require an estimated £117million of potential investment.

The Members were advised that the project would provide the capacity for the additional demand created by the expected increases in electric vehicles and heat pumps. It would also support future investment in housing and job creation by facilitating the Belfast Agenda targets of the city being home to 66,000 more people and 46,000 additional jobs by 2035.

In response to a Member’s question regarding hydrogen as an alternative to electric vehicles, Mr. Carlin confirmed that SONI was agnostic to the technology but that it modelled future demand and anticipated a significant increase over the next 15 years. Mr. Davison-Kernan added that, although hydrogen was an alternative fuel for larger vehicles, the production of green hydrogen also involved large amounts of electricity.

A number of Members asked questions regarding the locations of the new substations. The representatives from SONI explained that the route would form the second phase of the project. The Committee was also advised that SONI had a dedicated landowner engagement team and that the route would be subject to statutory consultation.

In regards to a Member’s question about funding for the project, the representatives explained that they would apply, via the Utility Regulator, to ensure that the project was value for money.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their presentation and they retired from the meeting.

Update on the Retrofit Delivery Hub

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To provide an update on progress by the Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to note:

- i. Progress made in delivering retrofit training and information sharing including a Galway City Retrofit Twinning Visit to Belfast.**
- ii. Efforts to progress an area based cross tenure retrofit project, exploring procurement mechanisms to attain economies of scale and optimising access to funding and community support.**

- iii. That two significant retrofit programmes are under development including a NIHE £14M programme of deep retrofit to 400 homes in NI with 120 in the Belfast City Council area by NIHE and a proposed NIFHA scheme for the shallow retrofit programme of around 4,000 homes.
- iv. The findings from a survey of two properties in Belfast that estimates significant costs associated with retrofitting solid wall properties.
- v. The challenges posed to retrofit in terms of the supply chain of construction materials and skills gaps in the required sectors.
- vi. The challenges and opportunities around a proposed low carbon heating grant and potential implications of a future Minimum Energy Efficiency Scheme.

3.0 Hub Update

Progress on the work of Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub was last reported to this committee in August 2024. Since then, a significant amount of collaborative work has taken place under the Hub's remit to share information, and work to engender action and progress. Work over the last five months can be divided into 5 themes:

- Skills gaps and supply chains
- Partnership retrofit programmes
- Data building
- Information sharing
- Cross tenure area based retrofit pilot project

3.1 Skills gaps and supply chains

Discussions through Belfast's retrofit twinning project (Euro Cities programme) between Belfast and Galway City Councils highlighted that large scale, government funding packages for home retrofit on their own do not deliver progress, noting lengthy backlogs in delivery of funded works. This has been caused by shortages in skilled workers and materials, partly due to major retrofit programmes in GB competing and effectively 'poaching' resources from each other and from Ireland. A round table on-line event was held with Retrofit Hub members and stakeholders from Galway to explore the issues and hear of research into the construction skills gap in the Republic of Ireland. One of the Hub's co-chairs (from CITB) recently convened a Green Skills Working Group of behalf of Department for Energy with a report due for publication shortly.

- 3.2 Delivery of the priority projects from the LAEP such as low carbon district heating, solar PV installations and retrofit will generate significant demand for construction and specialist skills and materials. This has prompted work by the Climate Team to work with Economic Development to assess market readiness in terms of skills and supply chains in order to identify any gaps and capacity building required.

3.3 Retrofit Programmes currently under development

The NI Housing Executive (NIHE) and the NI Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) collectively represent all social housing in NI with both working on large scale retrofit programmes and keeping Hub partners involved and updated. Two significant retrofit programmes are currently under development by NIHE (includes approximately 120 homes in the Belfast City Council area) and NIFHA which represents 20 housing associations with almost 19K homes in the Belfast area.

3.4 Data building

Domestic retrofit programmes depend on high quality data about housing stock. Belfast's Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) has collated high quality data about the energy performance of homes and any existing retrofit measures, allowing the identification of the properties and areas at greatest risk of fuel poverty and that could benefit most from retrofit. These data are in the process of being mapped into Electoral District Areas and city-wide reports, which will allow the Council and its retrofit partners to work strategically to identify areas for potential retrofit projects.

- 3.5 LAEP data currently capture financial and carbon data, helping to inform the financial case for projects but doesn't yet capture the full benefits such as health issues avoided and wider societal impacts. The Climate Team is exploring a number of tools used by other UK and EU cities to carry out wider cost benefit analysis which could demonstrate the full value of projects such as domestic retrofit and district heating.

