

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



**Belfast
City Council**

11th December, 2023

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room and via Teams on Friday, 15th December, 2023 at 9.30 a.m., for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes
- (c) Declarations of Interest

2. Restricted Items

- (a) Appointment of Strategic Director of Place and Economy (Pages 1 - 2)

3. Matters referred back from Council/Motions

- (a) Motion - Removal of the Maximum Capital Value Cap on Domestic Rates (Pages 3 - 6)
- (b) Motion - Right to Grow on Council-Owned Land (Pages 7 - 10)

4. Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

- (a) 30 Under 30 Climate Change-Makers Programme (Pages 11 - 14)
- (b) Review of Energy Efficiency Requirements and Related Areas of Building Regulations - Council Response (Pages 15 - 20)
- (c) Draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls/Foundational Action Plan/Reaccreditation of the Safe Employer and Safe Place Awards (Pages 21 - 34)
- (d) UNESCO Learning Cities - Belfast Festival of Learning 2024 (Pages 35 - 40)

5. Physical Programme and Asset Management

6. Finance, Procurement and Performance

- (a) Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes of the Meeting of 5th December (Pages 41 - 66)

7. Equality and Good Relations

- (a) Equality and Diversity: Equality Screening Outcome Report and Rural Needs Impact Assessment - Quarter 2 2023/24 (Pages 67 - 74)
- (b) Update on Race Equality Action Plan (Pages 75 - 80)

8. Operational Issues

- (a) Minutes of the Meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum (Pages 81 - 84)
- (b) Requests for use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality (Pages 85 - 90)
- (c) Requests for the use of the City Hall Grounds for Events in 2024 (Pages 91 - 94)

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

Document is Restricted

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Belfast
City Council

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE

Subject:	Motion – Removal of the Maximum Capital Value Cap on Domestic Rates
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
	To bring to Members' attention a motion in relation to the Removal of the Maximum Capital Value Cap on Domestic Rates, which the Standards and Business Committee considered at its meeting on 28th November.
2.0	Recommendation
	The Committee is asked to consider the motion and take such action thereon as may be determined.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 28th November, considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 4th December:</p> <p><u>Removal of the Maximum Capital Value Cap on Domestic Rates</u></p> <p>"This Council notes that, for ordinary domestic Belfast rate payers, it is a struggle to make ends meet at present, especially with rates reaching 7.99% in 2023/2024. For the better off in society, rates are not such a struggle to pay.</p> <p>There is a maximum capital value cap on Domestic Rates known as the Max Cap, which is currently set at £400,000, that limits the rates those in more affluent homes are compelled to pay. The Max Cap has not been altered since 2009. It is prescribed in legislation: The Rates (Maximum Capital Value) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, as amended.</p> <p>A rebalancing of the rates burden needs to take place so that all rate payers pay their fair share. There is no good reason for the poorer to pay more in percentage terms when they are struggling financially.</p> <p>The Council, therefore, urges the Government to remove the Max Cap and phase it in over several years. This will allow affluent rate payers a graduated response to rate rises over a period.</p> <p>In light of consultation that will take place on this issue, the Council will also make this motion a collective submission to the consultation".</p>

	<p>Proposer: Councillor McDowell</p> <p>Seconder: Councillor Flynn</p>
3.2	<p>As the motion calls upon the Council to support the removal of the maximum capital value cap on domestic rates, it was referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, as it is responsible for the annual revenue and capital budgets and the rate to be levied and will also be considering a Council response to the consultation paper on domestic rating measures.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.3	<p>This motion, if agreed, may have potential equality, good relations and rural needs implications and should be subject to our normal screening process as appropriate.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None

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Belfast
City Council

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE

Subject:	Motion – Right to Grow on Council-Owned Land
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes ☐ No ☒

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

Insert number

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6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
	To bring to Members' attention a motion in relation to the Right to Grow on Council-Owned Land, which the Standards and Business Committee considered at its meeting on 28th November.
2.0	Recommendation
	The Committee is asked to consider the motion and take such action thereon as may be determined.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 28th November, considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 4th December:</p> <p><u>Right to Grow on Council-Owned Land</u></p> <p>“This Council notes the pressures upon food security caused by many issues, including the cost-of-living crisis, the impact of the pandemic and climate change. It is, therefore, vital that the Council plays its part to ensure that our citizens have access to enough fresh food for day-to-day living.</p> <p>The Council, therefore, agrees to adopt a right to grow on Council-owned land which is suitable for cultivation. This would probably involve licensing cultivation of suitable land via community groups.”</p> <p>Proposer: Councillor Bell Seconder: Councillor Flynn</p>
3.2	<p>As the motion calls upon the Council to adopt a right to grow on Council owned land, it was referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, which is responsible for maintaining the corporate land bank and city assets.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>This motion, if agreed, may have potential equality, good relations and rural needs implications and should be subject to our normal screening process as appropriate.</p>

4.0	Documents Attached
	None

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Subject:	30U30 Northern Ireland Climate Change-Makers Programme
Date:	15th December 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officers:	Debbie Caldwell, Belfast Climate Commissioner

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

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To inform the Committee of an approach to the Council for support for the 30U30 (30 under 30) Northern Ireland Climate Change-Maker's programme.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. agree to contribute £8,750 plus VAT to the overall 30U30 Northern Ireland Climate Change-Makers programme costs; ii. note that, whilst the Council's support represents a modest proportion of the overall budget (circa £100,000 in total), it will be crucial in making the initiative (the themes of which complement and supplement the Council's climate programme) a reality; iii. note that the Council's support will resource the launch along with six modules/events featuring world-class speakers/experts taking place from January – June 2024; and iv. note that the collaborative, cross sectoral initiative, featuring world-class speakers and experts, will be supported by organisations such as Pinsent Masons, Coca Cola and Danske Bank with a request for local authority involvement being addressed through this approach to the Council.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>The 30 under 30 initiative is a climate focused programme where young leaders from Northern Ireland have the opportunity to take part in an international learning programme, led by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and Podiem. Following an exceptionally successful, multi-award-winning pilot programme (supported by the Council last year) a new cohort of young leaders will be competitively selected and there is a request for the Council to support the programme of activity they will undertake. Most of the 30U30 modules are being delivered in Belfast City Centre and the vast majority of the participants will either reside or work within the Belfast City Council footprint. The cohort will be diverse with a broad range of backgrounds, sectors and interest/expertise areas represented. Within the pilot programme over 55% of the group were female with a mix of those in education, employment and currently economically inactive.</p>
3.2	<p>Within the modular programme, participants will learn from globally renowned thought leaders and exemplars across a range of relevant topics. These topics have been carefully crafted to create a cohort of leaders who will return to their fields of expertise with the tools to become planet positive change-makers in the short/long term. Speakers and facilitators from the pilot programme included globally renowned individuals such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alice Thompson, an international speaker and social business leader who co-founded Social Bite in Edinburgh and helped to establish 'The Worlds Big Sleepout' which took place in 52 cities around the world;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gerry Hussey, Ireland’s leading health, wellbeing and performance coach, who has worked with many leading sports people and teams, and author of ‘Awaken Your Power Within’; • Philip Hesketh, an international authority on influence and persuasion, who has worked with clients such as the BBC, Nestle, Walt Disney, Nike, Microsoft and Bank of America, among others; and • René Carayol MBE, who has worked with leaders such as Mikael Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela, Sir Richard Branson, Bill Clinton, and Kofi Annan, and authored the book ‘SPIKE’. He has been Chairman, CEO and MD of businesses and served on the boards of Marks and Spencer’s and Pepsi. He is an authority on inclusivity and leadership.
3.3	<p>The programme includes an international element which will encourage and enable the NI climate change-makers to build relationships and collaborations with climate change-makers from other parts of the world through the 30 under 30 programme currently run by the North American Association for Environmental Education.</p> <p>Potential benefits for the Council</p>
3.4	<p>The programme coordinators will ensure that the Council will be positioned as championing (along with the other partners) the creation and development of the next generation of local leaders who will lead work to address climate change in Northern Ireland. This will support the cities ambition, articulated in the Belfast Resilience Strategy, to “transition to a low-carbon economy in a generation”. It will also build on work undertaken by the Council Climate Unit with young people through the Belfast Climate Commission and Council funded research on young people’s perceptions of the climate crisis undertaken during COP26 in 2021. Should the Council support the initiative, the Climate Unit will explore opportunities to align with our existing climate programme and the work being undertaken with young leaders through Belfast Climate Commission and within other projects such as Belfast One Million Trees Programme, the UPSURGE project, the Belfast Retrofit Hub and the Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership. In supporting this programme, the Council will be going well beyond its own carbon footprint and direct activity, it is proactively inspiring and equipping those who have the ambition to transform industries (similar to Artemis and Responsible, both from Belfast) and create global solutions (for example Catagen, also from Belfast) to our most pressing climate and environmental challenges.</p>

3.5	In terms of profile, the Council brand will be prominent on all of the initiative marketing material which will be launched to ensure mass awareness. The Council brand will also be highly visible at all of the modules (including the finale event) and a Council representative will be invited to participate in the press photos launching the event and at the finale event.
3.6	There is also an opportunity for a member of the Council's Climate team to present on how a city is playing its part in helping to avert a climate crisis. The cohort will feature some of NI's finest future leadership talent (including those from the local government sector), so this content will be very useful and relevant to the participants.
3.7	There is an opportunity for the Lord Mayor of Belfast to greet the group and hear how they are planning to create meaningful impact as a direct consequence of the programme. A short video of the Lord Mayor greeting the group as part of the pilot programme is visible at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3wl5qXyd48 There is also an opportunity to host one of the modules in the City Hall and secure the press coverage associated with that. This would be the ideal event for the Lord Mayor to greet and listen to the group and the positive planet impact they plan to create.
<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>	
3.8	£8,750 plus VAT which will be allocated from existing City and Organisational Strategy budgets.
<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications</u>	
3.9	None.
4.0 Documents Attached	
	None.



Subject:	Review of Energy Efficiency Requirements and Related Areas of Building Regulations – Council Response
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Ian Harper, Building Control Manager James Calwell, Building Control Surveyor,

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To present a response to a pre-consultation document, prepared by the Building Standards Branch of the Department of Finance (DoF), on potential proposals regarding energy efficiency measures and related areas of the Building Regulations.
1.2	The document is a call for evidence in a pre-consultation format covering a wide range of subject areas. It has 273 pages (with additional links to other documents) and contains 128 questions. The aim of this pre-consultation is to gather evidence that will help inform future improvements relating to energy efficiency of buildings and related areas.
1.3	At this stage, the nature of the evidence gathering is very wide and is not specific in a regulatory function. It is anticipated that further, directed consultation will follow (proposed under the next phase) which will require more specific input from Council as a Regulatory body.
2.0	Decision(s) required and recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. consider the draft response to the Department of Finance (DoF) pre-consultation and agree, subject to any amendments, a response on behalf of the Council; and ii. note that the closing date for responses to this consultation is 15th December 2023. If agreed, the response will be submitted, subject to ratification by the Council on 8th January.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	The document is a pre-consultation 'discussion document' that outlines potential future improvements in energy efficiency standards and related areas and explores the associated benefits and challenges in respect to future up-lifts.
3.2	This is essentially a scoping exercise to determine proposals that will be included in the next phase (phase 3) of the Department of Finance's 5 phase programme.
3.3	The overall objective will be to achieve much lower operational emissions and significantly improved energy performance of new buildings. The proposals also seek to uplift the standards when building work occurs to existing buildings, so that extensions are better aligned with new building practices. The consultation also explores the provision of improved building ventilation, electric vehicle charging infrastructure points around buildings, as well as new measures to help prevent overheating in dwellings.

