

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Monday, 27th January, 2025

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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

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

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting 13th December were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 9th January, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Groogan, R-M Donnelly and Duffy declared an interest in item 8(a) Minutes of the Shared City Partnership in so far as it related to PEACEPLUS in that

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

Councillor Groogan also declared an interest in item 2(i) Update on External Funding – UK Shared Prosperity Fund and proposed approach to recouped capital funds in that she worked for an organisation which had applied for funding. As the item did not become the subject of debate, she was not required to leave the meeting.

**Request to present Linen Hall Library
(in relation to Item 7 (b)) - Restricted**

The Committee was advised that, due to a family bereavement, the deputation would not be in attendance.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

**Revenue Estimates 2025/26 and
Medium-Term Financial Planning**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 13th December, it agreed to defer consideration of a report on the 2025/26 revenue estimates and rate setting. Accordingly, the Director of Finance provided an updated report following further meetings with the Party Group Leaders and recommended that the Committee:

1. Agree that the decisions should not be subject to call-in because it would cause an unreasonable delay which would be prejudicial to the Council’s and the public’s interests in striking the rate by the legislative deadline of 15 February 2025.
2. Agree the revised £4.9m departmental growth proposals as outlined in paragraph 3.5 of the report and at Appendix 1.

3. Agree the additional growth requests following Party Group Leader meetings as outlined in paragraph 3.6 of the report and the associated funding strategy for 2025/26 outlined in paragraph 3.7 of the report.
4. Agree to a domestic rate increase of 5.99% for 2025/26 as outlined in paragraph 3.3 of the report.
5. Agree to recommend the following cash limits for 2025/26 subject to the impact of the decisions made on items 2, 3 and 4 above:
 - a. A cash limit of £59,659,873 for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for 2025/26, including £1,270,000 for Belfast Investment Fund and £3,000,000 for City Deal.
 - b. A cash limit of £109,423,272 for the People and Communities Committee for 2025/26.
 - c. A cash limit of £22,897,361 for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee for 2025/26.
 - d. A cash limit of £2,826,952 for the Planning Committee for 2025/26.
 - e. A Capital Financing Budget of £25,274,022 for 2025/26.
6. Agree the next steps to be taken as outlined in paragraph 10 of the report.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Whyte,

That the Committee does not agree to adopt the recommendations in relation to the rate setting and the revenue estimates.

On a vote, no Members voted for the proposal and seventeen against, with two no votes and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Update on Temporary Contracts and Agency Workers

The Committee noted the content of the report and agreed that an Action Plan be developed which set targets for the reduction in the number of agency workers employed in each Council department. It was agreed also that the next report provide details of when each agency post last went out to public advertisement.

Organisational Reviews and Change Programme

The Committee noted the progress on the work programme for the Organisational Reviews and Change portfolio and timescales going forward.

**Update on Review of the
Property Maintenance Service**

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report until its special meeting scheduled for Friday, 31st January.

World Irish Dancing 2027 bid

The Committee approved the request from ICC Belfast to provide financial support towards the costs associated with hosting the World Irish Dancing Championships in 2027.

Requests for Funding

The Director of Finance reported that the following requests for funding had been received:

1. A request from Linen Hall Library for the Council to make a one-off financial contribution to secure the future of the Library.
2. A request from the Belfast Malone Tornadoes Rugby Football Club for the Council to make a financial contribution to help secure the teams full participation in the 2025 International Mixed Ability World Cup Rugby Tournament (IMART) being held this year in Paris, France.

Belfast Malone Tornadoes Rugby Football Club

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the request from the Belfast Malone Tornadoes Rugby Football Club to allow officers to look at the development of a fund which could support this and similar requests from sporting groups for funding.

Linen Hall Library

Proposal

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

That the Committees agrees to refuse the request submitted by the Linen Hall Library.

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

Further Proposal

Moved by Councillor Nelson,
Seconded by Councillor Whyte,

That the Committee agrees to approve the request for funding of a one-off investment of £175,000 that would assist the Linen Hall Library in

continuing to operate as it develops a new business model to make it more sustainable and resilient, subject to due diligence being undertaken.

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

Irish Football Association - Blanchflower Park

The Committee considered a report which outlined a request from the Irish Football association to lease a football pitch from the Council at the Blanchflower Playing Fields.

That Committee agreed not to accede to the request.

Newington Football Club

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report until its special meeting scheduled for Friday, 31st January.

Update on External Funding – UK Shared Prosperity Fund and proposed approach to recouped capital funds

The Committee noted the update provided on UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the proposed additional local capital schemes as a consequence of the funding, and that a further update would be brought to the Area Working Groups for consideration.

Crematorium Fees

The Committee considered a report which sought to address the income gap which currently existed at the Crematorium, the decision on which needed to be included in the 2025/26 rate setting process.