- 3.6 High quality data is available for most of the city's domestic building types but one significant gap has been the private rental sector which contains substantial numbers of older, city centre type homes with solid walls. These can be challenging to retrofit as walls are one of the greatest areas of energy loss and insulating solid walls can be expensive and disruptive for tenants. The Hub was keen to get accurate data specific to Belfast's common housing stock, up to date locally based costings with detailed measures for both simple or shallow interventions as well as more

complex or deep retrofit. Detailed surveys of two typical solid wall rental properties were commissioned, with the main finding being that in solid wall, older properties, even the use of a deep retrofit approach could fail to attain an A level of EPC rating for properties. The two properties studied attained no higher than a move from an E or a D rating to attain a rating of C even with over £80K of retrofit measures.

3.7 Training and Information sharing

Sharing information and capacity building is central to the Retrofit Hub and in October of 2024, the Climate Team facilitated a series of retrofit events to share information with Hub partners and external agencies:

3.8

- ‘Introduction to Retrofit’ training for Elected Members - following a request by members of the Climate and City Resilience Committee in June 2024, an Introduction to Retrofit Course was run by the Climate and City Regeneration teams in October 2024. Eight elected members attended the interactive session with excellent feedback from attendees. The course was based on a similar course aimed at the general public that was delivered in partnership with SERC in April 2024. With both courses now designed and tested, there are opportunities for delivery at a wider scale.

3.9

- Community led net zero and retrofit programmes meeting – convened groups and organisations that are working on fuel poverty and net zero retrofit across the city, including UP2030, Mount Vernon Sustainable Energy Community and the Dept for Communities. Groups shared information on community led retrofit/fuel poverty programmes and highlighted that significant community-led work is taking place across the city but is often done in isolation.

3.10

- Public sector low carbon retrofit programmes meeting – Hub programme leaders from QUB, the Belfast Trust, Belfast City Council and Mott MacDonald outlined major low carbon retrofit programmes being developed and successfully rolled out on public estate, sharing methodologies and data to encourage replication.

3.11

- Galway City Retrofit Twinning Visit to Belfast – Belfast City Council hosted a three day visit from Galway City Council and their community based energy team. Retrofit Hub members were particularly keen to learn about the Galway

Warm Home Hub who outlined their community embedded one stop shop approach. This was very well attended by community energy/ fuel poverty groups and Dept for Communities. Galway visitors met with Belfast social housing providers to explore how they rolled retrofit out at scale across their stock.

3.12

- Consultation on low carbon heating grants - lack of government retrofit funding is recognised by the Hub as the single biggest barrier to rolling out retrofit at scale. In light of this it welcomed a consultation by the Dept for Communities in November 2024 on a potential grant scheme for householders around low carbon heating, with an indicative timescale of 2027 for launch. Hub members took part in the consultation with key responses including: a fabric first approach is critical with a call for a precursor fabric first grant scheme; rather than focusing almost exclusively on ASHPs, it should support the roll out of low carbon district heating and hybrid heating technology; additional funding support is required for workforce development; and the need to build consumer awareness and confidence with support for public awareness campaigns.

3.13

- Potential Minimum Energy Efficiency Scheme – Hub members have highlighted that the NI Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2029 includes setting standards for EPC ratings for lettable accommodation, with an outline timescale of 3 years for legislation to come into force. This could mean that only domestic properties of a (to be determined) EPC level could be let, which would put pressure on landlords to raise the energy performance of their stock. The Hub agreed the need for clarity of commitment by The Executive along with early notice and clear lead in times to allow landlords to prepare and avoid any large scale rapid divestment of housing stock.

3.14

- Cross Tenure Area Based Retrofit Pilot Project
A key output from the Hub's work to date has been support for the establishment of a cross tenure, area based retrofit pilot. Retrofit programmes typically take a 'worst first' approach, targeting homes with the poorest thermal efficiency and greatest risk of fuel poverty and these are frequently areas with a combination of social housing, private rental and owner occupiers. Whilst building types in a given area tend to be similar, ownership and funding can be complex and challenging. The Retrofit Hub Steering Group has reviewed cross tenure case studies from the UK

and Republic of Ireland to explore critical components, with funding emerging as the single biggest challenge. Whilst some grant programmes may emerge in 2027, current funding pots for home-owners and landlords are very limited with many not eligible for financial support.

3.15 The Steering Group is focusing on identifying how the limited funds available might be optimised to minimise any shortfall in areas of greatest fuel poverty need and retrofit potential. Work is focusing on procuring works to attain economies of scale, optimising access to and uptake of available funding and community support to optimise engagement by householders.