3.4	<p>Uplifts to local Building Regulations in Northern Ireland normally take place following revisions made in England and the general technical guidance tends to be based on similar standards of technical performance with England, although some local adjustments may be made. This approach has been longstanding and follows the recommendations from the McConnell report 1970. Many of the proposals in the document follow England's Future Homes Standards.</p>
	<p><u>Proposals and Purpose</u></p>
3.5	<p>The Executive's <i>Energy Strategy - Path to Net Zero Energy (December 2021)</i> and associated Action Plans included a commitment to an interim uplift through revised technical guidance, which took effect in June 2022. That strategy also seeks to ensure new buildings are designed and constructed to net zero ready standards from no later than 2026/27. This discussion document represents the next step in that journey and seeks information and evidence on a range of technical issues to help inform subsequent uplifts.</p>
3.6	<p>The pre-consultation document is considering developments around energy efficiency aspects of the Building Regulations and related parts, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) • Part K (Ventilation) • Overheating (potentially a new part to the Building Regulations) • Provision of Electric Vehicle charge-point infrastructure. (Potentially a new part to the Building Regulations)
	<p><u>Headline Proposals</u></p>
3.7	<p>Timeframes – Provisional timeframes being 2024 for the implementation of the next phase (phase 3) with a further uplift proposed in 2026/27 (phase 4)</p>
3.8	<p>New Notional Dwelling Recipe – A new dwelling will be assessed against a similar size property which has much improved fabric measures and an expectation of 40% of the a building's roof to be covered with photovoltaic arrays (unless heated by a low carbon source). In addition to this, the DoF are keen to assess the appetite for a move to an alternative 'Option 2' heat-pump led approach.</p>

3.9	Fuel Factors - Removal of all existing 'fuel factors', which currently ease emissions targets, when higher carbon fuels are proposed. This will make use of conventional oil fuelled heating solutions very challenging in new dwellings.
3.10	Introduction of New Measurement Metrics – Introduction of a new secondary metric of 'primary energy' to act in addition to the carbon performance requirement. This is important, particularly in the context of decarbonisation of the electricity grid.
3.11	New Fabric Requirements – Improved insulation and airtightness levels within buildings. This would be supported by a new performance metric Fabric Energy Efficiency Standard (FEES). This will help with preventing the offsetting of emissions or primary energy impacts with excessive on-site renewables.
3.12	Provision of Information – Provision of information including, home user guides, compliance reports, geo-located and dated photographs of construction details.
3.13	Extensions - Improved elemental standards for extensions and minimum services efficiencies for existing dwellings to be more aligned with new-build standards.
3.14	Consequential Improvements - New consequential improvements requiring some low-cost interventions in existing dwellings where an extension is proposed.
3.15	Heating installations - New heating installations required to operate at lower flow temperatures. Improved efficiencies and controls on new heating installations.
3.16	Amalgamation of Technical Documents – It is proposed to introduce the updated guidance on minimum standards for building services and integrate this within Technical Booklet F (Conservation of Fuel and Power), rather than being published as a secondary reference document.
3.17	Ventilation – A review is proposed on the guidance for ventilation to ensure good indoor air quality is achieved. Proposals include limitations on the use of natural ventilation, revised ventilation sizes, ventilation provisions when work occurs on existing buildings and dedicated drying facilities for drying clothes.
3.18	Overheating – The DoF are considering the introduction of overheating mitigation standards to the Building Regulations. The proposal will require designers to carry out a 'simplified method' assessment of the extent of openings and glazing on the dwelling. Alternatively, or

	where the requirements of the simplified approach are not able to be met, dynamic thermal modelling of the dwelling can be used.
3.19	<p>Infrastructure for Electric Vehicle Charge Points – The DoF is considering the introduction of EV infrastructure charge points / ducting to parking spaces in and adjacent to new buildings and buildings undergoing major renovation work.</p> <p>Belfast City Council Response</p>
3.20	The Building Control Service co-ordinated this response in consultation with colleagues in the Climate Team, Planning Service, Environment Health and Physical Programmes and the proposed response on behalf of the Council can be accessed here . Members are advised that, given the wide range of issues discussed and evidence requested, officers have provided responses only where appropriate.
3.21	<p>The direction of travel being proposed in respect to an up-lift to the Building Regulations relating to improving the energy performance of buildings is broadly welcomed. The proposals reflect many of the priorities of the Net Zero Carbon Road Map for Belfast. The suggested ideas are expected to deliver benefits for the citizens of Belfast and improve use of our energy resources. Through the delivery of more energy efficient buildings, they will provide more comfortable indoor environments and potentially lower running costs.</p> <p>The full package of consultation documents can be found on the Department's website: -</p> <p>https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations/review-energy-efficiency-building-regulations</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.22	<p>As this is a pre-consultation document the DoF has not carried out a Regulatory Impact Assessment to establish the financial impact of these changes to Industry, this will take place once proposals have been finalised under the next phase (phase 3).</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.23	The proposed amendments have been screened out by DoF in relation to the need to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. A Rural Needs Impact Assessment has also been carried out by the Department which identified there may be impacts on the rural community in areas where access to mains gas and/or where the electricity network may not readily support the

	new requirements. It is expected that further work may be needed to assess the impacts depending on the route of travel in this regard. Both documents are published separately on the Departmental Website.
4.0	Document Attached
	Draft BCC Consultation Response – see paragraph 3.20 for link



Subject:	Draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and Foundational Action Plan/Council's Reaccreditation of the Safe Employer and Safe Place Awards
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources
Contact Officer:	Catherine Christy HR Manager - Development

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

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the Women's Steering Group's response to the Executive Office's consultation on Ending Violence against Women and Girls

	and the Council's recent reaccreditation of the Onus employer Safe Place and Safe City Awards.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and the Council's reaccreditation of the ONUS Safe Place Platinum employers' award and the Onus Safe City award.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>TEO Consultation</p> <p>The consultation ran for 13 weeks from 4th July to 3rd October, 2023 and sought views on the new draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls and Foundational Action Plan, being led by the Executive Office (TEO). The seven-year (2023-2030) Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls has been co-designed with over 50 partners from across government, community and voluntary sectors and organisations, as well as wider society. Importantly, these partners also include those with lived experience. It sets the agenda for all of government and society here to end violence against women and girls. (A summary of the TEO consultation is attached).</p> <p>Strategic Framework Content</p>
3.2	The Vision of the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls is a changed society where women and girls are free from all forms of gender-based violence, abuse and harm including the attitudes, systems and structural inequalities that cause them.
3.3	<p>The aim of the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls is to work together as partners across every sector of society to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls with a focus on root causes with four broad themes identified:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prevention; 2. Protection and Provision; 3. Justice System; and 4. Working Better Together <p>Outcomes</p> <p>Six big changes were identified and grouped into outcomes, namely:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Changed attitudes, behaviours, and social norms; 2. Healthy, respectful relationships;

	<p>3. Women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere;</p> <p>4. Quality frontline services, protection, and provision for victims and survivors of violence against women and girls;</p> <p>5. A justice system which has the confidence of victims, survivors and the public in its ability to address violence against women and girls; and</p> <p>6. All of government and society working better together to end violence against women and girls.</p> <p>Women's Steering Group Response</p>
3.4	<p>The Women's Steering Group (WSG) was established in 2006 to develop and the deliver the Council's Gender Action Plan, aimed at promoting gender equality both within the Council and across the city of Belfast. WSG proactively supports programmes aimed at ensuring women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere and is keen to explore how the council, and local government in general, can support the prevention of violence against women and girls. A response to the consultation has been sent to TEO on behalf of Women's Steering Group, (please see Appendix 2.) The response emphasises the important role that local government has to play in delivering the framework and achieving the outcomes.</p>
3.5	<p>On 21st November, the WSG hosted a delegation from The Executive Office who presented on the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, Draft Strategic Framework and Foundational Action Plan. The Executive Office has subsequently been asked to present to the Corporate Management Team and this will be followed by a workshop with council officers in relevant departments to consider how council can help deliver the action plan.</p>
3.6	<p>ONUS Safe Place Platinum Employers' award and the Onus Safe City award.</p> <p>An important element of the Gender Action plan is ongoing work to raise awareness around domestic violence and abuse, promote a zero-tolerance approach and provide support for those experiencing domestic abuse. Our workplace policy and activities and our work with partners across the city to raise awareness and provide support has been recognised again this year at the Onus Annual Awards with the Council being recredited with the Platinum Employers award and the Safe City award.</p>
3.7	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional financial or human resource implications in this report.</p>

3.8	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>An EQIA and Rural Needs Impact assessment on the Draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls has been carried out by TEO.</p>
4.0	<p>Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Summary of TEO consultation on draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and Foundational Action Plan</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Women’s Steering Group response to TEO consultation on draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and Foundational Action Plan</p>

TEO consultation on draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and Foundational Action Plan

Closes 3 October

Introduction

1. This consultation seeks views on the new draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and Foundational Action Plan, being led by the Executive Office (TEO).
2. The seven-year (2023-2030) Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls has been co-designed with over 50 partners from across government, community and voluntary sectors and organisations, as well as wider society. Importantly, these partners also include those with lived experience.
3. It sets the agenda for all of government and society here to end violence against women and girls. It is ambitious, long term, and wide reaching. It is a living document and will be adapted along the journey responding to emerging needs.

Consultation

1. The consultation will run for 13 weeks from 04 July 2023 to 03 October 2023.
2. While we want to hear from as many people as possible on as many of the changes as possible, please feel free to comment on as few or as many of them as you see fit.
3. The proposals for the Strategic Framework and Foundational Action Plan are subject to the views of the Executive who will be responsible for final approval.

Purpose

1. This seven-year (2023-2030) Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG), builds on the evidence received, and the key issues identified through the Call for Views consultation process, which took place in 2022. It sets the agenda for all of government and society to end violence against women and girls. It is ambitious, long term, and wide reaching. As a living document, it will be adapted along the journey according to emerging needs.
2. The **problem statement** that this Strategic Framework is addressing was agreed by our co-design group as,
“Societal culture and systemic attitudes and beliefs enable violence against women and girls”.
3. Wellbeing for all is at the heart of what Government aims to deliver in this jurisdiction. The ability to form and enjoy healthy relationships is central to individual wellbeing, and vital to building communities and a society where everyone can thrive. This is something that we want for all our children, and for every individual and community here.
4. Violence against women and girls, in all its forms, is a critical obstacle to achieving this goal of wellbeing for all. It is damaging to women, girls, men and boys. Stopping violence against women and girls by

changing the attitudes, behaviours, and social norms that accept and enable it, can create a future that is not only better and safer for women and girls, but more just, equal, and respectful for everyone.

Overview of the Strategic Framework

The co-design process to develop the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls began in October 2022. It saw a group of over 50 partners come together from across government, different sectors, and wider society, including intersectional representation and, importantly, those with lived experience, to create a Strategic Framework that has been **designed with**, not for, our communities and society.

Vision

The Vision of the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls is

A changed society where women and girls are free from all forms of gender-based violence, abuse and harm including the attitudes, systems and structural inequalities that cause them.

Aim

The Aim of the Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls is:

To work together as partners across every sector of society to prevent and eradicate all forms of violence against women and girls with a focus on root causes.

Four Themes

In developing this Strategic Framework our co-design group identified 4 broad themes and 6 big changes or 'outcomes' required to end violence against women and girls. The outcomes are grouped under the four themes:

1. **Prevention;**
2. **Protection and Provision;**
3. **Justice System;** and
4. **Working Better Together**

Prevention

The emphasis of this Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls is on the theme of **prevention**. Effective prevention can both stop violence from occurring in the first place, such as education and campaigns; as well as interrupt the cycle of violence, like making public transport safer. Our main focus will be on those outcomes associated with prevention:

- Changing attitudes, behaviours, and social norms
- Building knowledge and skills of individuals to form healthy relationships
- Ensuring that women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere.

Outcomes

The 6 big changes required to end violence against women and girls identified by our Co-design group were grouped into six outcomes, with priority areas identified under each outcome:

• Outcome 1: Changed Attitudes, Behaviours, and Social Norms.

Everyone in society understands what violence against women and girls is, including its root causes, and plays an active role in preventing it.