The Committee approved the proposed pricing model as part of the 2025/26 rate setting process.

Provision of pest control in Council estate

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 23rd August 2024, it had considered a request to tender for Pest control services for the Council's estate up to five years at Council owned sites.

The Committee did not agree to proceed with the contract and asked for a future report which considered the implications of providing these services in-house to be submitted to a future meeting. Accordingly, the Committee considered a report in this regard.

The Committee:

- noted the contents of the report;
- agreed to proceed to the detailed service design stage of providing an in-house service with more detailed analysis of the costs to be provided;
- noted the update in relation to the pest control interim Single Tender Action; and
- agreed that officers could continue to use external pest control support as an interim measure.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

**Notice of Motion - Rates Break
Sandy Row Business Community**

The Committee was advised that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 7th January, had referred the following motion - Rates Break Sandy Row Business Community, which had been proposed by Councillor Kelly and seconded by Councillor Bunting

“That this Council recognises the difficulties that small businesses in Sandy Row are facing since the closure of the Boyne Bridge and the crisis that some find themselves in due to loss of trade. Agrees to look into a rates break to try and help them through the testing time of the Boyne Bridge closure and recognises that some will not survive without this Councils intervention.”

The motion calls upon the Council to look into a rates break for Sandy Row businesses - the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee was responsible for finance matters and the setting of the rate and in the first instance the motion had been referred to this Committee.

The City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services pointed that, at this time, Members were normally only asked to note that the Notice of Motion had been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report would be brought to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Notice of Motion and the potential costs implications. However, it should be noted that the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 4th December, had already considered a motion on Retail Business in Sandy Row. In agreeing that a report to be submitted to a future meeting, that Committee had also requested that the potential for rates relief for the businesses be investigated as part of that report. That decision was ratified by the Council on 9th January. It was pointed out also that, as the Council did not have the power to grant rates exemptions, the report to come back to Committee would look at the possible options available to Land and Property Services.

The Committee:

- noted that in accordance with Standing Order 13(i) that Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report;
- noted the Council had already agreed to consider potential for rates relief as set out above, that this work was ongoing and agreed to close the notice of motion; and
- agreed that the motion considered by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee be expanded to include the area on the west side of Durham Street.

Notice of Motion – Armed Forces Covenant

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To consider the Notice of Motion in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant which was agreed by Council at its meeting on 9th January 2025, subject to equality screening pursuant to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to consider the contents of this report and determine whether it wishes to adopt the Notice of Motion to sign up to the Armed Forces Covenant.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

- 3.1 The Committee will recall that Alderman Lawlor, seconded by Alderman McCullough, proposed the following Notice of Motion at the Standards and Business Committee on 21st November 2024:

‘That this Council recognises the unique skills that are held by Armed Forces service leavers; recognises that many veterans can face disadvantages compared to the general population, arising from military life, when accessing services and as such, this Council commits to signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant immediately.’

- 3.2 Pursuant to Standing Order 13 (n), the Standards and Business Committee referred the Notice of Motion directly to Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in order for officers to ascertain what is involved and to ascertain what, if any, the Council’s commitments may be in signing the Covenant.

At its meeting on 13th December 2024, the Committee rejected the notice of motion.

- 3.3 At Council on 8th January 2025, this decision was overturned and Council agreed to adopt the notice of motion, subject to equality screening. In accordance with Standing Orders, this report sets out detail of the commitments in the Armed Forces Covenant, to include any financial implications, together with outcome of the draft equality screening exercise.
- 3.4 The Armed Forces Covenant can be found at the following link: <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>
- 3.5 The Covenant sets out two principles. The first is that those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether Regular or Reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. The second is that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially for those who have given most such as the injured and the bereaved.
- 3.6 The intention of the Covenant primarily relates to issues around housing, education or healthcare. The Armed Forces Act 2006 is a UK wide Act which imposes a statutory duty upon specified bodies to have due regard to principles of the Covenant. Specified bodies are those authorities responsible for certain relevant housing, education or healthcare functions.
- 3.7 The draft equality screening report concludes that the signing of the Covenant is likely to have a minor impact on the basis of religious belief and political opinion on both the promotion of equality of opportunity grounds and good relations grounds. This is on the basis that the legacy of the conflict is still very much evident in some areas throughout Belfast and the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant may be a divisive issue.
- 3.8 As such the decision has been screened out at this time. However any future decisions about resource allocation based on signing the Covenant would require an updated screening exercise to be undertaken.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.9 None associated with this report as the Motion only commits to signing the Armed Forces Covenant.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

These are set out above.”

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the Committee agrees that the Council adopts the motion and signs up to the Armed Forces Covenant.

On a vote, eight Members voted for the proposal and nine against, with one no vote and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to reject the motion and that no further action be undertaken.