3.16 Next Steps

- Establish a task and finish group to explore existing and potential funding sources as well as mechanisms for an area wide, cross tenure domestic pilot project.
- Work with partners' procurement experts to develop an approach to cross tenure procurement for a pilot project establishing roles, risk and process.
- Explore how the current grant funding could better support retrofit in the private rental sector and identify any changes that may be required to allow landlords to access funding.

Financial and Resource Implications

None at this point

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None known."

During discussion, the officers offered to run a further workshop for Members on Retrofitting at a future date.

A Member requested that a report on the skills shortages be submitted to a future meeting.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations within the report.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the report associated with the following item was restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

**Climate and City Resilience Committee,
Thursday, 13th March, 2025**

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the item, 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.

Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

**Update on implementation of
Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) Strategy**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy provided the Committee with an update on the implementation of the LEV strategy.

He outlined the background to the strategy and explained that it comprised a pragmatic and sequenced approach to bringing the work forward, with the initial phase focusing on how the Council would maximise the use of its land assets across the city to bring forward necessary Electric Vehicle infrastructure.

The Members were advised of the progress which had been made to date, including the establishment of a cross-departmental Working Group.

During discussion, the Director confirmed that engagement with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) was ongoing and that it was his intention to bring a list of proposed sites to the Area Working Groups.

During discussion, the Project Support Officer (Climate) informed the Committee that officers had received helpful procurement advice from Cenex regarding maintenance, availability and what apps to use. Cenex was a not-for-profit organisation that provided independent, expert advice and services to Local Authorities and other organisations.

A number of Members asked the Director for further clarification in regards to the type of chargers which would be provided and issues with faulty or broken chargers.

In response to a further Member’s question, the Director agreed to ensure that the EV spaces within the City Hall would be clearly marked.

After discussion, the Committee noted:

- that a cross departmental LEV Task and Finish Working Group had been established, and was currently progressing Step 1 of Operationalising the Strategy - Land Assets Assessment (Council sites).

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- that the 'EV charging point network' project had been added to the Capital Programme as a Stage 1 Emerging Project, and had been ratified by the Council. As part of project development, the EV charging point network delivery timelines and costs would be developed.
- the indicative timescales and noted that timescales were dependent on Northern Ireland Electricity (NIE) processes; and
- that the Council had been approached by Cenex to host an EVI Roadshow event at the City Hall in May 2025 (date TBC).

Chairperson

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Standards and Business Committee

Tuesday, 25th March, 2025

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM

Members present: Councillor Lawlor (Chairperson) and
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCormick);
The High Sheriff (Councillor McAteer);
Aldermen McCullough and Rodgers; and
Councillors Bradley, Carson, P. Donnelly,
D. Douglas, Groogan, Kelly, Magee, Maghie,
McCallin, McDonough-Brown, R. McLaughlin
Lyons and Murphy.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager, and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apology

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor de Faoite.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th 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.

Declaration of Interest

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in item 2 (b) viz., 'Paramilitary Transition Scoping and Engagement Exercise' in that her position with Forward South Partnership was funded through the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime (EEPOC Programme). She withdrew from the meeting whilst the matter was under consideration.

Motions

The Committee considered the following two motions which had been received in advance of the Council's meeting on 1st April:

Paramilitary Transition Scoping and Engagement Exercise

Moved by Councillor McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Murphy and

Resolved – that the above-mentioned motion, which had been moved by Councillor Nelson and seconded by Councillor T. Brooks, be referred to the

**Standards and Business Committee,
Tuesday, 25th March, 2025**

Council for consideration, with no restrictions placed upon the number of speakers.

Harm Reduction Campaign

The Committee agreed that the above-mentioned motion, which had been moved by Councillor Smyth and seconded by Councillor de Faoite, be referred, in the first instance, to the Licensing Committee for consideration.

Chairperson

Paramilitary Transition Scoping and Engagement Exercise

“That this Council categorically opposes proposals from the UK and Irish Governments to appoint an independent expert to scope out a new process of engagement seeking to bring about paramilitary group transitions to disbandment; agrees that, more than 25 years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, there is no place for paramilitarism in our society, and that such groups should either immediately disband or face a robust law enforcement approach like other organised crime gangs; welcomes the work of the Executive Programme on Paramilitarism and Organised Crime; and agrees to write to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Taoiseach calling on them to abandon plans for this paramilitary transition scoping and engagement exercise and reinvest the associated funding in law enforcement approaches to paramilitary activity.”

Proposer: Councillor Sam Nelson

Seconder: Councillor Tara Brooks

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