

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 22nd August, 2025

HYBRID MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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

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

Apologies

An apology was reported from Councillor Long.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th June were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st July, 2025.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Ferguson declared an interest under item 8(b) Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality in that he was associated with an organisation which had submitted an application. As the item did not become the subject of debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor Beattie declared an interest under items 4(d) Department for Communities (DfC) Letter of Offer Community Support Programme (CSP) 2025/26 in that he was

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associated with a group/organisation which had applied for or received funding and left the meeting whilst the items were under consideration.

Councillor R-M Donnelly declared an interest under items 7(a) Shared City Partnership in so far as it related to PEACEPLUS in that she worked for an organisation which had applied for funding; and 8(b) Requests for the use of the City Hall and the provision of hospitality in that she was employed by an organisation which had submitted an application. As the items did not become the subject of debate, she was not required to leave the meeting.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following six 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 six 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 advised that content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which takes place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

2025-26 Quarter 1 Finance Report

The Director of Finance submitted for the Committee’s consideration a report providing information on the financial position for Quarter 1 2025/26.

He reported that, at the end of Quarter 1, the financial position for the Council had shown an underspend of £1.14m, representing 2.2% of the net expenditure budget. The Quarter 1 Departmental forecast was an overspend of £0.5m, representing 0.3% of the net expenditure budget.

The Director then provided updates on the 2025/26 pay rise, the Extended Producer Responsibility Assessment 2025/26, the reserves position and the rates finalisation.

The Committee noted:

- the Quarter 1 financial position; and
- the Quarter 1 Treasury Management report.

**Medium Term Financial Plan
and Efficiency Programme**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the assessment of the key financial factors which would influence the development of the Council’s Medium Term

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Financial Plan for 2026/27 - 2029/30 and the rate setting process for 2026/27, together with an overview of the priorities and work in progress to establish the 2026/27 - 2029/30 Efficiency Programme.

The Committee:

- noted the challenges to be taken into consideration as part of the annual and medium-term rate setting; and
- agreed to defer a decision on the district rate increase to be levied on domestic and non-domestic properties to enable further details to be provided.

Organisational Reviews and Change Programme

The Committee:

- noted the progress on the work programme for the Organisational Reviews and Change Portfolio and timescales going forward; and
- an increase to the Legal and Civic Services establishment headcount.

Asset Management

The Committee:

(i) Plot 26, Balmoral Estate – Proposed surrender of part of NIFRS Lease

Approved entering into negotiations with NIFRS in respect of agreeing the terms of a surrender of part of its existing Lease at Balmoral Estate and agreed to a further report in the future use of the Bouche Road Playing Fields.

(ii) Belfast Stories Site, 3rd Floor, 108 Royal Avenue – Surrender of lease with May Gordon

Approved the surrender of lease with May Gordon re 3rd floor, 108 Royal Avenue and payment of compensation of up to £15,000.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

The Committee considered a report which sought approval for the allocation of the necessary budget to facilitate the hosting of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Belfast in August, 2026.

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Proposal

After discussion, it was

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

That the Committee agrees to note the proposed governance arrangements but that discussions be undertaken with Comhaltas in relation to the Fleadh Executive Committee and inclusion of other local organisations.

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

The Committee further:

- Noted the Strategic Case and the economic impact and return on investment; and
- Noted that an update on programme development and engagement would be brought to the next meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee;
- Approved the draft outline expenditure budget for Fleadh Cheoil 2026; and
- Agreed not to establish a Members Working Group but that a further report be brought back to the Committee on alternative arrangements including the use of delegated authority.

Draft Irish Language Policy – Update on Consultation

The Director of Legal and Civic Services reminded the Committee that, in April 2024, the Council had approved the draft Irish Language Policy to go out for public consultation. The draft policy and associated draft Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) were issued for public consultation for a 14-week period between 17th August 2024 and 28th November 2024.

The Council had also carried out a staff consultation alongside the public consultation during the same period.

The public and staff consultations were supplemented by a range of online and in-person consultation events across the city, and an online survey through the Council's YourSay engagement platform. The same survey was provided for both the general public and Council staff (that is, there were no additional or different questions asked of staff). The Council also consulted with trade unions in accordance with the agreed Industrial Relations framework.

Accordingly, the Director submitted a report which provided an update on the findings from the consultation on the draft Irish Language Policy and which sought direction from the Committee on several key issues identified.

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Proposal

After discussion, it was

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

The Committee:

- (i) Noted the contents of the report, including:
 - a. The Report on the Public Consultation (Appendix 1)
 - b. The Report on the Staff Consultation (Appendix 2)
 - c. The Trade Union Joint Response to the consultation (Appendix 3)
 - d. The EQIA Final Decision report (Appendix 4)
- (ii) Agreed, in principle, to adopt a bilingual logo, subject to agreed further engagement with Trade Unions, stakeholders and design work;
- (iii) Agreed that relevant stakeholders be invited to the next meeting of the Committee;
- (iv) Noted that further engagement with JNCC and the Stakeholders Forum will be undertaken based on Committee direction on the key issues identified; and
- (v) Noted that a final version of the draft Policy, together with a proposed Implementation Plan and options for an updated logo, will be brought to Committee at its next meeting.

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

Matters referred from Council / Notices of Motion

Notices of Motion - Pathways to Work Green Paper

The Committee was reminded that, at the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee on 28th April, that Committee had exercised its delegated powers to adopt the undernoted motion:

“This Council strongly opposes the proposed Welfare reforms as part of the Pathways to Work: Reforming Benefits and Support to Get Britain Working Green Paper from the UK government, which will have disproportionate impacts on vulnerable people in the North; commits to writing to the First and Deputy First Minister asking them to lobby the UK Government to reverse changes that will negatively impact vulnerable people; further commits to writing to the Minister for Communities to prepare a business case for a mitigation package which provides protections for current and future claimants

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from reductions in social security entitlements outlined in the Pathways to Work Green Paper.”

A response had since been received from the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons, MLA, in which he acknowledged the Council’s concern regarding the possible implications of the legislation. In addition, the Minister had pointed out that he had relayed his “strong opposition” to the Secretary of State and government ministers at Westminster. He added that he was committed to delivering a welfare system that “protects those who need it the most” and that his officials would continue to work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to assess the full implications of the legislation in Northern Ireland.

The Minister further added in his correspondence that the Department for Work and Pensions would be hosting a consultation event on Monday, 16th June. However, as the correspondence was received late on Friday, 13th June, it was impractical to advise Members.

The consultation has now closed, and the Department was considering the responses.

The Committee noted the receipt of the correspondence and agreed to the closure of the motion.

**Response received from Tanaiste re
extending voting in Irish Presidential Elections**

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting held on 2nd June, the following motion was passed:

“That this Council notes that the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement recognises the birth right of all the people of the north to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both; recalls that, in November 2013, the Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution recommended to give citizens residing outside the 26 counties the right to vote in presidential elections; further notes that Irish citizens living in the north can stand for, and be elected as, President of Ireland but cannot vote in presidential elections; and calls on this Council to write to the Irish Government and ask that they implement the recommendation of the Convention on the constitution with regards to voting rights in presidential elections, thereby extending the right to vote in elections for President of Ireland to all Irish citizens on the island of Ireland.”