Governance

Revisions to Scheme of Allowances

The Committee agreed:

- To defer consideration of the report on the Scheme of Allowances;
- To the establishment of a Remuneration Panel comprising the Chief Executive, the City Solicitor, the Director of Finance and the Director of Human Resources to consider Elected Members remuneration and allowances, with full delegated authority to the Chief Executive to implement any recommendations made by the Panel; and
- To write again to the Minister calling for the current legislation to be amended to provide for the establishment of an independent process to deal with the scheme of allowances, thereby removing Elected Member involvement.

**Appointment to Outside Body –
Belfast Hills Partnership Board**

The Committee was advised that correspondence had been received from the Partnership Manager, Belfast Hills Partnership, indicating that its Articles of Association had been updated to allow for two Councillors from Belfast City Council to become Board members.

The Council currently had one position, and this was held by the Sinn Fein Party following the selection process for appointments to outside bodies under the St. Lague Order of Choices which was agreed at the Committee meeting held on 26th June, 2023.

Also at that meeting the Committee “*agreed a process to deal with any additional requests from outside bodies for Council representation during the Council term, in that the Party or Parties who would have had the next available choice(s) under the Saint Lague table would be asked to nominate a representative(s)*”.

Accordingly, if the Committee accepted the request the position would be offered in the first instance to the next Party on the list, namely, the Alliance Party.

The Committee approved the request to increase the number of Members on the Board to two and noted that the nomination would be made in accordance with the Committee’s decision of 26th June, 2023 in relation to additional appointments to outside bodies.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Planning Update report

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

Response to Department of Communities consultation on the draft statutory guidance on the McCloud Remedy in the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland)

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to make Members aware of the Department of Communities consultation on the draft statutory guidance on the McCloud Remedy in the Local Government Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) and to seek Members’ approval of the Council’s draft response.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the draft response and approve its submission to the Department of Communities (DfC), subject to any comments or amendment provided.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

- 3.1 After reforming public service pension schemes in 2014 and 2015, the Government introduced transitional protections for older members. However, in December 2018, the Court of Appeal ruled that younger members of the judicial and firefighters' pension schemes had been unlawfully discriminated against because the protections did not apply to them.
- 3.2 This ruling is called the 'McCloud judgment'. As a result of the ruling, changes have been made to the Local Government Pension Scheme(LGPS) to remove the age discrimination. These changes are known as the 'McCloud remedy'.
- 3.3 In 2015, the LGPS in NI changed from a final salary scheme to a career average scheme. Older members who were closer to retirement were protected from these changes. Members were protected if they met these conditions:
- born before 1 April 1957
 - joined the LGPS before 1 April 2012 (or another public service pension scheme)
 - under age 65 and an active member between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2022
 - took their pension straight away when they left the LGPS.
- 3.4 When a protected member retired, their pension fund compared the career average pension they built up before age 65 with the pension they would have built up in the final salary scheme. If the final salary pension was higher, the difference was added to their pension. This protection is called the underpin.
- 3.5 The LGPS rules changed from 1 October 2023 because of the McCloud remedy. The changes are backdated to 1 April 2015, when the career average scheme started. If a member qualified for underpin protection, they will be protected even if they have already left the LGPS or taken their pension.

3.6 The McCloud remedy means two main changes for LGPS members:

- 1. Qualifying younger members are now protected by the underpin too. This removes the discrimination found in the McCloud judgment.**
- 2. The new underpin rules are much more detailed. This means that the underpin works fairly and consistently for all protected members. If you were protected by the 'old' underpin rules when you took your pension before 1 October 2023, your pension might increase under the 'new' rules.**

3.7 In 2020/21 and 2023 DfC consulted on proposals to remove unlawful discrimination found by the courts in the 'McCloud' case.

3.8 Members are advised that on 11th December 2024 DfC issued a further consultation and are now seeking further views on draft statutory guidance to implement the McCloud remedy in LGPS (NI). It outlines the topics the draft statutory guidance should cover.

3.9 Members should note that the closing date for responses is 19th February 2025. A copy of the draft response to the consultation is attached as appendix 1 and a summary of the key issues are outlined below.

A Link to the Consultation is detailed below.

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-draft-statutory-guidance-implementation-mccloud-remedy-local-government-pension-scheme-northern-ireland>

3.10 DfC are seeking consultees' comments on the content of the guidance, but in particular on the following points:

- Whether you agree with the approaches proposed**
- Whether the guidance is clear and contains sufficient information on each topic**
- Whether there are any other topics that should be covered in the guidance**

3.11 In summary the key areas are:

- 1. Overall Approach to McCloud Remedy**
- 2. Technical Matters**
- 3. Compensation**

3.12 The draft guidance is intended to support the Scheme Manager in the implementation of the LGPS (NI) McCloud remedy in the following ways:

- By providing the Department's view on the approach that should be taken for a number of key issues in order to achieve a consistent application of the remedy across the LGPS(NI).
- By providing additional guidance on how certain technical issues that may arise should be approached.
- By providing an overview of the legal framework for McCloud compensation.