- **Outcome 2: Healthy, Respectful Relationships.**

Everyone in society is equipped and empowered to enjoy healthy, respectful relationships.

- **Outcome 3: Women and Girls are Safe and Feel Safe Everywhere.**

Organisations and institutions across government and society embed the prevention of violence against women and girls in all that they do so that women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere.

- **Outcome 4: Quality Frontline Services, Protection, and Provision for Victims and Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls.**

Provision of high quality services for women and girls who are victims and survivors of violence against women and girls.

- **Outcome 5: A Justice System which has the Confidence of Victims, Survivors and the Public in its Ability to Address Violence Against Women and Girls.**

In the context of violence against women and girls, a justice system that considers and addresses the needs of people who come into contact with it, holds perpetrators to account, while challenging and supporting them to change, gives victims and survivors a voice and a place in the process, and has the confidence of the public.

- **Outcome 6: All of Government and Society Working Better Together to End Violence Against Women and Girls**

A whole system approach with collaboration and cooperation by default across government departments and with, within, and between the community, voluntary, and other sectors.

Each of these Outcomes, and the priorities for delivering them are explained in more detail in our Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

Overview of the Foundational Action Plan

This Action Plan is a foundational one which establishes our work for the remainder of 2023/24. This approach allows us to make progress in the challenging financial climate this year, and to align our planning cycle with the financial year from March 2024. As we go forward, further conversations will be needed to allow us to advise the Executive on decisions to be taken on budgets and priorities.

The Action Plan consists of a series of key actions that were developed to lay the foundations of the work to bring about meaningful change and effective delivery as we move forward, and which the Strategic Framework can build upon in subsequent years.

Foundational Action Plan

Actions falling under the theme of Prevention:

1. Develop a society wide communications and engagement strategy to change attitudes, behaviours and social norms.
2. Adopt the Task Group Sprint Model to consider the needs (including Intersectional needs) of specific groups.
3. Establish a forum to coordinate work on equipping and supporting families, children and young people to enjoy healthy, respectful relationships using the curriculum (including Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE)), policies and practices in early years, schools and community sector.

4. To embed structures and processes which give space for young people's voices to participate and influence decision makers in ending violence against women and girls (EVAWG) work.
5. Establish a cross sectoral Further and Higher education working group to develop a plan to address EVAWG on and off campus.
6. Establish a cross-sectoral workplace forum (including unions, Labour Relations Agency, employers' organisations and other professional bodies) to develop workplace policy toolkits/ guidance and to promote workplace training/ best practice in professional standards on EVAWG, Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) to lead good practice in public sector.
7. Support the cross-sectoral group addressing EVAWG issues in the hospitality sector and the night-time economy.

Actions falling under the theme of **Protection and Provision**

8. Map and undertake gap analysis of violence against women and girls (VAWG) provision in general frontline services to help inform further policy development and service delivery.
9. Map and undertake gap analysis of VAWG provision in specialist frontline services including a review of referral gateways to help inform further policy development and service delivery.

Actions falling under the theme of **Justice System:**

10. Develop further tools for communicating information on the justice system and processes to improve information sharing and enhance confidence amongst victims/survivors in support of implementation of the Victim and Witness Strategy.
11. In the context of care and protections for victims in the justice system:
 - a. evaluate agreed interventions that are providing support to victims to access the Justice System;
 - b. support research on victim attrition rates in serious sexual offences and domestic abuse cases as part of implementation of Gillen Programme and Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.
12. Explore with partners options to create specialism in VAWG cases in court proceedings including information provision for juries.
13. Undertake a review of international best practice perpetrator prevention and management systems to inform policy development and practice in support of the review under the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy.
14. Undertake a review of trends in aggravating and reinforcing factors of VAWG to inform policy development and practice.

Actions falling under the theme of **Working Better Together:**

15. Create a Knowledge and Network Hub within the Executive Office (TEO) to provide an accessible central resource on EVAWG research, data & evaluation and communication & engagement.
16. Establish a cross sectoral group located within the Knowledge and Network Hub to develop and lead the programme of EVAWG work on data and evaluation.
17. Through the Knowledge and Network Hub, develop and deliver an agreed annual EVAWG research programme with advice and support from a cross jurisdictional panel of academic research experts.
18. Through the Knowledge and Network Hub create reference groups to engage with lived experience, service provision, and academic research expertise in the development of the EVAWG work programme.

19. Create a five jurisdiction officials forum to share best practice and encourage cross jurisdictional shared learning.
20. NICS will identify and implement mechanisms including Programme for Government (PfG) to mainstream opportunities to EVAWG in public policies and strategies at all levels.
21. Develop funding strategy for sustainable EVAWG work across departments and other sectors.
22. In order to build widespread support for a changed society where women and girls are free from all forms of gender-based violence, abuse and harm including the attitudes, systems and structural inequalities that cause them - to seek endorsement of EVAWG strategic framework and active participation in the whole of society programme of actions by political and civic leaders.

Note: at a recent information seminar TEO presented the following:

How can we work together?

Building strong partnerships

- Programme of engagement between EVAWG, NILGA and SOLACE to share information and expertise
- Consider arrangements to facilitate and support strategic collaboration
- Joining in NIwide campaigns for example Women's NightTime Safety Charter
- Building on existing problem-solving Partnerships for example Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnerships and Multi-Agency Support Hubs

Local Community Relationships

- Leadership by Mayors, Councillors and officials
- Working with local partners to deliver on 'changed attitudes and behaviors'
- Working with local community groups on healthy respectful relationships programmes and bystander approach
- Mapping community services and needs

Community Planning

- Considering violence against women and girls throughout community plans
- Role for PCSPs
- Creating opportunities to support young people in learning about healthy relationships
- Role of planning, licensing and other Council functions
- Mainstreaming safety of public spaces

Summary of Consultation Questions

Answer options:

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Please add any comments

1 Do you agree or disagree with our vision below?

"A changed society where women and girls are free from all forms of gender-based violence, abuse and harm including the attitudes, systems and structural inequalities that cause them"

2 Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 1 below, will enable us to achieve this vision?

Outcome 1 - Changed Attitudes, Behaviours and Social Norms.

Everyone in society understands what violence against women and girls is, including its root causes, and plays an active role in preventing it.

3 Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 2 below, will enable us to achieve this vision?

Outcome 2 – Healthy, Respectful Relationships.

Everyone in society is equipped and empowered to enjoy healthy, respectful relationships

4 Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 3 below, will enable us to achieve this vision?

Outcome 3 – Women and Girls Are Safe and Feel Safe Everywhere.

Organisations and institutions across government and society embed the prevention of violence against women and girls in all that they do so that women and girls are safe and feel safe everywhere.

5 Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 4 below, will enable us to achieve this vision?

Outcome 4 – Quality Frontline Services, Protection, and Provision for Victims and Survivors of Violence Against Women and Girls.

Provision of high-quality services for women and girls who are victims and survivors of violence against women and girls.

6 Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 5 below, will enable us to achieve this vision?

Outcome 5 – A Justice System which has the Confidence of Victims, Survivors and the Public in its Ability to Address Violence Against Women and Girls.

7 Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 6 below, will enable us to achieve this vision?

Outcome 6 – All of Government and Society Working Better Together to End Violence Against Women and Girls.

A whole system approach with collaboration and cooperation by default across government departments and with, within and between the community, voluntary and other sectors.

8 Do you agree or disagree with our approach of focusing on PREVENTION to end violence against women and girls?

9. Do you agree or disagree that these are the right actions to take in our foundational Action Plan?

10. Do you agree or disagree with the way in which the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been carried out?

11. Do you agree or disagree with the findings of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)?

12. If you or your organisation would like to receive our newsletter, to keep up to date with our work to end violence against women and girls, please provide a contact email address in the box below.

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3 October 2023

FAO: The Executive Office EVAWG.HaveYourSay@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Consultation on draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and Foundational Action Plan

Belfast City Council established a Women's Steering Group (WSG) in 2006 to develop and deliver the Council's Gender Action Plan, aimed at promoting gender equality both within the Council and across the city of Belfast.

The WSG welcomes the consultation on the draft Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) and the Foundational Action Plan. We have circulated the consultation widely across the Council and have encouraged officers and elected members to respond. However, on behalf of the WSG we would also like to submit the following response to your consultation.

1. WSG supports the need for the EVAWG strategy and action plan.
2. We broadly agree with the vision and outcomes within the draft strategy. However, we feel that **Outcome 1 – changed attitudes, behaviours and social norms** should also reflect the need for everyone to not only understand what violence against women and girls is, but that they also “agree that it is unacceptable” and play an active role in preventing it.
3. Belfast City Council and the WSG proactively supports programmes aimed at ensuring **Women and Girls Are Safe and Feel Safe Everywhere (Outcome 3)**. We welcome the commitment to further embed the prevention of violence against women within organisations and government and are keen to support its implementation.
4. Belfast City Council provides many community and frontline services, including community centres, play centres, community safety programmes, our youth council and age friendly work. Whilst not directly focused on victims and survivors of violence against women, we would welcome the opportunity to explore how these services could help support the vision and outcomes set out in the strategy. This would be in keeping with the concept of a “whole system with collaboration and cooperation”.
5. Whilst we agree with **Outcome 6 – All of Government and Society Working Better Together to End Violence Against Women and Girls**, we feel the role of local government should be highlighted and not just “government departments”. Local government plays a key role in civic society and, through our Elected Members, is uniquely placed to listen and connect with residents at a local level. Councils are responsible for



leading community planning and the policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs). We encourage TEO to engage early and continuously with local government and to work collaboratively with us to achieve shared outcomes for women and girls. This will help shape successful places where women and girls are safe, and everyone can fulfil their potential, enabling them to contribute and play a positive role.

6. We strongly support the focus on prevention within the draft strategic framework.
7. We broadly agree with the Foundation Action Plan. We are particularly keen to explore how council, and local government in general, can support the prevention and working together themes.
8. We note that one of the actions relates to developing a funding strategy for EVAWG work. Adequate funding to support the framework will be essential. Community groups, in particular, will need adequate financial assistance to support the ambitions set out in the framework.
9. We generally endorse the findings of the EQIA. We would stress the importance of recognising that women and girls will also fall within other s.75 categories, and that these characteristics may impact how they experience violence, access support or wider EVAWG prevention work. We note that the EQIA recognises this and has identified mitigations to address this.
10. We also recognise that all Section 75 groups have a role to play in EVAWG.

I trust that you have found these comments helpful. We look forward to working with you in the future on this important issue.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Aine McCabe', written over a light blue horizontal line.

On behalf of
Councillor Aine McCabe
Chair of Women's Steering Group
Belfast City Council



Subject:	UNESCO Learning Cities - Belfast Festival of Learning 2024
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty
Contact Officers:	Patricia Magee, Policy and Performance Analyst, Naomi Doak, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual. 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
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Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update the Committee on the work underway in support of Belfast's membership of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities and the repositioning of this work in the context of community planning. on the proposed approach to Belfast's Festival of Learning 2024 and request Departmental consideration of support for the development of events for inclusion in the Programme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) reaffirm our commitment to Belfast's designation as a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities; ii) note the proposed Belfast Festival of Learning will run from 22nd April (recognised worldwide as Earth Day) – 27th April 2024; iii) note the proposed focus (Climate Action) of the Belfast Festival of Learning in April 2024; iv) note the synergies with the ambitions and plans across the Council; v) approve the proposed £10k match-funding to be allocated from existing budgets in support of the festival and associated work; and vi) consider and agree the proposed open call for small grant funding (up to a maximum of £500 to support community groups to design and delivery events.
3.0	Key Issues
	Background
3.1	Members may be aware that Belfast joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2018, in recognition of the City's commitment to promoting and encouraging lifelong learning for people of all ages. Within The Belfast Agenda, we have a vision that our city should be a great place for everyone to live and providing lifelong learning opportunities is a core part of this. Learning has the potential to transform lives for the better- it can build better relationships and help enhance quality of life for everyone in the city.
3.2	Belfast was awarded a UNESCO Learning Cities Award for outstanding learning in 2021. Whilst Belfast continues to play its role as a member of the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities as well as a member of an All-Island Network of Learning Cities, it is felt there is a real opportunity to build on Belfast's Learning City status and to bring city stakeholders together to reenergise our focus and maximise the opportunities presented. It is important to recognise that it's not about creating new initiatives but rather connecting and enhancing existing programmes and initiatives as well as aligning policy ambitions across multiple partners. A Learning Cities Leadership Group currently exists and comprises representatives from QUB, UU, BMET, BHSCT, PHA, Education Authority, Libraries NI, community partners and Council.