The Committee was advised that a response had been received from Mr. Simon Harris TD, the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In his response he advised that a Private Members Bill on Extending Voting Rights in Presidential Elections to citizens of Northern Ireland and the diaspora was debated in the Dáil Éireann on 24th May, 2025.

He outlined that the Government did not oppose the motion and that extending voting rights to citizens outside of the jurisdiction of the Republic of Ireland would require a referendum and the Government would continue to reflect on the matter.

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The Committee noted the receipt of the correspondence and agreed to the closure of the motion.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Belfast Region City Deal – update

The Committee considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 This report is to provide an update to Committee on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) and seek approval for the BRCD Annual Report 2024/25.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Approve the BRCD Annual Report for 2024/25
- Note the update in relation the Implementation and Financial Plan

3.0 Main report

Annual Report 2024/25

3.1 The agreed reporting arrangements for all City and Growth Deals requires the production of an Annual Report and the requirement to meet with the Northern Ireland Delivery Board in order to discuss deal progress as part of an 'Annual Conversation' which is arranged to take place at the end of August this year.

3.2 A high level, outward focused Annual Report has now been produced for 2024/25 and outlines the specific progress made at the overall programme level with some very tangible progress achieved in this reporting year. Key highlights as of 31 March 2025 include:

- A total of 16 projects with Outline Business Cases (OBCs) now approved alongside three Full Business Cases (FBCs) with a combined project value of £620m.
- Following FBC approval this year iREACH Health hosted an official sod cutting ceremony in February 2025, with the construction phase for the world-class clinical research centre having now commenced.
- In June 2024, construction commenced at the state-of-the-art Factory of the Future at Global Point in Newtownabbey marking a major milestone for the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC). Due to open in early 2026, the innovation centre with capacity for 150 staff, is set to

reinvigorate local industrial potential and address the future technology and skills challenges faced by the region's manufacturing sector.

- Augment the City successfully progressed through and completed the first two phases of its 3-phase SBRI programme.
- Four Contracts for Funding and funding agreements were signed – including Gobbins Phase 2 and Destination Royal Hillsborough.
- 21 contracts associated with BRCD projects now include social value clauses, to date these contracts that have commenced reporting to the SIB portal have committed to delivery of a total of 10,935 Social Value Delivery Points. Mainly through interventions such as paid employment opportunities for apprentices, student placements and graduates, health and wellbeing initiatives and climate change and carbon reducing training.
- Studio Ulster moved into full operation and as previously reported the official launch took place in June 2025 marking a new era for virtual production, creating opportunities and positive economic impacts for Belfast residents, and for our city and region.
- Two additional cross deals skills assessments were completed for the Virtual Production and Digital Sectors and a review of identified actions is underway to determine those suitable for inclusion in a BRCD Collaborative Employability & Skills action plan.

3.3 The Annual Report, which was approved by the BRCD Executive Board on 18th June 2025, is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration. The individual BRCD partners will also be seeking approval for the Annual Report through their own governance structures. The report will be formally published after all approvals have been secured.

3.4 The report will then be shared with the Department of Finance in advance of the Annual Conversation.

3.5 Moving into Year 4 (2025/26) and as partners focus on delivery and maximising the benefits of the investment, we will see significant progress across the programme with:

- The opening of Studio Ulster and the UK Digital Twin Centre already completed.
- Construction continuing at pace at both iREACH Health and AMIC and contractors expected on site at Momentum One Zero, Newry City Centre Regeneration and Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge.
- Approval of the OBC for Belfast Stories anticipated by the end of 2025.

- 3 additional CfFs currently in process for approval – committing an additional £140m
- 2 FBCs at advanced stages of the approval process
- The BRCD draft Benefits Realisation Framework being refreshed to ensure that benefits are effectively delivered and captured in alignment with the overall programme objectives.
- Completion of the Life and Health Sciences (LHS) skills assessment

Financial and Implementation Plan

3.6 The overarching deal document is supported by a Financial and Implementation Plan and the annual submission for 2024/25 was produced alongside the Annual Report. As the programme is now firmly in delivery phase this year's financial and implementation plan was combined into one document. The document includes the expenditure profile of all the projects broken down annually and the high level project milestones based on the Quarter 4 financial and performance returns. The PMO engaged closely with partners and following consideration by the Finance Directors' Group and the Executive Board it was formally submitted to the Department of Finance in June as required by the Contract for Funding.

3.7 During 2024/25 a further £46.3m was drawn down from both the Department for the Economy and the Department for Communities demonstrating the positive progress being made across the programme. Up to 31st March 2025, claims totalling £41m have been processed by Programme Management Office (£36m in FY24-25).

3.8 Financial and Resource Implications

All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets.

3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

The approach taken to develop the City Deal has been subject to independent equality screening and rural proofing and states that:

'BRCD is inherently inclusive, affording an opportunity for the region to grow in a way that will benefit the economy of Northern Ireland as a whole, thereby enhancing the lives and well-being of its citizens. If during further development of the programme it becomes apparent that there may be an adverse impact on certain groups or communities then the partnership commits to carrying out further Section 75 work and including screening and EQIAs as and when appropriate.'

The Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2.1.

Planning Information

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.

Department for Communities (DfC) Letter of Offer Community Support Programme (CSP) 2025/26

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted the undernoted report:

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The main purpose of this report is:

- Inform Members that Council has received the Letter of Offer for the Community Support Programme 2025/26 from the Department for Communities (DfC). The Department has provided an uplift of 9% across certain elements of the programme.
- Seek agreement from members on the options to allocate the additional funding provided based on the detail provided in the report.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to:

- I. Agree the preferred option relating to the Community Support General additional funding. (Table 2)
- II. Agree the preferred option for the reprofiling of the budget for Advice and Tribunal services. (Table 3)
- III. Agree the proposed additional funding allocation for: Community Support General, Advice Grant and Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension-Tribunal Representation.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 A report on the Letter of Offer received from the Department of Communities Department for Communities (DfC) Letter of Offer Community Support Programme 2024/25 was considered at the August meeting of the People and Communities Committee.
- 3.2 Members had asked that the following elements of the paper be referred to the August meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration

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1. Options relating to the Community Support General additional funding (outlined in Table 2)
2. Options for the reprofiling of the budget for Advice and Tribunal services (outlined in Table 3)
3. Note the proposed additional funding allocation for: Community Support General, Advice Grant, Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension-Tribunal Representation which are captured under points 1 and 2 above.

3.3 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, Revenue for Community Building grant, Summer Scheme Grant as well as Generalist Advice. It also provides 100% funding for Social Supermarkets.

3.4 Council received the CSP 2024/25 Letter of Offer from DfC on 13 June 2025. There is an increase to this year's funding across several new and existing elements.