3.13 The Key issues identified in the draft guidance cover the following areas:

- Governance
- Data Collection and verification
- Identifying members in scope
- Qualifying scenarios
- Case prioritisation

3.14 In relation to the technical issues, these have been identified as:

- Transfers – Issues regarding retrospection
- Multiple sets of underpin figures
- Unpaid additional pension contributions
- Deaths of beneficiaries before payment made

3.15 In relation to Compensation

- Identifying the conditions that must be met for direct or indirect compensation to be possible
- examples of where compensation may be payable in the context of the LGPS(NI)

3.16 Members are asked to consider the draft response in Appendix 1 and approve its submission to the Department for Communities.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.17 There are no implications associated with this report.

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

- 3.18 There are no implications associated with this report.
- 3.19 Members are advised that DfC have undertaken an equality screening assessment on the proposed guidance and this is available on their website.”

The Committee considered the draft response and approved its submission to the Department of Communities (DfC).

**Proposal for Belfast to join UK
Network of Learning Cities**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for Belfast Learning City to join the UK Network of Learning Cities, following an invitation from Swansea Learning City, and to endorse attendance at the network’s inaugural meeting and launch in late January 2025, coinciding with International Day of Education.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:
- a) Consider and agree that Belfast joins the emerging UK Learning Cities Network.
 - b) Consider and agree that officer representation (maximum of 2) from the Belfast Learning City’s Network attend the inaugural meeting and launch of the UK Learning Cities Network to be held in Swansea in late January 2025. Members to note the meeting takes place in advance of February Council ratification.

3.0 Key Issues

Background

- 3.1 Belfast joined the UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities in 2018 in recognition of the City’s commitment to promoting lifelong learning for all. This aligns with the vision of the Belfast Agenda, to promote Belfast as a great place to live and work for all.

3.2 Since joining the UNESCO network, Belfast has:

- **Strengthened partnerships with local education, community and business stakeholders:** Under the auspices of community planning, a cross-sectoral 'Learning Cities Leadership Group' currently exists and comprises representatives from QUB, UU, BMET, BHSCT, PHA, Education Authority, Libraries NI, community partners and Council. Other key partners, including the Open University and Belfast Healthy Cities, are engaged and plan to join the Leadership Group.
- **Strengthened partnerships with Learning Cities across the island (Dublin, Derry and Strabane, Limerick, Cork and Waterford):** These relationships have been formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), enabling collaboration, exchange of best practices and access to joint funding opportunities to deliver shared projects that have directly benefited Belfast's learning programmes particularly in areas such as community engagement and skills development.
- **Delivered annual Belfast Learning Festivals:** These festivals have provided a platform to celebrate and showcase formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities across the city, with participation from schools, businesses and community groups helping reinforce the city's commitment to narrowing educational inequalities and fostering a culture of lifelong learning. The city has also administered grant funding to enable not-for-profit organisations to host a learning event as part of this celebration.
- **Supported initiatives that enhance skills development and community wellbeing:** For example, Belfast Learning City recently funded the Aisling Educational Bursary Awards which supported individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds to access further or higher education.
- **Strengthened partnerships with Learning Cities across the globe:** This has included informal learning exchanges with cities across Europe, South Africa and Australia.

The Irish Network of Learning Cities

3.3 In 2019, Belfast joined the Irish Network of Learning Cities (INLC), with the Lord Mayor signing a Memorandum of Understanding between participating cities including Derry and Strabane, Cork, Dublin, Limerick and Belfast. The MOU was renewed and re-signed in May 2022.

- 3.4 The INLC meets several times a year to share knowledge, experience and support each other on their learning city journey. The network recently secured and implemented a Shared Island funded initiative which enabled and encouraged learning exchanges and joint initiatives across the INLC.

UK Network of Learning Cities

- 3.5 There are 7 designated learning cities across the UK (including Bristol, Derby, Glasgow, Kirklees, Manchester, Swansea and Wolverhampton). Reflecting on the approach adopted by the all-island Irish Network of Learning Cities (UNESCO promotes the collaborative approach as an exemplar), Swansea are leading an initiative to create a UK network of Learning Cities. Swansea has invited both Belfast and Derry and Strabane Learning Cities to join the Network.

- 3.6 Joining the UK Network will:

- Foster further collaboration with many UK Core Cities, enabling and encouraging the sharing of good practice and amplifying impact of lifelong learning on a national scale.
- Showcase Belfast's achievements and ongoing work, enhancing our city's profile both nationally and globally.
- Position Belfast as a leader in lifelong learning, increasing opportunities for external funding and partnerships.
- Provide a collective platform to influence regional and national policies in support of learning initiatives.