<p>3.3</p> <p>3.4</p> <p>3.5</p> <p>3.6</p>	<p>Festival Learning Week</p> <p>A key focus of the annual programme of work has been a 'Festival of Learning' which is a week-long programme of free interactive and engaging events. The festival showcases the range of learning opportunities that already exist in Belfast. Council officers are currently in the process of developing a citywide programme of 'learning' events to take place as part of a week-long festival of activity from 22nd April-27th April 2024. We want to work with as wide a range of partners as possible to deliver an inclusive programme of citywide events with three key aims:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To shine a light on the value of learning in all its forms and promote Belfast as an inclusive learning city for all. ▪ To engage and inspire people of all ages, in a wide range of settings across the city, with a variety of learning opportunities. ▪ To raise awareness of the engaging, fun and surprising ways in which we can learn. <p>Given the significance of the climate challenges facing the city and the need for significant behavioural change as well as leadership, it is proposed that this climate action is an overarching theme for the 2024 Festival of Learning. A core stand of the festival will be events which promote citizen awareness of, and engagement in initiatives focusing on lifelong learning in the context of the local and global climate emergency. This would align with the focus of the UNESCO's 6th Annual Conference on Learning Cities (2024) which is 'Learning Cities at the forefront of climate action'.</p> <p>This proposed focus not only aligns with UNESCO's global call for member states to strengthen the collective approach to urgent issues around climate change, but it also provides alignment across a number of internal and external strategies and priority areas, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refreshed Belfast Agenda's commitment to Our Planet ▪ Belfast Agenda emphasis on Connectivity, Active and Sustainable Travel ▪ Belfast 2024's principles of People, Place and Planet ▪ The draft Economic Strategy for Belfast's commitment to Enabling a Path to Net Zero ▪ A Bolder Vision for Belfast ▪ Healthy Cities 6 thematic areas: People, Place, Prosperity, Participation, Planet, Peace ▪ QUB commitment to Net Zero ▪ UU Sustainable Travel ambitions and plans ▪ NIHE commitment to retrofitting housing. ▪ Green Port and Net Zero zones established in Titanic Quarter ▪ Belfast in top 10 ranking of Global Destination Sustainability Index for tourism <p>It is felt that there are significant opportunities to align with and seek to progress many of these linkages as part of the planning and implementation of the 2024 Festival of Learning. We are also actively</p>
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	exploring the potential for senior officials from UNESCO to visit Belfast during the festival week and contribute to the emerging programme as well as strengthen the All-Island Network of Learning Cities.
3.7	Feedback from recent engagement events undertaken as part of the refresh of the Belfast Agenda has highlighted a need for a citywide education programme which helps build awareness around the need for and benefits of effective planning to address climate challenges. The messaging needs to land with residents in terms of for example, helping to tackle poverty (reducing heating costs), creating new jobs and opportunities through green growth, helping alleviate impact of flooding and securing a city (place) for our future generations.
	Grant Funding
3.8	As part of the Festival Week, it would be the intention to develop an open call for small grants (up to a maximum of £500) to help local groups to develop and/or showcase an event. This approach is subject to SP&R Committee consideration and approval. It should be noted that £10,000 funding has been secured through the Public Health Agency in support of the festival and officers are actively exploring other sources of possible funding to enhance the programme.
3.9	It is proposed that a £10,000 match funding is allocated and ring-fenced from within existing departmental budgets within council to support the Festival of Learning
	Next Steps
3.10	<p>In order to deliver on the festival, it is proposed that a festival planning group to be established comprising of representatives from: Healthy Cities, Libraries, QUB, UU, MET, VCSE and from BCC Cultural, EDU, Climate, City Regeneration and Marketing and Comms teams, with a view to co-designing an impactful festival programme. The emerging programme should take account of the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engage and inspire people of all ages, in a wide range of settings across the city, with a variety of learning opportunities, looking at 'learning' in its broadest sense. ▪ Promote understanding of and discussion around climate change and the need to transition to a green economy in the broadest sense / enabling action to address climate issues/ looking at climate, poverty and health inequalities with a particular focus on food, energy and transport.
	Financial and Resource Implications
3.11	£10K funding has been secured through the Public Health Agency in support of the delivery of the Festival of Learning. An additional £10k match funding from Council is proposed and will be funded through available in-year budgets within City and Organisational Strategy.

	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.12	There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications contained in this report.
4.0	Documents Attached
	None

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Subject:	Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes of the Meeting of 5th December
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer:	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services

Restricted Reports									
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Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
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1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the key issues which were considered and discussed by the Audit and Risk Panel on 5th December and present the minutes of that meeting for approval.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is requested to note the key issues arising at the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel held on 5th December and approves the minutes of that meeting, as attached.
3.0	Main Report
	<p>Key Issues</p> <p><u>Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)</u></p> <p>3.1 On 22 September, the Committee approved the Statement of Accounts for the year-end 31st March 2023. The NIAO has now completed its audit of the accounts and the Panel considered the final Report to Those Charged With Governance (RTTCWG) and the Annual Audit Letter, which provided an unqualified audit opinion on the accounts. These accounts are a fundamental part of the Council's overall corporate governance framework and provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position.</p> <p>3.2 The RTTCWG contained only four recommendations for management action, which are priority three (i.e., issue of a minor nature which represents best practice) and are all due to be implemented by April, 2024.</p> <p><u>Key Reports</u></p> <p>3.3 The Panel noted the progress being made against the annual internal audit plan, with five audits finalised in the period September - November 2023, all of which had an assurance opinion of "some improvement required". The Panel also noted the broad range of advisory work undertaken.</p> <p>3.4 The Panel considered the corporate risk dashboard which provided an analysis and update on the progress being made to manage the 25 risks that are considered to present the greatest threat to the delivery corporate priorities and / or compliance with key statutory requirements. These corporate risks are being considered in the development of the new corporate plan for 2024 – 28. Following a request from the Panel, management have re-set the target implementation dates for all of the corporate risk actions. The Panel requested that Strategic Directors be reminded of the importance of implementing corporate risk actions timely,</p>

	that progress towards implementation will be monitored quarterly by the Panel and that they may request Strategic Directors to attend the Panel in relation to progress updates.
3.5	The Panel noted the quarterly assurances provided by Directors regarding compliance with risk management and internal control processes. The Head of AGRS is to meet the newly appointed Strategic Directors to brief them on risk, control and governance matters. Work is underway to re-introduce formal departmental risk management processes, with a view to having these agreed and in place for 24/25.
3.6	The Panel noted the work which was underway to exercise, review and update business continuity management (BCM) plans for the critical services by the year-end. Each critical service has been asked to focus their BCM exercise on a cyber-attack scenario; to review whether their BCM plans have sufficiently documented the learning from the pandemic response and; to review winter preparedness arrangements.
3.7	The Panel received quarter 2 reports on corporate health and safety, absence management and performance improvement .
3.8	Regarding health and safety, the Panel requested that Strategic Directors be reminded of the importance of implementing all health and safety and fire safety actions in a timely way , including manual handling actions.
3.9	Regarding absence management the Panel requested that Strategic Directors be reminded to review progress on the implementation of their Departmental Improvement Plans quarterly and to ensure that their Absence Management Dashboards are reviewed monthly at their DMT's and that they may be requested to attend the Panel in relation to these matters.
3.10	The NIAO updated the Panel on the current position of audit and assessment of performance improvement arrangements and indicated that their report would be ready for the next meeting of the Panel. The Panel also learned that there are plans to develop a new engagement framework for residents.
3.11	This was the first meeting of the new external member to the Panel , Mr Derek Wilson. In line with best practice, training is being organised for the Panel in early 2023.

	<u>National Fraud Initiative (NFI)</u>
3.12	<p>A key element of the Council's counter-fraud arrangements is our participation in the National Fraud Initiative. The NFI is essentially a data matching exercise that involves comparing sets of data against other records held by the same or another body, allowing potentially fraudulent or erroneous payments to be identified, reviewed and, where necessary, investigated. The Panel received an update on investigation of the matches which have now been investigated. The Panel learned that no fraudulent payments were identified and; that only four duplicate payments with a value of £17,250 were identified and that the majority of these monies had now been recovered. The Panel also learned that the NFI exercise had identified potential instances where conflict of interest declarations may be required, and that these had been referred to the relevant departments.</p>
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.13	None.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.14	None known at this time.
4.0	Document Attached
	Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel of 5th December

Audit and Risk Panel

Tuesday, 5th December, 2023

MEETING OF AUDIT AND RISK PANEL

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

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

In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of
Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Ms. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk
Services;
Mr. L. Mulholland, Audit, Governance and Risk
Services Manager;
Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit, Governance and Risk
Services Manager;
Ms. S. Williams, Governance and Compliance
Manager; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Also attended: Mr. P. Barr, Audit Director, Northern Ireland Audit
Office; and
Mr. M. Heery, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit
Office.

External Member

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. Derek Wilson, who had replaced Ms. Geraldine Fahy as the external member on the Audit and Risk Panel, to his first meeting.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th September were approved by the Panel.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Absence Rates - Quarter 2 2023/24

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Audit and Risk Panel of the Council’s performance in managing absence in quarter 2, April – September 2023.**

2.0 Recommendation

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

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Key Corporate Indicators:

At the end of quarter 2:

- **The Council’s average sickness absence rate stands at 7.9 days per FTE, a decrease of 0.31 days compared to absence for the same period last year (8.21).**
- **A total of 16749.39 working days was lost due to sickness absence. This accounted for 7.3% of the total working days available.**
- **The table below provides a summary of how Departments are performing against the target. As indicated below, 3 departments did not meet the corporate target for quarter 2 (7.43 days).**

End of year target:	14.85					
Q2 target:	7.43					
Department	Number of Employees (FTE)	Total days lost (FTE)	Actual absence per FTE	Variance	% of workforce	% of absence
City and Neighbourhood Services	1191.38	10966.86	9.21	1.78	56.16%	65.48%
City and Organisational Strategy	125.24	303.5	2.42	-5.01	5.90%	1.81%
Finance and Resources	191.77	769.78	4.01	-3.42	9.04%	4.60%
Legal and Civic Services	158.2	1658.18	10.48	3.05	7.46%	9.90%
Place and Economy	332.35	1555.89	4.68	-2.75	15.67%	9.29%
Physical Programmes	122.32	1495.18	12.22	4.79	5.77%	8.93%
Grand Total	2121.26	16749.39	7.90	0.47		

3.2 Additional Absence Information:

- There has been an increase in the number of staff with no recorded absence this period (60.11%) compared to the same time last year (56.63%);
- There has been an increase in absence classified as long term (20+ days) this year (12365.34 days or 73.83% of total absence) compared to the same time last year (11136.85 days or 67.28% of the total absence);
- The Council's average sickness absence rate further reduces to 7.5 days per FTE when COVID-19 related absences are deducted;
- The number of days lost per full time equivalent increased in quarter 2 (4.03 days) when compared to quarter one (3.88 days). This increase is illustrated in Figure 1 below;
- Depression/anxiety/stress (32% of total days lost) and musculo-skeletal (25% of total days lost) continue to be the top two reasons for absence. Refer to Figure 2 below for further information;
- Between July and September, 2023, 625 employees were off due to sickness absence (accounting for 8577.87 days). Discretion was applied to 106 of these employees (17%) and their absence accounted for 2243.44 days (approximately 26% of the total absence for quarter 2). Refer to Figure 3 below for further information;
- A total of 187 cases were identified as having compliance related issues. Refer to Figure 4 below for further information;
- Approximately 33.72% of absence (5648.11 days) is recorded as disability related, of which, 70% was managed as long term. Depression / Anxiety (29.85%), Osteoarthritis (10.13%) and Cancer (7.68%) accounted for over 47% of all disability related absence days. Refer to figure 5 below for further information;

- **Between April and September 2023, a total of 174 employees were recorded as absent due to COVID, accounting for 4.85% of the total absence in quarter 1;**
- **18 employees met the trigger for a Stage4/FAH in quarter 2:**
 - **Discretion was applied to 13 of these cases not to progress to a FAH, whereby:**
 - **3 employees returned to work at month six**
 - **2 employees were off due to disability related absence and returned to work shortly after month six.**
 - **2 employees were off due to cancer related absence.**
 - **2 employees availed of a career break.**
 - **1 employee was off due to complex medical reasons.**
 - **1 employee was off due to complex personal stressors.**
 - **1 case was awaiting GP notes.**
 - **1 case was delayed due to employee relations issues.**
 - **4 cases did not progress to a case review stage, and therefore could not progress to a FAH, due to non-compliant reasons.**
 - **In addition to the above, 5 employees were dismissed on the grounds of permanent ill health during quarter 2.**

3.3 Department Improvement Plans

Four of the six Departments returned improvement plan progress reports for quarter 2. However, they did not provide sufficient detail on what specific action(s) they had taken in quarter 2 to reduce sickness absence.