Additional Funding by CSP Heading

3.5 Table 1 illustrates the additional 9% uplift and available budgets under the relevant headings to be considered by SP & R.

Table 1

CSP Heading	Additional Funds 2025/26
1. Community Support General	£82,007.26
2. Advice Grant	£60,108.77
3. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation- Appeals	£6,960.79

3.6 **Proposed Allocation of Additional Funds**

It is proposed that additional funding for elements 1-3 should be allocated using the approaches outlined below. Further detail is provided in Appendices 1-3

1. Community Support General

3.7 Members are asked to consider and agree their preferred option for allocating the additional funding provided under the Community Support General heading (£82,007.26) as outlined in Table 2. Further

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detail on the organisations funded through Capacity and Revenue awards is provided in Appendix 1

Table 2

Option	Description	Pro	Con
1	Allocate all the additional funding £82,007.26 to the 43 Capacity funded groups. Each group will receive a non-recurrent payment of £1,907.15	<p>Capacity grant funding enables the provision of training, development and support programmes provided by 43 organisations to smaller organisations within communities. The funding contributes to staff and programme delivery running costs. As employers, Capacity funded groups have seen an increase in staff related costs this past year particularly in relation to National Insurance Contributions. They have also seen an increase to the costs running costs of their programmes.</p> <p>At Committee in March 2025, members agreed to double the funding allocation received by Revenue funded groups from a maximum of £20,629 in 2024/25 to £41,258 2025/26. Capacity funded organisations did not receive an uplift, this option would provide an increase in funding to these organisations.</p>	Revenue organisations do not have access to these additional funds.

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2	Allocate the funding to Revenue and Capacity funded groups. 130 organisations will receive a non-recurrent payment of £630.83	Revenue and Capacity organisations will receive additional funding to meet their running costs and provide services.	This option does not take into account the fact that revenue funded groups have already received a significant uplift for 25/26.
3	Use the funding to offset the council allocation that was used to double the revenue awards in 25/26.	This would offset the significant council investment that was made to double revenue awards in 25/26.	This option would not provide any additional support to funded organisations.

3.8 Appendix 1 provides a revised allocation for Capacity and Revenue based on options 1 and 2 above.

3.9 Members will be aware that this is the final year of awards of Capacity and Revenue Grants 2023-2026 in its current form. An open call for our new Large Grant programme 2026-2029 was launched on 28 July.

2. Advice Grant and Provision for Appeals.

3.10 Members will recall the Council agreed to provide £270,000 on a recurrent basis for the provision of an Appeals and Tribunal Service in the City. At Council in July, members agreed to extend the provision of the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service (BCTS) provided by Ligoniel Improvement Association on behalf of the Belfast Advice Group (BAG) to the end of March 2026. Members also agreed that future services will be procured and for Officers to begin the process with the contract awarded and provider in place for April 2026.

3.11 This year DfC provided an allocation of £84,302.81 towards the provision of Appeals and Tribunal Services. Including Council's contribution of £270,000 the total available budget is £354,302.81. BCTS requested £242,000 which was agreed by Council in July. Thus, there is a potential underspend in the budget of £112, 302.81.

3.12 Funding relating to Advice and Appeals is a specific element of the Community Support Programme and ringfenced for the provision of related services. The review of Advice services which council completed in December 23 highlighted the rising delivery and staffing costs experienced by advice organisations, this additional funding will support organisations to address these issues. Members may also wish that a consultation on the DfC regional

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review of advice services opened on 11th August, further detail on this will be presented to P&C committee at a later date. Members are asked to consider the reprofiling of the budget and agree a preferred option presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Option	Description	Pro	Con
1	Redistribute the £112,302.81 providing an uplift for Generalist Advice and Appeals to the five area-based Advice Consortia using Council's allocation model. (Table 4 below)	<p>Council currently funds 5 Area based Advice consortia that includes 14 independent advice providers in 19 locations and additional cover via extensive outreach provision.</p> <p>Providers have expressed concerns regarding the growing costs relating to staff such as National Insurance Contributions and operating overheads.</p> <p>Staff retention has posed a significant problem for advice providers. Due to short-term contracts and lower salary compared to other agencies such as Housing Associations</p> <p>Providers have also discussed the growing need for the provision of</p>	<p>The demand for services and complexity of dealing with multiple needs is growing. This greatly impacts on the level of service provision. The additional funding is short-term for 2025/26 on a non-recurrent basis. Next year the provision may return to its current level thus the service capacity of the organisations will reduce. Providing funding for 1 may lead to a higher dependency of the providers on Council funding and of people on the service. A demand that may be inflated with the provision of additional support this year.</p> <p>The providers may use some funding to increase its staff salaries and off set NIC. This increase may lead to an unmanageable cost next year</p>

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		<p>services that meet the needs of more complex cases and also of a growing population who do not have English as a first language.</p> <p>An additional non-recurrent allocation for this year will provide the Advice providers with sufficient resources to maintain their current level of staff, meet increased overheads and provide additional resources to meet the growing demand for services on complex cases as well as for people who require additional support such as translation services.</p>	
2	<p>Redistribute the £112,302.81</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing an uplift for Generalist Advice and Appeals to the five area-based Advice Consortia using Council's allocation model. (Table 4 below) up to £85,302.81.and <p>allocating the remaining £27,000</p> <p>towards the procurement process ensuring that contingencies are in place to effectively transition from current funding to contracted service provision e.g. costs to transfer service user records and systems from</p>	<p>As Above</p> <p>This is the final year of the current arrangement for the Tribunal Service. From April 2026 the service will be provided by a contracted organisation following a procurement</p>	<p>As Above</p> <p>It is £27,000 that can be used for direct service provision.</p>

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	<p>the current to the new provider. Grant permission to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations to the generalist advice services should the budget provision of up to £27,000 not be used.</p>	<p>process. It is envisaged that the provider will be secured by December 2026. The current provider has extensive case records and systems in place for maintaining the records. The provider is also dealing with an extensive caseload that may take longer to complete beyond the 31 March 2026.</p> <p>This allocation will provide Council with an opportunity to manage the transition from the current funding arrangements to the new contract. It may cover items such as transfer of Casefiles and systems, current caseloads, issues relating to GDPR.</p>	
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3.13 In relation to the Advice Grant, DfC has provided an uplift of £60,108.77 for the provision of Generalist Advice Services. Members are asked to allocate the uplift based on Council's current advice grant funding model.

3.14 Table 4 below presents the level of additional funding each Area Based Advice Consortia will receive this year for the uplift and budget reprofile options. The additional funding is non-recurrent.

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Table 4

Area Consortium	Council's Funding Allocation Model	Advice Grant Uplift	Additional Budget Reprofile Option 1	Additional Budget Reprofile Option 2
Central	9%	£5,381.69	£9,953.06	£7,560.13
East	14%	£8,628.51	£16,229.47	£12,327.66
North	26%	£15,556.90	£29,063.05	£22,075.67
South	15%	£9,259.96	£17,299.22	£13,140.11
West	35%	£21,281.71	£39,752.01	£30,199.34

3.15 Appendix 2 provides details of the revised allocation for each Consortium based on uplift plus Options 1 and 2.

3. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation - Appeals

3.16 Members are asked to note the increase of £6,960.79 towards the provision of tribunal and appeals and agree the allocation be used for the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service.