Next Steps

- 3.7 Subject to the consideration and approval of the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the proposed next steps are set out below.

1. Belfast Learning City Steering Group will confirm its intention to join the UK Network of Learning Cities.
2. Representatives of the Belfast Learning Cities Steering Group will attend the inaugural meeting and launch event of the UK Network of Learning Cities in Swansea in late January 2025.
3. Opportunities for collaboration within the network will be identified and reported to future meetings of the Committee.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.8 There are no membership fees for joining the UK Network of Learning Cities and participation in network activities will align with ongoing Learning City Work.
- 3.9 Attendance at the inaugural meeting and launch of the network in Swansea, if agreed, will incur travel and subsistence costs which can be funded through existing budget assigned for Belfast Learning Cities.
Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
- 3.10 There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications contained in this report.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Response to Department of Finance
consultation on the draft 2025/26 Budget**

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

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to make Members aware of the Department of Finance consultation on the draft 2025/26 Budget and to seek Members’ approval of the Council’s draft response.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the draft response and approve its submission to the Department of Finance (DoF), subject to any comments or amendment provided.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

The Draft 2025/26 Budget sets out the proposed departmental allocations for the incoming financial year.

The Executive is encouraging people to get involved in the Draft Budget consultation and have their say on how to prioritise the finite funding available.

- 3.2 Members should note that the closing date for responses is 13th March 2025. A copy of the draft response to the consultation is proposed in paragraphs 3.8 and 3.9 below. A summary of the key issues are outlined below.

A Link to the Consultation is detailed below.

<https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations/draft-budget-2025-26-consultation>

- 3.3 DoF are seeking consultees' comments on the following points:

1. Do you agree with the prioritisation of funding within the 2025-26 draft budget document?
2. What services should be prioritised in the 2025-26 budget?
3. Are there any services that no longer need to be delivered or can be reduced in 2025-26?
4. Do service charges need to be considered for some services?
5. Should Public Sector pay be prioritised?
6. And have you any other views?

- 3.4 The information provided is at a very high level. Unfortunately, this makes it difficult to make an informed response to the questions posed. On that basis it is recommended that the Council does not respond to questions 1-5.

- 3.5 Within the written ministerial statement issued with the consultation documents, dated 19th December 2024, there is reference to the Autumn budget and the increase in employers' National Insurance and the potential cost to local government.

- 3.6 Prior to this in a statement from government on 18th December they have confirmed £515 million in support for local authorities in England to mitigate the additional impact of the increase in employer National Insurance Contributions. As members will be aware, this funding will then come through the block grant as a result of the Barnett Consequentials.

- 3.7 Members will be aware that additional funding received by the Executive via the block grant is unhypothecated and as such it is at the discretion of the executive as to how that funding is allocated. It is proposed that the Council provides a response to Q6 – Any other views – as follows:

- 3.8 Belfast City Council fully understands the serious financial pressures across public services and local government is committed to doing its bit in addressing those pressures. We do believe in the benefit though of a joined up and ‘whole of government’ approach to public services in Northern Ireland and would encourage us both to work together to protect essential local services. By doing this, we can avoid just transferring the financial pressures public services are experiencing from one part of the public sector to another part of the public sector and instead put our collective efforts into the transformation needed to put all our public services on a sustainable footing.
- 3.9 On that basis, it is imperative, that additional funding received through the block grant as a result of the Barnett Consequentials is passed onto Local Authorities to ensure the continued delivery of core services.
- 3.10 Members are asked to consider the draft response above and approve its submission to DoF. Financial & Resource Implications
- 3.11 There are no implications associated with this report.
- Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
- 3.12 There are no implications associated with this report.
- Members are advised that DoF have undertaken an equality Impact assessment on the draft budget and this is available on their website.”

The Committee considered the draft response and approved its submission to the Department of Finance.

Community Recovery Fund

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted the undernoted report;

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 Following a meeting of the Strategy Policy and Resources (SP&R) committee on the 22nd November 2024, members requested Officers to consider the Area Based Facet of the Community Recovery Fund (CRF) Action Plan, which the Deputy Prime Minister is making available to support communities impacted by the public disorder that took place

between July and August 2024, including Belfast. In England this will be issued under section 31 of the Local Government Finance Act 2003, and in Northern Ireland funds will be released to the Department of Finance, to support those communities most affected.

2.0 Recommendation

The Committee is asked to agree that Officers Progress the Community Recovery Action Plan under the following 4 themes: -

- Theme 1 Good Relations Inclusion and Integration
- Theme 2 Wider University and Lower Ormeau
- Theme 3 Community Integration and Inclusion
- Theme 4 Resource Recoupment

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1** The CRF is allocative and offers a flat rate of £600,000 to Belfast City Council, to be committed and commenced before the end of the Financial Year 2024-25.

