

# Zoo Long-Term Financial Sustainability Group

Wednesday, 27th May, 2026

## MEETING OF THE ZOO LONG-TERM FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY GROUP

Members present: Councillors Anglin, Flynn,  
Murphy and Nelson.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive (Chairperson);  
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;  
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;  
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration  
and Development;  
Mr. N. Simpson, Zoo Development Manager;  
Ms. J. Bryans, Zoo Commercial Support Officer;  
Ms. A. Fox, Assets Development Officer;  
Ms. S. Kalke, Client Manager (Physical Programme); and  
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Brennan and R. McLaughlin.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 10th December, 2025, were taken as read and signed as correct.

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest reported.

### **Terms of Reference**

The Group approved the terms of reference as outlined by the Strategic Director of Place and Economy. The Strategic Director highlighted the Group's purpose which would be to examine options in relation to the long-term financial sustainability of Belfast Zoo and complementary assets, and to make recommendations to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee by February, 2027.

### **Workshop Recap**

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided the Group with an overview of the issues discussed and raised at its workshop held on 4th March, 2026.

### **Updates and Next Steps**

The Zoo Development Manager provided the Group with an update in relation to a range of operational matters including staff recruitment and training, and the development of the Zoo's Annual Business Plan for 2026/27.

The Zoo Commercial Support Officer outlined the work which had been undertaken in respect of marketing, corporate sponsorship and outreach activity. She also provided the Group with further detail in respect of the upcoming events at the Zoo.

The Group was provided with an overview of the Zoo's current position in relation to conservation, which included detail on the species cared for which are threatened with extinction and the species which are managed as part of the European Endangered Species Programmes (EEP's).

In relation to next steps, the Development Manager and the Commercial Support Officer outlined a range of short to medium-term measures and actions, such as the ongoing health and safety and animal welfare capital improvements, small-scale changes to animal habitats and changes to improve and enhance customer experience.

A copy of the key findings from the n-gage.io industry insights report '*UK Zoo and Wildlife Attraction Benchmark Survey 2026*' was submitted for the Group's information to provide an overview of the industry's strategic priorities, operational pressures and future direction.

The Director of Property and Projects highlighted potential site visits for the Group's consideration.

During discussion, officers answered a range of questions in relation to Zoo improvements and challenges, increasing footfall, conservation, enhancing customer experience, operating models, and customer journey mapping.

A Member highlighted the critical role of the Zoo in respect of conservation and the importance of increasing awareness regarding its work to care for and manage vulnerable and endangered species through breeding programmes and supported conservation projects.

The Group requested that, at future meetings, it be provided with financial and visitor data. The Group also requested that further information be submitted to its next meeting in relation to the Zoo's Annual Business Plan for 2026/27 and corporate sponsorship.

Chairperson