3.17 Financial Implications

All awards listed in the appendices can be made in line with existing budgets for 2025/26. Members should note that the Capacity and Revenue awards are multi annual awards from 23/26.

3.18 Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment

This will be considered throughout, and any appropriate issues highlighted to Members. Any amendments to existing scheme or new scheme will be considered in the context of any equality/good relations and rural needs considerations.

The Committee:

- (i) agreed to Option 2 relating to the Community Support General additional funding (Table 2);
- (ii) agreed to Option 2 for the reprofiling of the budget for Advice and Tribunal services (Table 3); and

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- (iii) agreed the proposed additional funding allocation for: Community Support General, Advice Grant and Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension-Tribunal Representation.

30 Under 30 Climate Change-Makers Initiative 2025-6

The Committee deferred consideration of the matter to allow further information to be provided on the co-sponsors. The Committee also agreed that information on the assessment of participants in previous programmes would be provided at a future date.

City Innovation programme update

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services submitted the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To update Members on current City Innovation initiatives including the submission to the first phase of the Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayoral Challenge competition.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- 1. To note the Belfast Alleyways proposal has been submitted to Bloomberg Philanthropies and that a decision on whether we proceed to phase one is expected by the end of August.**
- 2. To retrospectively approve Belfast City Council's inclusion in a joint bid to DSIT's Regulators Pioneer Fund to independently map mobile coverage in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.**
- 3. To retrospectively approve letters of support to both Ulster University and Queen's Universities for two separate, independent, funding bids to the National Institute for Health and Care Research £50m funding call to tackle health inequalities.**
- 4. To approve support for Ulster University and the Agile Ageing Alliance consortium bid to Horizon Europe's 'GenAI4EU' call to deliver a potential €5,000,000 project which would include a demonstrator in Belfast.**
- 5. To note the date of the first event in the Belfast: Inclusive Futures series and that invitations have been issued to all Members.**
- 6. To approve attendance by two officers to accompany the Belfast Innovation Commissioner to this year's Smart Cities World Congress to develop innovation funding and investment opportunities for the city.**

7. To approve the participation of an officer from the City Innovation Office in the i30 Inclusive Innovation Medellin visit. Travel costs are included in the project funding.

3.0 Main report

Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayoral Challenge 2025

- 3.1 Following Member approval, Belfast City Council applied to Bloomberg Philanthropies' Mayoral Challenge with a proposal '*to re-imagine Belfast's network of alleyways*'. This broad proposal was accepted and over the past few weeks officers have been involved in planning workshops with the Bloomberg team to prepare Belfast's submission for phase one funding by 15 August.
- 3.2 If this submission is approved by Bloomberg \$50,000 will then be made available to Council to work with local communities and stakeholder over September and October to develop the detailed \$1 million application to deliver a 24-month programme.
- 3.3 The work of this first phase will be engaging with communities and stakeholders on options delivery mechanisms for a future Belfast alleyway transformation programme. It will examine local demand, types of viable projects, and specifically at co-delivery models with communities and the community and voluntary sector that can be sustained over the long term. Members should note that this phase will not be identifying specific locations for projects. There will be a range of engagement mechanisms including at least five neighbourhood workshops across the city.
- 3.4 Members are asked to note the submission of the Belfast proposal and that a decision from Bloomberg on phase one is expected by the end of August. Details will follow at a future Committee.

DSIT's Regulators Pioneer Fund

- 3.5 Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council invited Belfast City Council to be a supporting partner in a £1 million application by Wales, Northern Ireland & Scotland to the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) Regulators' Pioneer Fund. The proposal is to map 4G/5G mobile coverage across all of Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland at a granular level to help identify coverage gaps within communities and explore opportunities to improve coverage and address digital exclusion.
- 3.6 The bid is being led by Caerphilly County Borough Council (on behalf of Welsh local authorities), with support from Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council (on behalf of NI local authorities) and Glasgow City Council (on behalf of Scottish local authorities). If the bid is successful, the project will start in October 2025. No

financial or resource commitment is required from Belfast City Council. Belfast City Council will have the opportunity to use the data to support its work and inform decision making.

- 3.7 Given the short deadline for submission over the summer months, Members are asked to retrospectively approve Belfast City Council's inclusion in the bid.

£50m call to tackle inequalities in cardiovascular disease

- 3.8 The Council has been approached separately by both Ulster University's Centre for Digital healthcare Technologies (CDHT, and by Queen's University, seeking support for two funding bids to the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) £50m funding call¹ to tackle health inequalities.
- 3.9 Both proposals seek to develop and implement long-term change in cardiovascular disease outcomes, focusing on digital healthcare interventions, escalating community focused engagement and diet and wellbeing education. Early detection and intervention will be important and as well as encouraging lifestyle changes, support systems changes or adaptations to medicine and treatments.
- 3.10 To enable both applications to be submitted in time for a 13 August deadline, a letter of support has been given to Ulster and a separate letter of support, with a role as a co-applicant, to Queen's. Members are asked to retrospectively approve both supporting letters, and to note that in the event of either bid making through to an initial selection stage, a more detailed report will be brought back to Committee in advance of any further commitments being made.

Horizon Europe Call: Generative AI in Health Care

- 3.11 The Agile Ageing Alliance is working with an EU wide consortium to submit a bid to the Horizon Europe GenAI4EU call which is making €15,000,000 available for three projects.
- 3.12 The Alliance have invited Belfast City Council and Ulster University's CDHT to partner in a bid which will focus on '*end user-driven application of Generative Artificial Intelligence models in healthcare*'. The consortium wishes to have 5 to 6 demonstrator sites over the four-year period of the project to test/further develop the infrastructure in real world settings. Belfast has been proposed as one of the health care demonstrator sites (locations might include social housing estates, retirement villages, care homes, or hospitals. The consortium will engage with local partners on potential local options.

¹ <https://www.nihr.ac.uk/news/new-50m-funding-to-tackle-inequalities-cardiovascular-disease>

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- 3.13** Members are asked to approve support from Belfast City Council ahead of the 15 September deadline. This will involve brokering opportunities and building relationships to support the local demonstrator.

Belfast Inclusive Futures

- 3.14** In May Committee approved a 'dialogue series' to inform new thinking on inclusive growth opportunities from the Belfast Region City Deal and other investments. Specifically, the series called '*Belfast: Inclusive Futures*' will bring together city leaders (private, public and community) and senior policymakers to build understanding and consensus about the challenges and opportunities that digital technologies represent for our city existing shared commitment to inclusive growth.
- 3.15** Invitations have been issued, including to all Members, for the first in the series which will take place on Tuesday, 16 September at City Hall from 4:30pm. The first speaker is Professor Kate Devlin, Chair-Director of the Digital Futures Institute, King's College, whose research focuses on AI and its benefit to people, communities and society. The sessions will be introduced by the Chair of SP&R and co-hosted by our Chief Executive and the Belfast Innovation Commissioner. This first session will explore the implications of AI and automation across a broad range of social and economic policies associated with 'inclusive growth'. The event aims to encourage a common, pro-active, positive response to the challenges and opportunities.