Expenditure is eligible under this scheme if it is in response to the violent disorder that took place between July and August 2024 and is on, or in connection with:

- a. Immediate action to safeguard life or property.
- b. To prevent suffering or severe inconvenience.
- c. To reduce the risk of further disorder in the future.
- d. To rebuild social trust and promote cohesion between communities.

- 3.2** The Fund has deliberately sought to provide local areas with flexibility to design a package that responds to their circumstances. Previous reports have detailed examples of projects which are designed to support Community and Voluntary Activity.

- 3.3** Officers have considered members feedback in relation to the original area-based approach and are recommending a number of changes to the Community Recovery Action Plan, which will assist bolstering support directly to Communities within Belfast City. The Changes can be summarised as follows: -

1. CRF002 – Integration and Inclusion has been realigned to £35,000.
2. CRF003 - Community Centre Programme (Reaching Out) has been realigned to £30,000.
3. CRF008 – Community Resource Integration and Inclusion has been increased from £180,000 to £330,000.

This will still leave sufficient budget to develop and target cultural competence and capacity within communities, as there will be opportunity to couple this with Council's Good Relations Action Plan 25/26. However, it also means more investment can be provided directly into Communities in Belfast to improve Integration and Orientation.

3.4 CRF008 will be divided into two parts: -

1. Targeted Intervention £160,000 – Proposals will be sought and developed through an open call for 4 areas in Belfast which have been directly impacted by Racist Attacks, Officers will work with Community Organisations in the following 4 locations, and ensure Community Led proposals to increase Integration and Inclusion of the Migrant population are developed and progressed: -
 - a. Sandy Row/Donnegal Road
 - b. Woodvale
 - c. Connswater
 - d. Greater Falls
2. The remaining £170,000 under this theme; Council will support Projects led by Constituted Community Organisations in Belfast City up to a value of £20,000, through an open call, that support a proactive approach to integration and inclusion of the Migrant population in Belfast City.

3.5 Council will invite projects that specifically address some or all the following:

- Proposals that are innovative and do not duplicate the work of other services.
- Proposals that engage host communities and people from the migrant community.
- Proposals that foster contact and connections with host communities to improve the welcome that people from the migrant community.
- Proposals that encourage and support groups to involve migrant population to get involved in the life of their communities through participation in local activities, networks, sports and organisations.

- **Proposals that are delivered in areas where, to date, there has been limited infrastructure / funding for interventions supporting the inclusion of people from the migrant community.**
- **Proposals that provide orientation and advocacy support**

It should be noted that this fund does not support one - off events / festivals, and the said criteria applies to both parts of CRF008.

3.6 The outcomes from the above programme should provide the following: -

- **Community Projects which provide Increased Integration, Inclusion and Orientation for the Migrant Community in Belfast**
- **A reduction in Anti-Muslim hate.**
- **Increased Community Leadership and Competence**

3.7 Further to the above it is anticipated that the direct outcomes and data attained from the said projects will inform the core work of Council's Good Relations Action Plan and Strategy.

3.8 The Action Plan attached has been submitted and agreed in principle with the department. Officers have been in discussions with the relevant department in Westminster and providing programmes are committed Council will have the ability to deliver into the Financial Year 25/26. That said, members should note that the Good Relations Manager will have to agree the said changes with the Department of Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

3.9 Following members comments in November at SP&R Officers have reviewed the fund criteria above and amended the four main themes of the action plan for delivery as follows: -

- **Theme 1 Good Relations Inclusion and Integration**
- **Theme 2 Wider University and Lower Ormeau**
- **Theme 3 Community Integration and Inclusion**
- **Theme 4 Resource Recoupment**

Full Detail of the Community Recovery Action Plan can be seen in Appendix 1

3.10 Financial and Resource Implications

All the budget detailed within the report is at 100%, the biggest implication is that of resource to design, implement, manage and monitor the programmes, however Council will be able to recoup this under Theme 4.

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

All the above aligns with Council's Good Relations Strategic Framework, which seeks to improve Good Relations between people from different political, religious, and racial backgrounds."

The Committee agreed that officers progress the Community Recovery Action Plan under the following 4 themes:

- Theme 1 Good Relations Inclusion and Integration;
- Theme 2 Wider University and Lower Ormeau;
- Theme 3 Community Integration and Inclusion; and
- Theme 4 Resource Recoupment.

It agreed also to realign the budget as follows: -

1. CRF002 – Integration and Inclusion has been realigned to £35,000.
2. CRF003 - Community Centre Programme (Reaching Out) has been realigned to £30,000.
3. CRF008 – Community Resource Integration and Inclusion has been increased from £180,000 to £330,000. £160,000 would be allocated to 4 areas (Sandy Row/Donnegal Road, Woodvale, Connswater and Greater Falls) and £170,00 allocated to an open call for the constituted community organisation.