Corporate HR issued guidance to departments at the end of quarter 1 in relation to what should be included in the progress reports and met with individual departments to discuss their improvement plans.

Physical Programmes did not return its improvement plan update for quarter 2.

Place and Economy did not return its improvement plan update for quarter 2 due to unforeseen personal circumstances.

It was noted that a number of Departments did not return its improvement plans within the specified time frames. Corporate HR is developing an annual schedule to assist departments in providing timely updates to CHR.

3.4 Absence Dashboard update

Five of the six Departments provided monthly dashboards for July, August and September.

The City and Neighbourhoods Services' update for July and August did not correlate with the compliance issues reported by Corporate HR.

The Physical Programmes Department did not provide an absence dashboard for July, August and September.

Departments have been reminded that the non-compliance issues raised, during the fortnightly compliance meetings, must be presented at their monthly DMTs in the format of the agreed absence dashboard.

3.5 Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Initiatives:

Consultation on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan is ongoing with the Joint Negotiation and Consultative Committee (JNCC). While the Strategy is still being developed, we continued to deliver a programme of health and wellbeing during the quarter.

The summer months allowed the promotion of the Active Challenge initiatives including Cycle to Work Day on 3rd August and a Men into Cycling programme.

The Council's participation in the Active Travel Challenge was recognised by being awarded 2nd place in the 1000+ staff category at the Active Travel Awards on 21st September. In addition, the following was delivered:

- Positive Mental Health training – 11 employees attended.
- Stress Awareness for Managers training – 10 employees attended.
- Caring for Carers Webinar
- Cycle to Work Day 3 August
- 15 minute desk yoga

- Financial Support for Working parents
- Vital Nutrition for Busy People
- Suicide Awareness Training

It should be noted that the corporate training programme is reduced over the summer period.

4.0 Resource Implications

4.1 Directors are asked to ensure that resources are in place to ensure that adequate monitoring and review is in place at department level.

5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications

5.1 Approximately 33.72% of absence (5648.11 days) is recorded as disability related. The use of discretion and reasonable adjustments is considered in such cases.

Figure 1

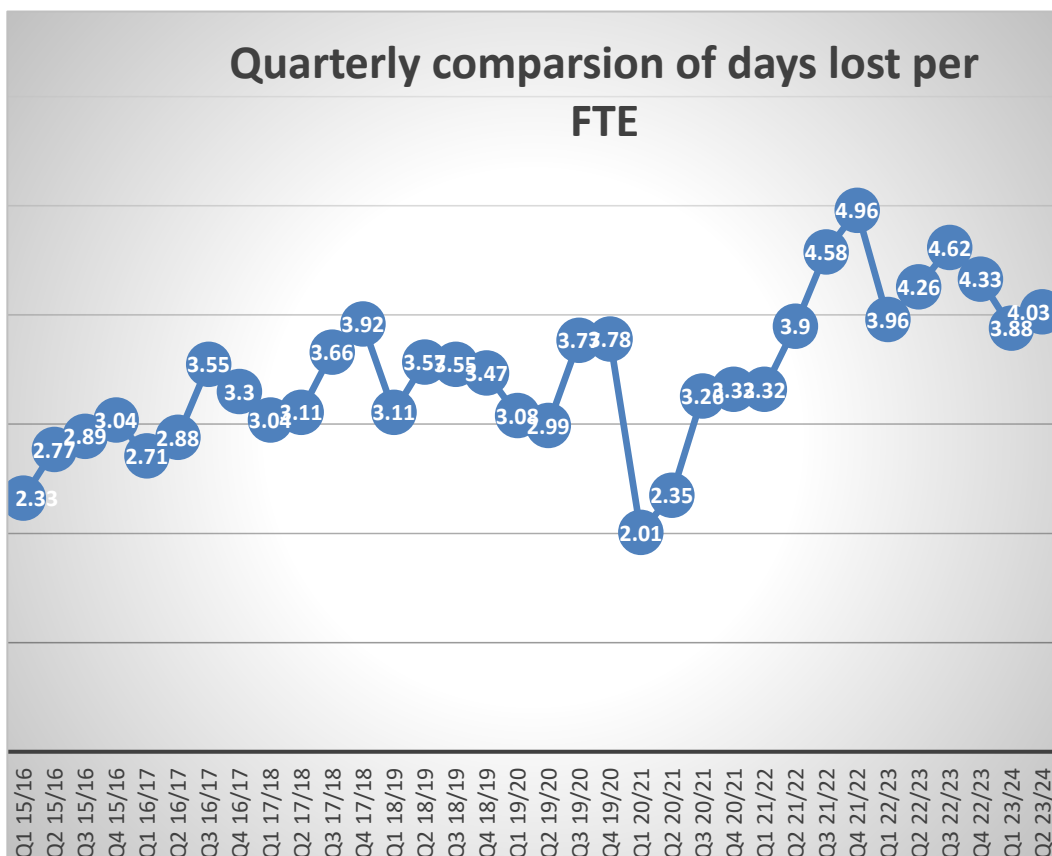


Figure 2

Reason for Absence	Days lost (FTE)	% of absence
Stress. depression, anxiety	5421.07	32.37%
Musculo-Skeletal	4207.3	25.12%
Stomach, digestive, etc	1728.71	10.32%
Infections, Covid19	812.02	4.85%
Heart, blood press, circ, etc	793.57	4.74%
Neurological, inc headaches	733.92	4.38%
Eye, ear, nose & mouth/dental	706.9	4.22%
Chest and respiratory	658.24	3.93%
Infections, inc colds & flu	649.53	3.88%
Other	553.52	3.30%
Genito-urinary, inc menstrual	370.97	2.21%
Pregnancy related	112.64	0.67%
Indust/Other	1	0.01%
Total	16749.39	

Figure 3

Reason for discretion	Total days	% of total
Disability / Underlying medical condition	501.9	22.37%
Bereavement	362.8	16.17%
Industrial Injury	299.67	13.36%
Planned surgery	249.77	11.13%
Mental Health	186.03	8.29%
Hospitalisation	162.64	7.25%
Unresolved ER Issues	138.62	6.18%
Violence at work	84.93	3.79%
Maternity	78.83	3.51%
Previous long service and clear record	72.16	3.22%
Significant personal stressor	62	2.76%
Emergency domestic responsibilities	23.92	1.07%
Covid 19	11.42	0.51%
Pregnancy related	8.75	0.39%
Total days lost in quarter 2 (July to September 2023)	2243.4	
% of total days lost where discretion applied in quarter 2	26.15%	
Average days off per occurrence of discretion in quarter 2	21.2	

Figure 4 Compliance issues

Department	Totals
City and Neighbourhood Services	94
City and Organisational Strategy	3
Finance and Resources	18
Legal and Civic Services	35
Physical Programmes	27
Place and Economy	10
Totals	187

Figure 5

Actual disability	Total days	% of total disability related absence
Depression / Anxiety / Mental health conditions	1685.89	29.85%
Osteoarthritis	572.23	10.13%
Cancer	433.73	7.68%
Chronic back condition	424.26	7.51%
Arthritis	200	3.54%
Chronic gastrointestinal condition	146.96	2.60%
Chronic cardiac condition	146.42	2.59%
Stroke	142	2.51%
Diabetes	138.78	2.46%
Chronic heart condition	138.38	2.45%
Long Covid	121.35	2.15%
Brain Aneurysm	121.35	2.15%
Ulcerative Colitis	117.91	2.09%
Chronic leg condition	114.07	2.02%
Detached Retina	84	1.49%
Myofascial pain syndrome	82.5	1.46%
Rheumatoid Arthritis	80	1.42%
Chronic eye condition	79.93	1.42%
Osteoarthritis	76.76	1.36%
Chronic Genito/Urinary condition.	75.92	1.34%
Syncope	68.92	1.22%
Perianal abscess	68.92	1.22%
Fibromyalgia	68.5	1.21%

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Diverticulitis	66.96	1.19%
Graves' Disease	58	1.03%
Other*	334.37	5.92%
Total	5648.11	
Total absence end of quarter 2	16749.39	
Disability related absence in quarter 2	5648.11	
% if absence lost due to disability	33.72%	
% of disability related absence managed as LTA	70.00%	

***Other includes a total of 16 conditions that each individually account for less than 1% of total disability related absence.**

After discussion, the Panel noted the contents of the report and agreed that the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services would write to each Strategic Director stressing the need for their Departmental Improvement Plan and Absence Management Dashboard to be submitted in time and contain sufficient detail and pointing out that they would, in future, be required to provide the Panel with an explanation, in person, should these requirements not be fulfilled.

Update on Corporate Health and Safety Performance

(Ms. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Health and Safety Manager reminded the Panel that it was responsible for overseeing the Council's risk, control and governance arrangements for health and safety. In undertaking this function, the Panel provided independent scrutiny of the Council's health and safety performance, with reports being presented to it on a quarterly basis.

Accordingly, she submitted for the Panel's consideration a report on corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending on 30th September, 2023.

She provided, on a Departmental basis, information on the implementation of actions associated with the key performance indicators of health and safety and fire safety and pointed out that, at a corporate level, compliance rates had been 62% and 75% respectively. Information was provided also on outstanding high priority health, safety and fire actions, outstanding health and safety actions and outstanding fire safety actions.

In terms of accident/incident reporting, there had, in that quarter, been 31 employee accidents, 4 non-employee accidents, 11 RIDDOR accidents and 23 incidents of work-related violence.

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She concluded by providing details of the information which had been forwarded to the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland in response to enquiries/correspondence.

After discussion, the Panel noted the corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending on 30th September, 2023 and agreed that there was a need to monitor incidents of work-related violence, given the marked rise on the previous quarter and to address the significant number of health and safety actions (including manual handling actions) and fire safety actions which had still to be implemented.

Report to those charged with Governance 2022/23

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

“1.0 Purpose of Report/ Summary of Main Issues

The Local Government Auditor has issued her Report To Those Charged With Governance for 2022/23. This report summarises any system/control issues arising during the Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) 2022/23 audit and includes recommendations for management action.

The purpose of this report is to appraise the Audit and Risk Panel of any issues raised in the Local Government Auditor's Report for 2022/23 21 in relation to the Accounts of Belfast City Council.

2.0 Recommendation

The Audit and Risk Panel is requested to note the Report to those charged with Governance Audit results for 2022/23.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

3.1 The Local Government Auditor has certified the 2022-23 statements for Belfast City Council with an unqualified opinion. The Auditor had identified in the Audit Strategy for 2022-23, the risk of fraud in revenue recognition and management override of controls as having an impact on the audit approach.