Smart Cities World Congress 2025

- 3.16** Innovation City Belfast's (ICB) is participating at the Smart Cities World Congress from 4th to 6th November 2025. SCWC is the world's biggest and most influential event for urban innovation. Each year it attracts around 900 cities and 1,000 digital companies, bringing together a powerful ecosystem of leaders from global companies, city governments and funders.
- 3.17** The Belfast Innovation Commissioner, Adrian Johnston, is attending this year on behalf of ICB, which is hosting a Belfast presence as part of the UK Pavilion. The ICB stand at the United Kingdom Pavilion will provide rich opportunities for Belfast partners for networking, the promotion of Belfast's ambition, City Deal Digital innovation investments, the work of our universities, and the success of our innovative companies. (Members should note that Belfast's participation in a Bloomberg city network event last year that directly led to our successful bid to their Mayors Challenge outlined above.)

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- 3.18 This year Belfast City Council has been invited by the SCWC organisations to present on inclusive innovation. ICB has also encouraged its members to attend and is making a small number of Congress passes available free of charge. (These normally cost up to €950 each).
- 3.19 Members are asked to approve attendance by two officers from the City Innovation Office to accompany the Innovation Commissioner to this year's Congress.

ESRC Inclusive Innovation city workshop

- 3.20 Members previously approved Belfast City Council's participation in an £85,000 project led by Newcastle University and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Working with the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Oslo and EAFIT University, the project is exploring how City Deal and other place-based innovation investments can better contribute to local inclusive growth outcomes. The project will deliver a policy toolkit, guidance, and inform a future large scale funding bid.
- 3.21 Subsequently, Queen's University's QCAP team and Innovation City Belfast have become part of this work. QCAP received an additional £15,000 from ESRC to become involved.
- 3.22 The first city visit is planned for early December to Medellin. A delegation from Belfast, including community representatives working with QCAP, and the Innovation Commissioner, are planning to attend. This will be an opportunity to share inclusive innovation practice with Medellin city government officials, local community organisations, and business leaders. Return visits to Belfast and to Newcastle Upon Tyne are planned for the new year when representatives from Medellin and Pittsburgh will visit both cities. This will include work with local communities here in Belfast.
- 3.23 Members are asked to approve the participation of an officer from the City Innovation Office in the Medellin visit. Travel costs are included in the project funding. Details of the return visit will be shared with Members in the coming months.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.24 Resources for these initiatives have been identified within the existing departmental budgets.

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

- 3.25 None at present. A successful Bloomberg proposal will be subject to an Equality screening.

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Draft response to Department for Communities
Anti-Poverty Strategy Consultation**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to submit for the consideration of Members a draft corporate response to the Department for Communities (DfC) draft Anti-Poverty Strategy consultation.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- i. note the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy being consulted upon – [CLICK LINK](#);
- ii. consider and provide feedback on the draft Council response attached at Appendix 1; and
- iii. agree that the draft Council response, subject to any amendments made by Members, be submitted to DfC.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 The Department for Communities (DfC) recently launched a consultation on a draft Anti-Poverty Strategy for Northern Ireland, which sets out a proposed framework for addressing poverty in a practical and sustainable manner.
- 3.2 DfC defines poverty as the inability of individuals and households to afford the essentials of life, including food, housing, heating, and other basic needs. It is influenced by factors such as low income, high living costs, employment insecurity, health inequalities, and access to services. When people experience poverty, it can lead to poor mental and physical health, reduced educational outcomes, social isolation, and intergenerational cycles of disadvantage.
- 3.3 This strategy proposes a vision of eradicating poverty sustainably, supported by principles of collaboration, dignity, inclusion, and respect. It is structured around three pillars, each with associated outcomes:
1. Minimising risks;
 2. Minimising impacts; and
 3. Exiting poverty

- 3.4** Key outcomes include improving education and skills, addressing health and disability barriers, supporting vulnerable groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, carers, and children in care), enhancing employment quality, tackling place-based deprivation (e.g., transport poverty and access to green spaces), and promoting civic engagement. The strategy also commits to involving those with lived experience, developing indicators aligned with the Programme for Government, and establishing an Anti-Poverty Strategy Board for oversight.
- 3.5** As part of the recent refresh of the Belfast Agenda, a key and immediate area of concern emerging from key stakeholder groups, community and voluntary sector representatives, citizens, communities of interest, and elected Members was the growing poverty crisis facing the city and communities. There was a strong call to action for community planning partners to work with NICS Departments to move quickly to bring forward immediate and integrated measures to support vulnerable people, alongside helping inform the development of long-term and sustainable approaches and underpinning strategies, policies, and programmes.
- 3.6** There is little doubt that the scale and complexity of challenges, with a dangerous combination of rising living costs, stagnant wages, insecure employment, inadequate access to essential services, and systemic barriers for groups like disabled people, single mothers, and ethnic minorities, could create the perfect storm and push many households further into poverty. These pressures come at a time when many household budgets are already stretched thin, exacerbated by issues such as the two-child benefit limit, long health service waiting times, and in-work poverty. Living in poverty can severely affect a person's life in a wide range of ways, on physical and mental health, household finances, the economy, and ultimately on people's quality of life.
- 3.7** Members will be aware of the significant investment made by the Council over recent years in helping to alleviate the impact of poverty and the cost-of-living crisis, including initiatives aligned with our Inclusive Growth agenda to create a more compassionate city. Officers would highlight the collaboration which has taken place with DfC, and the role of Council working closely with community partners to get significant funding and support to those impacted by poverty across the city. There is no doubt of the effectiveness and impact of central and local government working together with communities in responding together in times of emergency.
- 3.8** While we understand and embrace the fact that its causes are complex and its consequences are multiple, there is an opportunity through community planning to create the environment and bring the key stakeholders together to develop achievable actions. Whilst

immediate and practical interventions and support can be brought forward to help mitigate the effects of poverty, we would commend that a broader and integrated programme and longer-term strategy and associated resources are required to seek to eradicate poverty within Belfast and the wider region.

3.9 Attached at appendix 1 is a proposed draft response which has been informed by feedback received from across Council departments. Overall, the Council supports the strategy's vision, broad areas of focus and outcomes which mirror good practice in terms of prevention approach, supporting those experiencing poverty, and creating pathways out of poverty. However, there are concerns raised in the draft response in relation to the about the absence of any detail on specific actions, timelines, SMART targets, and a robust performance management framework. Some of the key points included in the draft response include e.g.