Review of Illuminate Policy

The Committee deferred consideration of the report to enable a further report to be submitted which addressed those issues which had been raised by Members.

**Smart Belfast: City Innovation
programme update**

The Committee was informed that the Smart Belfast Urban Innovation programme encouraged collaboration between government, industry, SMEs, academia, and communities. The aim was to harness digital innovation to address public policy challenges, while at the same time encouraging greater investment in innovation to stimulate economic growth. The following update outlines two initiatives that would contribute to these aims:

Inclusive Innovation Workshop

The Deputy Chief Executive reminded Members that they had previously approved a city partner workshop to be held to explore the opportunities for 'inclusive innovation'; what it means; why it's important; and how it can help to unlock more local economic and social value from innovation investments such as Belfast Region City Deal and planned major investments by the UK Government in innovation over the next four years.

Invitations had been extended to all Members, community organisations, industry, public and university partners (with 70 participants currently confirmed). It would take place on 28th January at the Titanic Hotel from 9.15 am. The agenda had been developed with the Belfast Innovation Commissioner, Adrian Johnston, who would be chairing the event. It would feature local and national speakers who would share their experiences and perspectives on inclusive innovation. This would include the Council's own four-year Hubs of Innovation project with the Maritime Belfast Trust; research by King's College which had been working with Catalyst on measuring inclusive innovation; Newcastle Upon Tyne's i30 research programme (which was looking at practice in Newcastle, Belfast, Medellin, and Pittsburgh); and Queen's University's Communities and Place programme.

The workshop, which was mainly funded by Horizon 2020, would help inform a future programme of work led by the Innovation Commissioner and the City Innovation Office. Members were encouraged to come along.

'Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayoral Challenge' competition

This global innovation competition opened every few years and provided city governments with up to \$1 million and multi-year support to transform an essential, city-wide public service.

The competition was delivered in two stages: Phase 1 provides up to \$50,000 to 50 cities to refine and test their initial ideas (March 2025.) While Phase 2 would provide 25 of these cities with a further \$1 million to bring their ideas to life. (Phase 2 awards would be made in October 2025.)

The deadline for submission was 20 December, which had given Council officers very little time to prepare an application that would meet Bloomberg's detailed criteria and not affording time to submit this first iteration of the application to the Committee in advance. Officers had therefore focused on areas that aligned to areas of work already agreed by Members. Following an ideation process, that included discussions with the Bloomberg team in New York, the Belfast application focused on re-imagining the city's alleyways. The idea was to develop a mechanism that would allow the Council and other bodies, including social enterprises, to work directly with communities to sustainably manage city alleyways to promote biodiversity, cultural activities, to encourage active travel, and, by doing so, crowd out anti-social behaviour. This would build on an existing priority of Members and the existing work of the Parks Outreach Team, the Climate team and others.

Accordingly, the Deputy Chief Executive asked the Committee to note the application, and that any decision on whether Belfast had made it through to the first phase was expected in March 2025 at which point, if selected to progress to the next stage, the proposal would be brought back to Members for further consideration.

The Committee noted:

1. the details of the Inclusive Innovation workshop and the invitation to Members; and
2. that Belfast City Council had applied to the Bloomberg Mayoral Challenge competition to support work on re-imagining city alleyways and that the Deputy Chief Executive would provide Members with details of the Bloomberg application

Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2025-26

The Committee considered a report which sought approval of the draft performance improvement objectives and indicative actions for 2025/26 and for their issue for public consultation.

The Committee:

- i. agreed the Council's proposed 2025-26 draft performance improvement objectives and indicative actions, subject to minor edits based on feedback.
- ii. agreed that the proposed 2025-26 draft performance improvement objectives and indicative actions were issued for public consultation for a period of 8 weeks. The draft performance improvement objectives were summarised below for Members:

Draft performance improvement objectives 2025-26
Our services We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.
Our people and communities We will improve our local areas and provide opportunities to support our residents to become healthier and engaged.
Our place We will create a more vibrant, attractive, and connected city (including the city centre).
Our planet We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.
Our economy We will stimulate inclusive growth and innovation, help businesses to start-up and grow and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment.
Compassionate city We will support our most vulnerable people to make Belfast a more caring, safe, and inclusive city.

- iii. noted the next steps, as outlined in the report.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

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

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Capital Programme:**
 - **IT Programme** – Folder Inserter Equipment – Note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £69,000 be allocated.
 - **City Hall Stained Glass Windows** - Agree that ‘City Hall Stained Glass Windows – Health Service and LGBT Community’ is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed*; note that a satisfactory tender return has been received for the LGBT window, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £35,000 be allocated to each of the windows, a total allocation of up to £70,000.
 - **Belfast Bikes** - Note that a satisfactory tender return has been received for a new Belfast Bikes operator, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council; and note that capital costs can be met via an existing reserve along with either external funding or a growth proposal as part of

the Revenue Estimates 2025/26 & Medium-Term Financial Planning report.