3.2 During audit fieldwork, no significant issues were identified in these areas.

- 3.3 The Local Government Auditor has identified four areas where she has made prioritised recommendations. The NIAO definition of the priority levels are:
- i. significant issues for the attention of senior management which may have the potential to result in material weaknesses in internal control,
 - ii. important issues to be addressed by management in their areas of responsibility, and
 - iii. issues of a more minor nature which represents best practice.
- 3.4 In summarising the report there are:
- 0 priority 1 area,
 - 0 priority 2 area, and
 - 4 priority 3 areas
- 3.5 The 4 priority 3 areas are:
1. Creditors - recommend that the council updates its procedures for identifying and reviewing its year-end creditors;
 2. Discounting of legal claims - recommend that the Council ensure that the discount rates applied to legal claims are reviewed on a periodic basis, and that the outcomes of any such reviews are supported appropriate documentary evidence to detail how discount rates have been calculated;
 3. Depreciation method for Infrastructure Assets - the Council is in the process of implementing a programme of certified maintenance inspections for this asset. This would provide Council with information that would enhance the accuracy of the valuation of this asset; and
 4. Agency Costs – Recommend that the Council should ensure arrangements are in place to measure and ensure continuing the value for money for use of agency Staff
- 3.6 A detailed response to the management letter has been circulated, identifying timescales. In accordance with the process adopted in previous years, management will monitor the progress made in implementing recommendations and will report back to the Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel on the progress.

Financial and Resource Implications

None

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

The Panel noted the Report for those charged with Governance for 2022/23.

Northern Ireland Audit Office - Annual Audit Letter 2022/23

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

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 As an independent auditor of the Council, the Local Government Auditor seeks to examine that the Council has managed its affairs having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and that public money is properly spent or in the case of income properly accounted for. The Annual Audit Letter is issued under Regulation 17 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. The Regulations require the Council to publish this Annual Audit Letter as soon as reasonably possible.**

2.0 Recommendation

The Panel is asked to note the comments and review the Annual Audit Letter.

3.0 Main Report

1. Financial Statements

The Local Government Auditor has noted no financial adjustment to the draft accounts as a result of her audit work. The accounts for the 2022/23 year were given an unqualified opinion.

2. Proper Arrangements

The Local Government Auditor is required to satisfy herself that proper arrangements have been made

for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.

The Local Government Auditor has confirmed that she is satisfied that the council has proper arrangements in place.

3. Annual Governance Statement

The Local Government Auditor has indicated that the Annual Governance Statement reflects compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022-23, it also complies with proper practices as specified by the Department for Communities, and it is not misleading or inconsistent with other information from the audit.

4. Absenteeism

The annual rate of absenteeism has shown an increase of 0.74 days from 2021/22. Covid related absences had a significant impact in 2021/22 A total of 558 employees were recorded as absent due to COVID in 2022-2023. COVID related absence accounted for 1.78 days per FTE, this equated to over 10 per cent of the Council's total absence.

Average number of days sickness absence per full time employee						
2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
12.44	13.72	13.71	13.58	10.86	16.33	17.09

The robust, fair and consistent management of attendance continues to be a key priority for Belfast City Council.

5. Performance Improvement

The Local Government Auditor's Annual Improvement Report for 2022-23 was published on 31 March 2023 and concludes that Council met its statutory duties in relation to publication of the 2021-22 self-assessment report and 2022-23 Annual Improvement Plan. Given the impact of the pandemic on council services, however, she was unable to conclude on an assessment of whether the council was likely to meet their performance improvement

responsibilities under legislation for the 2022-23 year.

6. Outlook

The Local Government Auditor has highlighted the current cost of living crisis and high inflation rates have had a significant impact on council finances and has indicated the Council should continue to carefully consider the impact of rising prices on budgets, and closely monitor and forecast future costs and affordability.

Financial and Resource Implications

None

Equality or Good relations/Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

The Panel noted the Annual Audit Letter for 2022/23.

Update on Corporate Risk Management

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services submitted for the Panel's consideration a report on the corporate risk dashboard, which summarised the key updates from the risk reviews for the quarter ending 30th September, 2023. The report provided also an update on compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on assurance statements completed by senior management for the quarter and on business continuity management arrangements.

After discussion, the Panel:

- i. noted the corporate risk management dashboard for the quarter ending on 30th September, 2023 and adopted the recommendation to replace the current wording of the corporate risks on Climate and Data with the following: ***“Fail to develop a Council climate action plan for the changes arising from climate change and to resource and implement that plan”*** and ***“Without a strategic approach to the utilisation of data at both a city and organisational level, we will be limited in our ability to design and deliver innovative solutions to city challenges.”***;
- ii. agreed that the Strategic Directors be reminded of the importance of implementing corporate risk actions in a

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timely manner, particularly in light of the recently revised implementation dates and that progress towards implementation would be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Panel, which may request them to attend a meeting in relation to actions which had not been implemented;

- iii. noted the assurances from senior management regarding compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for the quarter-ending on 30th September 2023;
- iv. noted the progress being made to re-establish formal Departmental risk management arrangements; and
- v. noted the current position on the review and update of business continuity plans for the critical services and agreed that critical services be asked to focus their Business Continuity Management exercise on a cyber-attack scenario.

Audit, Governance and Risk Services Progress Report

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager drew the Panel's attention to a report providing an update on the progress which had been made on the Service's audit and related activities during the period from September to November, 2023.

He summarised the outcome of the five assignments which had been finalised during that period, namely, Police and Community Safety Partnerships, Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. – Risk Management, Sales and Marketing and Performance, the Social Value Procurement Policy and internal audits of the management of the corporate risks for the Customer Focus Programme and Preparing for Climate Change (Council Level). In terms of progress against delivery of the 2023/24 audit plan, 53% of planned activity was underway or had been completed.

He went on to point out that the assurance and advisory work on key corporate systems and programmes which had been undertaken during the period related primarily to the new accounting system and provided an update on the status of those audits which were in progress.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager then informed the Panel that the investigation into matches arising from the 2022/23 National Fraud Initiative exercise was nearing completion and Audit, Governance and Risk Services was liaising with Departments on some administration issues relating to declarations of interest. A more detailed report on the outcome of that exercise would, he pointed out, be presented later in the meeting.

He concluded by making reference to the advice and consultancy services which the Service had provided to management and to the recent publications which had been reviewed and notified to management.

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The Panel noted the information which had been provided.

Update on National Fraud Initiative

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager submitted for the Panel's consideration the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Assurance Board / Audit and Risk Panel's terms of reference include provision for consideration of summary reports from the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services on the Service's activity. This report addresses these requirements.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Audit and Risk Panel is asked to note the progress on the investigation of matches arising from the council's participation in the current National Fraud Initiative exercise.**

3.1 National Fraud Initiative

- 3.2 A key element of the Council's counter-fraud arrangements is our participation in the National Fraud Initiative (NFI). The NFI is essentially a data matching exercise that involves comparing sets of data against other records held by the same or another body, allowing potentially fraudulent or erroneous payments to be identified, reviewed and, where necessary, investigated. Council data was uploaded in October 2022 and included Creditor data for the period 1 October 2019 – 30 September 2022 and Payroll data for the period 1 April 2022 – 30 September 2022, matches were received in February 2023.**

- 3.3 Matches relating to 22/23 exercise have now been investigated and a summary of the outcome is as follows:**

- Payroll Reports**

There were 38 matches across 4 reports. Of these 26 have been reviewed and closed with no issue. The remaining 12 matches have been referred to the relevant departments to ensure that adequate conflict of interest declarations have been made. Departments have been asked to confirm to AGRS that the potential conflicts have been

managed and the forms completed where appropriate, by the end of November 2023.

- **Creditor Standing Data Reports**

There were 365 matches in 4 reports. All matches not previously reviewed in prior year exercises were reviewed by CTU to identify if matches were valid, such as different suppliers at the same address or if they required cleansing from the SAP system. This review will identify any duplicate accounts that should be cleansed from the system. CTU intend to complete this as part of migration to the new accounting system, currently planned for April 2024.

- **Creditors Transactions Report**

There were 1,041 matches in 6 reports. Two of these reports included a further 38 matches that were not reinvestigated this time because they appeared in the 2020 exercise and were closed without issue.

- 3.4 Of the matches reviewed, four duplicates were identified, totalling £17,250 and the majority of these monies have been recovered.
- 3.5 We have provided details of these duplicates to Finance and have recommended that they review the root cause of these duplicates and determine whether any action is necessary to prevent reoccurrence.
- 3.6 Audit, Governance and Risk Services also carried out sample checking on the investigation of the creditor matches by the Central Transactions Unit to provide assurance over the results.

- **Procurement Reports**

There were 109 matches in 2 reports. Of these 95 matches have been reviewed and closed with no issue. The remaining 14 matches have been referred to the relevant departments to ensure that adequate conflict of interest declarations have been completed. Departments have been asked to confirm to AGRS that the potential conflicts have been managed and the forms completed where appropriate, by the end of November 2023.”

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After discussion, during which the Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager confirmed that the sharing of data by the Council was undertaken in strict accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation, the Panel noted the contents of the report.

Update on Performance Improvement

(Mr. G. Dickson, Strategic Planning and Policy Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Panel considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To provide the Audit and Risk Panel with a mid-year update on progress made against activities contributing to the Improvement Objectives contained within our 2023-24 Improvement Plan. (Quarter 2 update).**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Panel is asked to note the Quarter 2 (mid-year) status update on the 2023-24 Improvement Plan which has been circulated.**

Note: the report was compiled in consultation with officers from across departments and presented to the Corporate Management Team on 22nd November.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act requires councils to agree improvement objectives on an annual basis and publish these in the form of an Improvement Plan. In August 2023, Members agreed the Improvement Plan 2023-24, which contains our commitment to securing continuous improvement as well as delivery of five improvement objectives. The Act also requires us to monitor and report on progress in an annual assessment of performance. Our 2022-23 year-end performance assessment report which was submitted to the September meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel. This assessment was later published [online](#) ahead of the September 30th deadline as required by legislation.**

Improvement Plan 2023-24

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- 3.2** In August, the SP and R Committee approved the Improvement Plan for 20223-24. It was then published on the council website as required by legislation. (Note: the plan must normally be published by 30 June, but with this year's local government elections the statutory deadline was extended to 30 September.
- 3.3** The Improvement plan does not include everything that council plans to do that year, but instead focuses on a smaller set of key improvement priorities, as informed by residents, and evidenced by need. The Plan for 20223-24 includes the following improvement objectives:

Our services and facilities
Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.
Our communities
Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.
Our economy
Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.
Our environment
Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.
Our city
Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

- 3.4** We monitor progress against our improvement objectives, and as part of our approach to continuous improvement, bring quarterly progress reports to CMT and Audit and Risk Panel. The draft mid-year report on progress made against activities contributing to the Improvement Objectives contained within our 2023-24 Improvement Plan has been circulated. It sets out the key milestones and provides a summary of activity under each objective. The report also includes the most up to date position in relation to the performance indicators included within the plan.

- 3.5** Progress against all the objectives is in the most part on target with only a few milestones that have been slightly delayed and ragged amber, only one action has been ragged red. Explanations for the delays are contained within the mid-year report. A further report on progress will be presented to the Panel at the end of quarter 3.
- 3.6** The Board should note that the Guidance accompanying the legislation advises that what we learn about our performance in the quarterly update reports and the NIAO assessment, should be used to help inform the content of our next improvement plan and ongoing improvement activity. It should also form the basis of our annual *Year-End Performance Assessment Report* which must be made available to the Local Government Auditor by 30th September each year.

Arrangements for Performance Improvement 2022-23

- 3.7** The 2022-2023 audit and assessment of council's Improvement activity has been undertaken by the NIAO. Their final report will be available by mid-December 2023. This will be presented to the Audit and Risk Panel in March.