- Consider adding a fourth pillar on prevention/eradication of poverty;
- The need to develop and embed measurable targets (e.g., reducing child poverty by a specific percentage by 2030)
- The need to ensure clear accountability for delivery through assigning departmental leads.
- Need for multi-year funding to be put in place.
- Adopting a poverty mainstreaming approach with an intersectional lens
- Seek to maximise the opportunities presented through new technologies and inclusive innovation to help understand the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and bring forward new technology and digital solutions to address poverty and reduce inequalities.
- Involvement of lived experience through models like Scotland's Experience Panels
- Establishing an independent Poverty and Inequality Commission
- Enhancing monitoring by disaggregating indicators by Section 75 groups and geography.
- Additional outcomes suggested cover the working poor, dual diagnosis services, transport poverty, green spaces, and civic voice.
- Feedback also emphasises integration with other strategies, co-design with vulnerable groups, and alignment with local initiatives like the Belfast Business Promise for greater synergies and effectiveness.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 There are no financial or human resource implications arising directly from this report.

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

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

The Committee:

- (i) noted the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy being consulted upon;
- (ii) approved the draft Council response attached at Appendix 1; and
- (iii) agreed that the draft Council response be submitted to DfC.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Director of Property and Projects submitted for the Committee's consideration 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 stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme, update on proposed new crematorium at Roselawn, along with updates on capital letters of offer and contracts awarded.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to –

- Capital Programme Movements –
 - Asset Management System – Integrated Work Management System – Agree that the project is 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 a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

- **Belfast Stories** - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and update regarding the funding position on the submitted Business Case to the Department for Economy (DfE) as part of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD).
- **Communication Boards in Playgrounds** – Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* with a maximum allocation of up to £170,000.
- **Strangford Playing Fields Enabling Works** - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* with a maximum allocation of up to £60,000 to allow contractor to be appointed and enabling works to commence.
- **City Hall External Christmas Tree** - Agree that the project is 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 a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
- **Basketball Courts** – Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
- **Woodvale Park Sensory Garden** – Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
- **Musgrave Park Sensory Garden** - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
- **Under the Bridges** - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

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- **Greening and Growing Project - Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.**
- **New Crematorium – note the scheduled date regarding the dedicated workshop session facilitated by the consultants on the new crematorium project on Thursday, 18th September 2025.**
- **Capital Letters of Offer - to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer.**
- **Contracts awarded in Q1 2025/26 - to note the update in relation to contracts awarded.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Physical Programme

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 Property and Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.

3.2 Capital Programme – Proposed Movements

As outlined above 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 - Asset Management System – Integrated Work Management System	Procurement and implementation of a new Asset Management Integrated Work Management System (IWMS).	Move to Stage 3 – Committed
Belfast Stories	The development of a new world class visitor attraction within the city centre.	Move to Stage 3 – Committed
Communication Boards	Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds.	Move to Stage 3 – Committed with a

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		maximum budget of £170,000
Strangford Playing Fields Enabling Works	Enabling works for active travel container and gate improvements.	Move to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum budget of £60,000
City Hall External Christmas Tree Provision	Consideration of options for replacement of the current Christmas Tree provision in front of the City Hall with an alternative solution.	Move to Stage 3 – Committed
Basketball Courts	Creation and upgrade of basketball courts at five BCC park sites	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
Woodvale Park Sensory Garden	New sensory garden facility	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
Musgrave Park Sensory Garden	Upgrade to sensory garden	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
Under the Bridges	Connectivity, active travel and public realm enhancements under M3 bridges	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
Greening and Growing Project	Biodiversity improvement and sustainable food growing development project at the Waterworks, funded through Shared Island programme.	Add as Stage 1 – Emerging

3.3 IT Programme - Asset Management System – Integrated Work Management System

The project is to procure and implement a new Asset Management Integrated Work Management System (IWMS). A single corporate asset register is fundamental to the management of assets and the Council's ability to take a strategic approach to the planning and use of assets, the management of risk and delivery of value for money and quality. 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. A contract will be awarded based on the most economically advantageous tender received and full commitment to deliver.*

3.4 Belfast Stories

Members will recall that Belfast Stories Outline Business Case (OBC) update was considered by the SP&R Committee in April 2025. Belfast Stories is the Council's flagship project under the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) and is due to open in 2030. Positioned as a tourism anchor, Belfast Stories is set to deliver significant economic and social impact for Belfast and beyond, helping to regenerate the city centre and connect the tourism offer to the neighbourhoods. The Committee noted the detailed overview of the OBC following the 5-case model, with the total estimated capital cost of the preferred option at approximately £100m with £35m funded by BCC and £65m by BRCD. Furthermore, it was agreed to submit the Business Case to the Department for Economy (DfE) for £65m funding as part of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD). *Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to Stage 3 – Committed and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and update regarding the funding position referred above.*

3.5 Communication Boards

This project was moved to the Capital Programme at Stage 2 – Uncommitted in May 2025 and was part of the agreed additional local schemes as a consequence of UKSPF. The outline business case has been completed and the project can now progress to delivery stage. *Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum allocation of up to £170,000. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.*

3.6 Strangford Playing Fields Enabling Works

This project was moved to the Capital Programme at Stage 2 – Uncommitted in April 2025 as part of the additional schemes on the recoup capital monies from UKSPF. The project involves the transfer of two containers (council assets) to Strangford Playing Fields, and the associated enabling works in preparation for the delivery of the containers. It is envisaged that one container will be fitted for bike storage and the other will include a small kitchenette. The project will act as an outdoor classroom/park outreach hub which will improve accessibility and enable further community programming in the park. *Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum allocation of up to £60,000 to allow contractor to be appointed and enabling works to commence. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.*

3.7 City Hall Christmas Tree Provision

In June 2024, the City Hall Christmas Tree Provision project was moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted under the Capital Programme. The City Hall Christmas tree is a major focal point within the City Centre and can set the tone for the city's Christmas celebrations, both for visitors and the local economy. Given issues with the quality and supply of real trees it is proposed to purchase an artificial tree which will be installed from 2026 onwards. A real tree will be installed this year. The Installation - City Hall/ City Hall Grounds Working Group at its meeting on 13th August agreed to recommend this approach to SP&R Committee. *Members are asked to agree that the project is 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 a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.*

3.8 Basketball Courts

This project was added to the Capital Programme at Stage 1 – Emerging in April 2025 as part of the additional schemes from UKSPF. The work includes creation or upgrades of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. *Members are asked to agree that the 'Basketball Courts' project is moved 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.*

3.9 Woodvale Park Sensory Garden

This project was added to the Capital Programme at Stage 1 – Emerging in April 2025, as above, this is part of the agreed additional schemes as a consequence of UKSPF. The work involves creation of a new sensory garden at Woodvale Park. *Members are asked to agree that the project is moved 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.*

3.10 Musgrave Park Sensory Garden

This project was added to the Capital Programme at Stage 1 – Emerging in April 2025, and it is part of the agreed additional schemes from UKSPF. The work includes refurbishment of the existing Musgrave Park Sensory Garden to provide a greater range of equipment that will improve the play value and accessibility of the facility. As per the three-stage approval process, a strategic

outline case has been submitted. *Members are asked to agree that the project is moved 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.*

3.11 Under the Bridges

In April 2025, the Under the Bridges project was added at Stage 1 – Emerging under the Capital Programme. This project seeks to improve connectivity through high quality active and sustainable travel corridors, enhanced public realm and amenity space under the M3 bridges. Members will note that this project is in partnership with BHC, DfI, DfC and BCC. Officers are currently working with consultants to develop project concepts and designs. *Members are asked to agree that the project is moved 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.*

3.12 Greening and Growing Project

This project focuses on biodiversity improvement and sustainable food growing development funded through Shared Island programme at the Waterworks. It will be developed and delivered on site managed by GROW NI community group, in partnership with Belfast City Council and Belfast Healthy Cities. *Members are asked to agree that the project is added to Stage 1 – Emerging to allow the business case to be developed.*

3.13 New Crematorium

Members will recall that on 20th June 2025, the Committee has received an update on proposed new crematorium at Roselawn and agreed to hold a dedicated workshop to inform a Strategic Analysis and Options Appraisal on the proposed project. The date of the workshop is now set on Thursday 18th September 2025. All Members of the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development (SC&CD) Working Group and SP&R Committee are invited and encouraged to attend. *Members are asked to note on the scheduled date regarding the workshop session which will be facilitated by the consultants on the new crematorium project.*

3.14 Capital Letters of Offer

Members are asked to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer in Q1 2025/26 at Appendix 1.

3.15 Contracts Awarded

Members are asked to note the award of tenders for capital works including services related to works in Q1 2025/26 at Appendix 2.

3.16 Financial and Resource Implications

Financial Implications –

Belfast Stories – up to £35m.

Communication Boards - capital allocation of up to £170,000.

Strangford Playing Fields Enabling Works - capital allocation of up to £60,000.

The Director of Finance has confirmed that these are within the affordability limits of the Council.

Resource Implications – Officer time to deliver.

**3.17 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.

Asset Management

The Committee:

- (i) St. John Vianney Youth Club – Lease assignment & Deed of Variation to LORAG**
 - Approved the assignment of the existing Lease between the Council and the Trustees of St. John Vianney Youth Club to Lower Ormeau Residents Association Group (LORAG) to ensure continuity of a youth club following the dissolution of the Trustee company.
 - Approved the submission of an application to the Department for Communities to seek approval for a rent at less than best value.
- (ii) John Murray Lockhouse- Disposal of lands to LORAG**
 - Approved the freehold disposal of 0.055 acres of land to be carved out of the existing community garden ground Lease to LORAG to facilitate an extension to the John Murray Lockhouse project.
 - Approved the submission of an application to the Department for Communities to seek approval for a disposal at less than best value.
- (iii) Ulster Hall, 3rd Floor Recording Studio– Renewal of Lease with BBC**

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- Approved the renewal of the Lease between the Council and the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) for the recording studio for a term of 5 years from 1 July 2025 at a rent of £3,500 p.a.
- (iv) Hope Street Car Park – Disposal of Land**
 - Approved the disposal of land resulting in the loss of 4 no. car parking spaces to the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company.
- (v) Glor-Na-Mona – New licence at Whiterock Close**
 - Approved a short-term licence for a meanwhile use at lands adjoining Glor-Na-Monas existing premises at Whiterock Close.
 - Approved amendment to the user clause for the current Lease and License to Glor- Na-Mona
 - Approve the proposal that the transaction can progress under delegated authority powers upon receipt of LPS valuation.
- (vi) Port Health Services – Transition arrangements from existing to new facilities**
 - Approved a Licence extension from DAERA to the Council to occupy DAERAs new Point of Entry inspection facility on a long-term basis.
 - Approved a Tenancy at Will from Belfast Harbour Commissioners (BHC) to the Council to retain the existing inspection facility as an operational contingency on a short-term basis.

Proposal

Benview Community Centre – New Licence

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

That the Committee agrees to reject a new 5-year licence agreement for the use of a portion of Benview Community Centre as a play centre and for use of storage container.

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

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Contracts Update

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1);
- approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3); and

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- noted the award of retrospective STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2):

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Booking system for cemeteries and crematorium including user licences, Funeral Director portal, Sculptor portal, finance integration, daily csv file extraction	Up to 4 years	£156,000	S McNicholl	License support and maintenance for Plotbox Bereavement Services Management System
Electric upgrade projects	Up to 5 years	£1,500,000	S Grimes	New MTC contract to provide emergency call outs, reactive & response maintenance works & provide call off facility for electrical contractor to carry out planned projects
Electric Gates, Barriers & Bollards maintenance and small works	Up to 5 years	£300,000	S Grimes	Recurring contract which covers callouts, repairs, planned maintenance and small works to electric gates, barriers & bollards systems to all Council properties
Lease of 2x 18T-RCV 4x2 x 18T narrow track 0L10N Electric Bin Lift	Up to 4 months	£35,000	S Leonard	The current lease for the hire of 2 x 18T RCVs contract (T2614) expires on 31/03/26 with no option to renew. A new 4- month interim hire contract required from April 2026 to July 2026 to allow for the continuation of services until the arrival of 2 x 18T RCV vehicles which have been purchased are not due to be

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				delivered until August 2026.
Collection of environmental water and sediment samples at North Foreshore Site	Up to 3 years	£160,000	S Grimes	The samples are required to be taken, analysed and reported to DAERA / NIEA in accordance with the relevant provisions of The Waste and Contaminated Land (NI) Order 1997.
Belfast WiFi Service	Up to 5 years	£165,000	S McNicholl	The Belfast WiFi service is required to deliver public WiFi services across over 100 council sites as well as external city centre locations.
Management and delivery of a Belfast Citywide Appeals Service	Up to 4.5 years	£1,215,000	D Sales	Provision of a shared and centralised appeals service, creating a dedicated and specialised service which could efficiently meet the wide range of need for appeals, across the communities of Belfast.
Implementation of a new Service Desk Management solution with Asset Management	Up to 4 years	£380,000	S McNicholl	Replacement of the current inhouse legacy CRM Service Desk system and Asset Management system that is approaching end of life.
Public services hub project delivery	Up to 15 months	£650,000	M McCann	Belfast 5G Innovation Region is a DSIT-funded programme that requires Belfast City Council, on behalf of Belfast Region, to deliver economic benefits in key industries. A public services hub will be delivered on behalf of Belfast City Council as part of this programme.