4.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 4.1** The Council is charged an audit fee, which is calculated by the NIAO based on the time spent on Belfast's audit. We will be advised of this charge in due course.

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

- 5.1** There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report."

After discussion, during which the Strategic Planning and Policy Manager outlined the work which was underway to increase engagement with residents across all Council strategies and the Audit Director confirmed that the annual Section 95 Audit and Assessment Report for the Council would be presented to the next meeting, the Panel noted the update on performance improvement for Quarter 2, 2023/24.

Schedule of Meetings 2024

The Panel approved the following schedule of meetings for 2024, with a commencement time of 12.30 p.m.:

- Tuesday, 5th March;

**Audit and Risk Panel,
Tuesday, 5th December, 2023**

- Tuesday, 4th June;
- Tuesday, 10th September; and
- Tuesday, 3rd December.

Date of Next Meeting

The Panel noted that its next meeting would be held at 12.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 5th March.

Training for Audit and Risk Panel

It was noted that Audit, Governance and Risk Services was planning to hold a training session for the Audit and Risk Panel in January and that potential dates would be circulated.

Chairperson

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Subject:	Equality and Diversity: Equality Screening Outcome Report and Rural Needs Impact Assessment - Quarter 2 2023/24
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Sarah Williams, Governance and Compliance Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide the Committee with a summary of equality screenings and rural needs impact assessments for Q2 2023-2024.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Background</u> One of the main requirements of the Council's Equality Scheme is to carry out the screening of new and revised policies. This allows any impacts related to equality of opportunity and/or good relations to be identified and addressed. An equality screening template is completed by the relevant officer, in collaboration with the Equality and Diversity Officer. On a regular basis, the Equality and Diversity Officer collates all completed templates into a Screening Outcome Report and publishes onto the council's website along with the relevant completed screening templates.
3.2	<u>Key Issues</u> The current Screening Outcome Report (including rural needs assessments) for July-September 2023 is attached. As usual, this report will be brought to the next Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for noting and will be published on the Council's website.
3.3	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None
3.4	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment The actions outlined contribute to our legal compliance regarding the promotion of equality, good relations and duties under the Rural Needs Act.
4.0	Document Attached
	Screening Outcome Report (Q2 2023-24).



Belfast
City Council

**Equality Screening Outcome Report and Rural Needs Impact Assessment
from July - September 2023**

Introduction

Legislation – An Overview

Section 75 Statutory Equality Duties

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires the Council, when carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland, to have due regards to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine categories of persons, namely:

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to its obligations above, the council must also have regards to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

The Council's Revised Equality Scheme was formally approved by the Equality Commission in March 2021. The revised Scheme outlines how we propose to fulfil our statutory duties under Section 75. Within the Scheme, the council gave a commitment to apply the screening methodology below to all new and revised policies and where necessary and appropriate to subject new policies to further equality impact assessment.

- What is the likely impact of equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy/proposal, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?
- Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within Section 75 equality categories?
- To what extent is the policy/proposal likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?
- Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

In keeping with the Council's commitments in its Equality Scheme, the Council has applied the above screening criteria to new policies and proposals. Screening identifies policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Screening identifies the impact of the policy/proposal as major, minor or none.

- If major – an Equality Impact Assessment may be carried out.
- If minor – consider mitigation or alternative policy and screen out.
- If none – screen out and give reasons.
- Ongoing screening – for strategies/policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages – screen at various stages during implementation.

The council also committed within its Revised Equality Scheme to prepare and publish for information regular reports on its screening exercises. This is screening report providing details on all screenings undertaken from the period January – June 2023.

Rural Needs Impact Assessments

The Council also has a statutory duty under the Rural Needs (Northern Ireland) Act 2016 to consider rural needs in the development of new policies, plans or strategies or in any service design/delivery decisions. The Council must therefore engage with rural stakeholders in relation to policy development when it is relevant and appropriate. The Equality and Diversity Unit is responsible for reporting to the Strategic, Policy and Resources Committee and for ensuring that annual reporting returns are submitted to DAERA.

To further promote openness and transparency, there is a link to each completed screening and rural needs impact assessment template on the Council's website. www.belfastcity.gov.uk

The templates detail all policies screened over this period and includes decisions reached.

Consultation

The development of new policies and proposals will be supported by effective engagement processes to ensure that staff, service users and all interested parties are fully involved.

Planning for and delivering safe and cost-effective services requires close collaboration at many levels.

If you have any queries about this document, and its availability in alternative formats (including Braille, disk and audio cassette, and in other languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English) then please contact:-

Bridgeen O'Neill
Equality and Diversity Unit
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS

Direct Line 02890 270555
or 028 9032 0202 ext 6315

email: equality@belfastcity.gov.uk or oneillbridgeen@belfastcity.gov.uk

Screening Outcome

The screening outcomes are outlined in the table below. Three possible outcomes are recorded:

If **Major** – an Equality Impact Assessment may be carried out. **EQIA** - subject to further scrutiny under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 to determine the impact upon those directly affected, which in turn will require informal and formal consultation with a wide range of stakeholders.

If **Minor** – consider mitigation or alternative policy and screen out.

If **None** – screen out and give reasons.

Screening Outcome Options

Major= In

Minor= Out with mitigation

None= Out without mitigation

Rural Needs Impact Assessment Options

Does the policy, plan, strategy or service design/delivery impact on the social and economic needs of people in rural areas?

Belfast City Council Equality Screening Outcome Report and Rural Needs Impact Assessment

This report includes published screenings and Rural Needs Impact Assessments for the period January – June 2023. Copies can be found at:-

<https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/council/equality-and-diversity/equality-screening-reports#711-3>

Description of Policy/Proposal	Rural Needs Impact Assessment	ECNI Screening Decision and Contact
Active Travel Plan	This plan will have no detrimental impact on rural area residents of Belfast.	Screened Out – No EQIA necessary (no impacts) Contact: Alison Patty
Change of security rotas	Will have no detrimental impact on rural area residents of Belfast.	Screened Out – mitigating actions (minor impacts) Contact: John Terrett
Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-26	This strategy will have no detrimental impact on rural area residents of Belfast.	Screened Out – No EQIA necessary (no impacts) Contact: Janette Hennessey
Interim staff car parking arrangements	Will have no detrimental impact on rural area residents of Belfast.	Screened Out – mitigating actions (minor impacts) Contact: Russell Connelly
People Strategy	This strategy will have no detrimental impact on rural area residents of Belfast.	Screened Out – No EQIA necessary (no impacts) Contact: Jenni Mulree

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Subject:	Update on Race Equality Action Plan
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	John Tully Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Catherine Christy - HR Manager Development Sarah Williams - Governance and Compliance Manager Leish Dolan - Good Relations Officer

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

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update the Committee on the development of the Race Equality Action Plan.
1.2	Following the decision, in April 2022, to appoint a CMT representative as Executive Sponsor for Race to champion and take forward the development of a Race Equality Action Plan in the Council, work has been ongoing across departments to identify appropriate activity. This report sets out progress to date.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the contents of this report.
3.0	Main Report
	Background and context
3.1	In 2022, the Council, in partnership with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency Northern Ireland, commissioned research into the inequalities experienced by Black, Asian, minority ethnic and Traveller people residing in Belfast at that time. The research was undertaken by Lucy Michael Research with the African and Caribbean Support Organisation of Northern Ireland (ACSONI) and Polish Language, Culture, And Affairs (POLCA).
3.2	The research identified that while minority ethnic residents have made significant and lasting contributions to the city many face challenges of racism, isolation and poverty. These have impacted on how they can participate in political, social, and economic life. There are a wide range of challenges identified for both minority ethnic and migrant individuals in gaining employment, accessing suitable housing, healthcare, education, leisure, political participation, access to justice, safety, economic inclusion, receiving language support and cultural integration.
3.3	Members will recall the decision to appoint a CMT representative as Executive Sponsor for Race, to take forward the development of a Race Equality Action Plan to help the Council lead the way in the city to help address these challenges.
3.4	CMT agreed that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy would be best placed to lead on this work and engage with relevant officers across all Council departments. A cross departmental working group and three subgroups were set up to consider three distinct strands of work:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Workforce: attracting more ethnic minority applicants and supporting our existing ethnic minority staff in the workplace; ○ Accessibility to services: promoting access to council services to ethnic minority customers and citizens and; ○ Civic leadership: championing ethnic minority inclusion in decision making, in communities and in public life.
3.5	<p>A variety of staff including officers from Corporate HR, the Equality and Diversity Unit, Good Relations, Employability and Skills, departmental policy officers, community safety, the Customer Hub, Marketing and Communications etc. have worked together to ensure necessary linkages with existing relevant service delivery, activity and work plans.</p> <p>Provision of Support and Assistance</p>
3.6	<p>Members will be aware that the Good Relations Unit has a significant level of engagement with people from Minority Ethnic Backgrounds and have regular contact with support organisations through the Council led Migrant Forum. In March 2023, the Council received Home Office Dispersal funding through TEO to support proposals to develop support and services for people seeking asylum.</p>
3.7	<p>Through this funding Council is supporting a number of initiatives to support those seeking asylum in the city. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An Asylum Support and Triage Project, providing a bilingual helpline and casework support for people seeking asylum, delivered by the Red Cross • A Family Help Project, Supporting parents and children coping with displacement through conflict, with a focus on school readiness, child development and parenting, delivered by Barnardos • A Community Integration Programme and trauma therapy intervention, delivered by LORAG • A Language, mentoring, training befriending and integration programme, delivered by Conway Education Centre • An integration and well-being outreach project, delivered by Belfast City of Sanctuary.
3.8	<p>In addition to the Council's integral role in organising and hosting the Ukrainian Assistance Centre, the Council had also provided funding to the Red Cross to develop a bilingual helpline for Ukrainian Nationals to support them with accessing services.</p>

3.9	<p>Following a proposal at the SP and R Committee in August 2023 to explore funding opportunities for a migrant hub or hubs, officers have commenced work to commission a scoping of the current services offered as well as an assessment of need, demand and gaps in provision. As part of this project extensive engagement will be undertaken with key stakeholders, with those who have a lived experience of coming to Belfast and navigating services, existing service providers and statutory agencies. Following the completion of this first phase and presentation back to Members, the next steps will include a site options appraisal to identify the right location for a resource that would serve communities new to Belfast, identification of the specific services and agencies to be involved and identification of potential funding sources.</p>
3.10	<p>Belfast Agenda Refresh</p> <p>To ensure that the voices of everyone living in Belfast are heard, conversations have continued with a wide range of stakeholders, including the new communities in our city. The need for Belfast to be a Compassionate City - a welcoming, caring, fair and inclusive city where no one is left behind, has again emerged as an important theme to ensure the Council's inclusive growth and anti-poverty ambitions. This engagement across the city has helped shape the specific actions in the draft Belfast Agenda that is now in the final stages of preparation.</p>
3.11	<p>Belfast Business Promise and Race at Work Campaign</p> <p>Aligned to our inclusive growth ambitions, the Belfast Business Promise includes a number of pledges aimed at encouraging employers to commit to and implement inclusive recruitment and workplace practices for all communities facing additional barriers to employment. Having participated in the pilot exercise, it has been identified that the Council already fully meets the Recruit Inclusively pledge criteria.</p>
3.12	<p>Signing up to Business in the Community Race at Work campaign also demonstrates the Council's best practice and commitment to attracting employees from minority ethnic groups and supporting them in the workplace. Among other things it requires the Council to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit at board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying • Make it clear that supporting equality in the workforce is the responsibility of all leaders and managers • Take action that supports ethnic minority career progression • Support race inclusion allies in the workplace
3.13	<p>Further appropriate actions and outreach are being considered for the action plan.</p>