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				Approved April 2025 for 11 months. Duration has now been updated.
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Table 2: Retrospective Single Tender Actions

Title of Contract	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason
Fleadh Cheoil Belfast 2026 Volunteer Services	Up to 8 months	£55,610	D Martin	Volunteer Now is the only organisation in NI with experience and capacity of co-ordinating and managing a complex, high profile, volunteering programme of the scale of the Fleadh.	Volunteer Now	3

Table 3: Contract Modifications

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration	Modification	SRO	Description	Supplier
<p>T1974 – Security Guarding Services</p> <p>Lot 1 – Manned security guarding</p> <p>Lot 2 – Event stewarding</p> <p>Lot 4 – Keyholding</p> <p>Lot 5 – Mobile Patrol</p>	Up to 4 years	Additional 1 months and £110k	N Largey	<p>An additional 1-month extension of contract to help facilitate the evaluation and award of the new tender and ensure continuity of services including a smooth transition of any new service provider i.e. time for TUPE consultations and transfer.</p> <p>Large number of tender bids received as part of the re-tender exercise which is resulting in the evaluation taking longer to complete. Evaluation and award scheduled to be complete by end of August 25 but a 2-month handover period needs to be allowed for to allow for a potential</p>	<p>Cobra Security Services (Lots 1, 4 & 5)</p> <p>Eventsec (Lot 2)</p>

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				transfer to a new service provider.	
Review and development of additional H&S processes at Belfast Zoo	Up to 6 months	Additional 6 months and £15,000	D Martin	An extension to the current contract is required due to additional H&S requirements being generated following a HSENI investigation at the Zoo. Being reported as STA as value now exceeds £30k.	Health and Safety Risk Management Consultancy Service

Equality and Good Relations

**Minutes of Shared City Partnership
Meeting on 4th August 2025**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 4th August 2025 including:

Good Relations - Quarter 1 Update

- That Shared City Partnership recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that they note the contents of the report, including the allocation of £170,945.41 in grants through the Good Relations Small Grant Scheme.

Forth Meadow Community Greenway Signage update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that they also note the contents of the report

Peace Plus Local Community Action Plan (LCAP) Mobilisation Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Peace Plus Thriving and Peaceful Communities Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

Peace Plus Celebrating Culture and Diversity Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

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Peace Plus Processes Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Update from Partnership Members

- A Member advised the Partnership of an upcoming event entitled “Re-imagining Peace” which would take place in the City Hall on Monday, 29th September.
- A further Member reported that an event marking the International Day of Peace and promoting shared space would be taking place at Alexandra Park on Sunday, 21st September 2025.

Any Other Business

- The Chair welcomed the new Faith representative, Rev. Graeme Kennedy, who was taking over from Fr. Martin Magill and thanked Fr. Magill for all of his input over the last year.

Operational Issues

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

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 14th August 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
Active Communities Network	29 September 2025	ACN Way Project Celebration A celebration event alongside facilitated discussion of the ACN Way Project. The UK wide project helps grassroots organisations to become more sustainable and for leaders to develop their skills and confidence	D	Current rate free as Charity	

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		Numbers attending – 150			
Arts Ekta	6 October 2025	Garba Night 2025 is an annual celebration which brings the spirit of the Indian festival of Navratri to life through traditional music, dance, and cultural exchange. Numbers attending – 370	D	Current rate free as Charity	
Ashton Community Trust	14 October 2025	PEACEPLUS Health & Wellbeing Project Launch Celebration with speeches, showcase of project and light catering Numbers attending - 50	D	Current rate free as Charity	
Ulster Scots Agency	29 November 2025	Belfast Tartan Tay Reception is the culmination of a series of events to celebrate and mark Ulster-Scots Language Week. Reception of refreshments and musical performances will follow a parade in city centre. Numbers attending – 450	C	Room hire £450	
Department for Communities	2 December 2025	International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPWD) and celebration of Sean Fitzsimmons, internationally known disability rights advocate and developer of	C	Room hire £450	

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		<p>'Embrace the Inclusive Spirit'. Lunch, Presentations and speeches.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 70/100</p>			
South Belfast Youth Football League	12 December 2025	<p>10th Anniversary Celebratory Christmas Dinner. SBYL have supported young people with learning difficulties, disabilities and additional needs pensioners and the most vulnerable in society for 10 years.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 200</p>	C & D	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	
British Council	16 December 2025	<p>Schools COP30 British Council schools debate event engages students (aged 16-18) from approx. 30 schools in Northern Ireland to debate live and topical COP30 issues through a climate negotiation simulation.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 150</p>	D	Current rate free as Charity	
Cruse Bereavement Support	21 December 2025	<p>Light Up the Night – An Occasion to Remember commemoration event to support recently bereaved within community with reflective music, poetry and speeches.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 400</p>	D	Current rate free as Charity	

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**Request for use of City Hall grounds
for two events in Autumn 2025**

The Committee was reminded that requests for the use of City Hall and the grounds were normally dealt with under the authority delegated by the Committee to the Director of Legal and Civic Services using criteria agreed for this purpose. Occasionally, however, it was necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the requests set out below falls into this category.

PWC Sleep-Out for Homelessness Awareness 26th September 2025

PWC had held similar events on 20th October 2023 and on 27th September 2024 and the events were successful with no incidents, hence PWC requesting a third event.

The proposed sleep-out would take place along the West façade of City Hall, with around 50 participants sleeping overnight on the pathways, ensuring a safe distance from the intruder alarms situated along façade. Their preference was concrete rather than the grass lawns. The City Hall building and grounds would be closed to the public as normal at this time. The only Infrastructure onsite would be portaloos, no catering provision was planned, and participants would bring their own sleeping materials. A wet weather alternative was not available inside the City Hall. PWC staff would fundraise in advance of the event and monies raised would be donated to charities helping with homelessness.

A Belfast One Halloween 25th – 26th October 2025

Belfast One had held similar events on 28th and 29th October 2023 and on 26th and 27th October 2024 and the events were successful with no incidents, hence Belfast One was requesting a third event.

The event would be aimed towards families celebrating Halloween, with a pumpkin patch on the west lawn with a few novelties throughout such as scarecrows. The event would be ticketed online and at the gate, allowing for restricted flow throughout the day, with an allowance of 80 guests per half hour to avoid overcrowding. It would be designed with a route through the patch with an entrance and exit on opposite sides to stop congestion and limit lawn damage, with mats in place to help mitigate damage also. There would be some additional entertainment throughout the day such as characters animation. The set-up would be facilitated from the afternoon of the 24 October 2025. The event intended to support wider activity across the City Centre. A report outlining Council funding for this event and associated city-wide activity was presented to City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 6th August by the Culture and Tourism Unit.

In respect of the PWC request, it should be noted that the city centre was very busy on Friday evenings and therefore there might be a requirement for the organiser to pay for additional security depending upon the event management plan and risk assessment.

There would be no costs to the Council for both these requests as the various organisers would bear any/all stewarding and equipment costs etc. themselves. The normal event support in the form of electrical and water provision in the grounds was not required for either of these events. There were no concerns from an asset management point of view,

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although the organisers would be required to provide the usual insurances, indemnities, and obligations.

The Committee authorised:

1. the use of City Hall grounds on the dates noted above; and
2. the events to take place on the basis of the submission of an event management plan and risk assessment to ensure delivery of a safe public events.

**Minutes of the meeting of the City Hall/City
Hall Grounds Installations Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the City Hall/City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group of 13th August 2025.

Chairperson