	Building Capacity and Understanding
3.14	In October, Livingstone Thompson of Living Cultural Solutions, a contributor to the inequalities research project referenced at paragraph 3.1, delivered Anti-Racism training to a number of directors and other members of the working groups. In addition, the Executive Sponsor for Race and working group members have been engaging with people with lived experience, both groups and individuals, to learn more about what changes are needed. Feedback from this “lived experience mentoring” has identified opportunities to further build capacity and understanding.
3.15	A draft Race Equality Action Plan, incorporating all three strands of work, has now been produced and shared with Dr Lucy Michael and Livingston Thompson in their role as “critical friends” for this work, and detailed feedback on the draft plan has been received following this engagement.
3.16	A key recommendation from this engagement is that the Council should continue to build capacity in this area ahead of the final publication of the plan. This approach will ensure that senior council officers and elected members are fully equipped with the relevant knowledge and understanding to maximise the positive impact of the Race Equality Action Plan and further support senior decision makers in identifying appropriate actions to underpin the Belfast Agenda ambitions.
3.17	TEO approved the use of £20,000 Home Office Dispersal funding to support the procurement of a cultural competence training programme for the Council. This will be used to commission both awareness raising training for elected members, directors, senior managers and other relevant staff, and further consultancy support to assist the working group to finalise the development of a Race Equality Action Plan that will make a difference to the lives of people from minority ethnic communities living and working in our city.
	Resource Implications
3.18	There are no direct resource implications in terms of costs or human resources associated with this report at present. Further resource implications will be identified through the development of a Race Equality Action plan and costed for future approval.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
3.19	Work on screening of the Race Equality Action Plan is ongoing as the plan is being developed. Actions, which promote the inclusion of black and other ethnic minority

	communities in employment and civic life, would have a positive impact on equality and good relations within the city.
4.0	Documents Attached
	None

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum Thursday 7th December 2023

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Sam Nelson (*for Cllr Michael Long*)
Councillor Ciaran Beattie
Councillor Brian Smyth
Alderman Sonia Copeland
Councillor Christina Black
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Alderman Dean McCullough (*for Councillor Sarah Bunting*)

Apologies: Councillor Michael Long, Councillor Sarah Bunting

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl Director of Corporate Services and Deputy Chief Executive
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item1)
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 2)
Catherine Christy, Human Resources Manager, Development (for Item 2)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 3, 4 & 5)
Eunan McConville, Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Finance Update

The Director of Finance provided an update on the setting of the district rate for 2024/25. The Director outlined the challenges in setting the district rate for 2024/25 given the current economic climate and this will be discussed at the upcoming Party Group Briefings. It was noted that given that the party group briefings were due to take place the following week the timeframe would not allow for Member feedback to be included in the report to December SP&R Committee. Therefore, the special SP&R Committee being held for 12 January 2024 will be required in order to consider the overall position with a view to recommending the rate for 2024/25. Special meetings for the other standing committees will then be required the week commencing 15 January 2024 to agree the cash limits for Committees in order for the level of the District Rate to be set for 2024/25 by the 15 February 2024.

2. Elected Member Development Programme

Members previously agreed that the proposed programme of work for the Elected Member Development framework and the re-accreditation of Charter Plus would be considered at this Forum. The Human Resources Manager outlined the current framework and there was detailed discussion with a number of recommendations made by Members in relation to the processes already in place for learning and development. Specific recommendations were made in relation to budget allocation for learning and development and the potential to extend this over a council term as opposed to an annual allocation and the need for flexibility. Officers to further consider the recommendations discussed and an update will be brought back in January. It was agreed that the Member Development Strategic Framework would be circulated to Party Group Leaders following the meeting for discussion with their individual parties. Plans for identifying a strategic case study were also outlined and it was noted that this will be discussed further at the next meeting.

The Human Resources Manager also advised that an offer had been received to observe another Council Charter Plus assessment panel and it was agreed that the Chair of SP&R would be the most appropriate Member to participate in this assessment along with the relevant Officer. Members also noted upcoming political management development training for Council Officers which includes the proposal for Members participation in some of the training sessions. The Human Resources Manager to follow up with Party Group Leaders to seek nominations.

3. Hugh Hanna Statue

The City Solicitor provided an update for Members in relation to the relocation of the Hugh Hanna Statue which was previously considered by Party Group Leaders. Members noted that a subsequent request on a revised location had since been received. There were a number of issues and concerns raised in relation to the revised location outlined and it was agreed that further consideration by parties was required. Members to further consider and an update will be brought back to the Forum in January. A Member asked for supplementary information to also be provided in advance for the next meeting.

4. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in the coming months. In relation to queries raised by Members the City Solicitor to follow up with those Members.

5. AOB

Coronation Gift

The Chief Executive referred to the offer of a coronation gift (*an Irish Oak Tree*) to His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant for Belfast which was previously discussed. Members discussed potential location options for the planting of the tree including the grounds of City Hall and it was agreed that this would be further explored and an update will be brought back for Members consideration.

Service Improvement Working Group

The Chief Executive outlined the rationale for the establishment of a Service Improvement Working Group and the Director of Finance highlighted the linkages to the work being undertaken in relation to the Medium Term Financial Plan. He also advised that it would be beneficial for the work being undertaken on emerging efficiency proposals to help offset any future current district rate increase. The Chief Executive to consider the terms of reference for the group and an update will be brought back for Members consideration.

Belfast 2024

The Chief Executive provided an update on the Belfast 2024 programme following the decision by Members at November SP&R Committee to hold a special SP&R meeting to consider issues raised. He advised that a date for the Special week commencing 11 January would be arranged imminently. Members will also consider an update on The Mac at the same meeting.

Northern Ireland Policing Board

The Chief Executive advised that he had received correspondence from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in relation to independent members to the Northern Ireland Policing Board. It was noted that a report would be brought to November SP&R Committee and the correspondence would be circulated to Party group Leaders in advance. In relation to a query raised by a Member regarding the request for the Secretary of State to meet with Members on a number of issues it was noted that this would be followed up with Democratic Services.

Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members a number of illuminate requests received. There were some queries raised on one specific request specifically in relation to criteria which will require further consideration. The City Solicitor to consider the queries raised by Members and then to be brought back to a future meeting.

Members then noted the following requests would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

- **World Fairtrade Day – 10 May 2024**
- **Philippines Independence Day – 12 June 2024**



Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Requests for use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality
Date:	15th December, 2023
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Aisling Milliken, Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☒

No

☐

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☐

No

☒

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	This report, together with the attached appendix, contains the recommended approach in respect of each of the requests by external organisations for access to the City Hall function rooms received up to 5th December, 2023.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to approve the recommendations as set out in the attached appendix.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Background Information</u>
3.1	<p>The current criteria for use of the function rooms used to review external applications is:</p> <p>Functions permitted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • functions which support other events in the city and which are of demonstrable economic benefit to Belfast whether organised by the council or not; • functions which demonstrably enhance the city's image nationally or internationally as a desirable commercial, business or tourist destination; • functions designed to celebrate or commemorate a notable achievement or significant anniversary (25, 50, 100 years) by an organisation or body with close links to the city or province; and • functions organised by recognised local community or voluntary sector groups for non-profit and non-political purposes.
3.2	<p>Functions not permitted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conferences, meetings, seminars, performances, wedding receptions, private parties or receptions and similar booking requests in the prestige function rooms; • functions, which have as their principal purpose the generation of commercial gain for the organisers. Charity-fundraising functions are managed by the Lord Mayor's Office; • functions which have no compelling links to the council or the city specifically and which could instead use local private sector facilities; • functions which have as their primary purpose the advancement of any political or religious cause or campaign or are otherwise potentially contentious or involve significant reputation risks for the Council; and • functions which involve exceptionally large or disruptive set-ups or pose a real and tangible risk to the fabric of the building or grounds.
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.3	<p>The existing revised criteria and scale of charges have been applied to the various requests received and the recommendations herein are offered to the Committee on this basis for approval.</p>

3.4	The attached schedule covers two applications for functions, scheduled for 2024.
3.5	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None, any recommendations for hospitality will be met from existing budgets.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None.</p>
3.6	
4.0	Documents Attached
	Schedule of function requests received up to 5th December 2023.

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DECEMBER 2023 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET		HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2024 EVENTS						
Social Change Initiative	5 February 2024	Reception for delegates attending the conference on Countering Violent Conflict and Polarization- bringing together leading players from the world of philanthropy, peace building, civil society, multi-lateral agencies to hear/learn from the NI peace process. Numbers attending - 100	A & D	No (charity)	Yes, Tea and coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
Sisters In (charity) and Podiem	7 February 2024	Celebration/ Recognition of Female Entrepreneurship – organised as part of Belfast City Council's Enterprise Pathway Programme which Podiem is delivering. The purpose of the event is to celebrate/recognise the role of female entrepreneurs and inspire the attendees to consider pursuing an entrepreneurial journey themselves. Numbers attending – up to 350	C & D	No (charity)	Yes, Tea and coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>

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Subject:	Request for use of City Hall Grounds for Various Events in 2024 – Belfast24 and Belfast City Marathon 5K
Date:	15th December 2023
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Aisling Milliken, Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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

Insert number ☐

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To consider requests for the use of City Hall grounds in 2024 for:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little Amal – part of the Belfast24 programme • Belfast Marathon Christmas 10k
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. authorise the use of City Hall grounds on dates noted below; and 2. agree that the events take place on the basis of submission of an event management plan and risk assessment to ensure delivery of a safe public events.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Background Information</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that requests for the use of City Hall are 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 is necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the requests set out below falls into this category.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Several requests have been received for events over the spring and summer period and this report seeks to update members on larger events using City Hall grounds, due to the larger scale of activities involved it is deemed necessary to seek Committee approval.</p>
3.3	<p><u>The Proposed Events</u></p> <p>The proposed events would take place on the front lawns only or cobbled area and areas such as the Titanic Garden and Cenotaph will remain open to the public. Access to the City Hall building will not be affected.</p>
3.4	<p>In each case, the organisers would be providing all stewarding/marshalling staff & first aiders and would of course have to comply with the usual conditions including indemnities for damage and submission of a formal event-management plan.</p>
3.5	<p><u>17th – 19th May 2024 – Little Amal</u></p> <p>This project is part of Belfast 2024 and ArtsEkta has been commissioned by the Council to produce Little Amal. Little Amal is the 12-foot puppet of a 10 year old Syrian refugee child at the heart of The Walk. She has become a global symbol of human rights, especially those of refugees. Between 17th to 26th May, Amal is journeying across Ireland, starting in Belfast and ending in Dublin in one of the largest free public festivals ever created on the island. This event will be similar in scale to Mela Carnival, Lord Mayor's Day events previously held in City Hall grounds. The creative programme proposed for the city centre is currently in</p>

	<p>design stage and organisers will engage with City Hall functions team for planning and delivery.</p>
3.6	<p><u>16 November 2024 Belfast City Marathon</u></p> <p>A request has been received from Belfast City Marathon to use the cobbled area for a 4th event to their annual calendar of events. The intended distance is 5k and would be open to all ages, genders and abilities who could walk, jog, or run. All participants will be encouraged to fundraise for the official charity, Cancer Focus NI. The event will take place on Sunday 16th November at 9 am, starting and finishing on Donegall Square North, outside the City Hall. The route will be 1 loop and will showcase Belfast City Centre to all participants and their families.</p>
3.7	<p>Over 1,000 people are expected to register including children, teenagers, adults, and the elderly. There will be three prizes for the top males and females, but all will be invited to come in fancy dress with special prizes for best dressed. Initial meetings with City Events and Markets team have confirmed this 5k event, on the day after the market opens and the Christmas Lights Switch On event, will not affect their event plans or delivery and both teams are happy for this 5k to take place subject to members approval.</p> <p>Previous marathon events have all taken place outside City Hall on the cobbled area without incident and the organisers engaging with various stakeholders for planning and delivery.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There would be no costs for the council as the various organisers would bear any/all stewarding and equipment costs etc themselves. The utilities costs on the day are of a very minor nature and the normal event support in the form of electrical and water provision in the grounds will be provided.</p> <p>There are no concerns from an asset management point of view, although the organisers would be required to provide the usual insurances, indemnities, and obligations.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no direct good relations, equality or rural needs implications arising from this report.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None

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