- EV Charging Network - Agree that 'EV Charging Network' is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging*, arising from the agreed LEV Strategy, to allow a business case to be developed.
- Fleet Replacement Programme 2025/26 – Note the agreed fleet programme for 2025/26 at Appendix 1 including the replacement of the Lord Mayor's official car.
- North Foreshore Development Site - Infrastructure Works – Note the cost increase for this project since the original budget was allocated in 2016, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council and can be met via capital receipts from the North Foreshore site as previously agreed by Members; and agree to a budget increase of £1.8m.
- IT Programme – Corporate HR/Payroll System - Note the cost increase for this project since the original budget was allocated in 2016 and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree to a budget increase of £93,000 up to a maximum total allocation of £486,000.
- Procurement process for 2025/26 Non-Recurrent Programme, Fleet Programme and Externally Funded Projects - agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated for any Physical Programme projects in 2025/26 including Fleet Replacement Programme, non-recurrent programme and externally funded projects as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund – to note the update provided and the proposed additional local capital schemes as a consequence of the UKSPF funding and that a further update will be brought to the AWGs for consideration.
- Capital Letters of Offer – to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer in Q3 2024/25.
- Contracts awarded – to note the update in relation to contracts awarded in Q3 2024/25.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Physical Programme

Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. The Council also delivers externally focused funding streams such as Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Local Investment Fund (LIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF), as well as numerous physical programmes and standalone projects that we deliver for central government. Our funding partners include National Lottery Heritage Fund, SEUPB PeacePLUS, the Executive Office, DfC, DfI including the Living with Water Programme, DAERA, Ulster Garden Villages, Levelling Up Fund (LUF), UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and others. When appropriate, the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange site visits to any projects that have been completed.

3.2 Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

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

Project	Overview	Stage movement
IT Programme – Folder Inserter Equipment	Folder inserter equipment is hardware used for automated mailing processes within Digital Services. It is required for large volume communications processing for NIHE and the Council.	Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum budget of up to £69,000

Project	Overview	Stage movement
City Hall Stained Glass Windows – Health Service and LGBT community	The creation of two new stained glass windows at City Hall, in recognition of the Health Service in Belfast and the acknowledgement of the positive role of the LGBT community in Belfast	Move to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> with a maximum budget of up to £70,000
EV Charging Network	The development of a publicly accessible electric vehicle charging point network on Council owned assets	Add at <i>Stage 1 - Emerging</i>

3.3 IT Programme – Folder Inserter

A new folder inserter is required to continue to provide a high volume enveloping service for NIHE mandated via a Service Level Agreement, and internally for council departments. Members will recall that in August 2024 this project was moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at *Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk* pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return. An update was to be brought back to Committee along with the final budget allocation and confirmation that this is within the affordability limits of the Council. Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of £69,000 be allocated.

3.4 City Hall Stained Glass Windows – Health Service and LGBT Community

Members will recall that in September 2022 this project was moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted*. Due to the bespoke nature of this project, a procurement exercise for the LGBT Community window has been carried out to inform the business case process. The design for the LGBT window has been agreed by Members and work on the Health Service window will be progressed this year. Members are asked to agree that ‘City Hall Stained Glass Windows – Health Service and LGBT Community’ is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed*; note that a satisfactory tender return has been received for the LGBT window, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £35,000 be allocated to each of the windows - a total allocation of up to £70,000.

3.5 Belfast Bikes

The Belfast Bikes scheme was launched in April 2015 with a network of 30 docking stations and 300 bikes. NSL Limited has operated the scheme (under contract) on behalf of the Council since its inception, and it uses bikes and supporting infrastructure provided by 'Next bike by TIER'. Currently, the network comprises of 60 docking stations and 560 bikes. The contract with NSL Limited expired in March 2024. It was extended initially to December 2024 and then on a rolling extension up to maximum period to 9 months.

Members will recall that in October 2024, the Council approved a new operating model and revenue structure for the Belfast Bikes Scheme. It was agreed that after conclusion of the procurement exercise, Members would be updated about the outcome and clarity around any costs associated with the transition. The procurement exercise has now concluded and a preferred operator has been identified. Operational costs will be managed as part of annual revenue budgets. Members are advised that a bid has been submitted to DfI Active Travel for capital funding to support this phase of Belfast Bikes and a decision is awaited. If the Council is unsuccessful in securing external funding, then it is proposed that the remaining potential capital costs related to this project will be met via a growth proposal. Members will be aware that this proposal, if required, is part of the Revenue Estimates exercise. Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has been received for a new Belfast Bikes operator, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that it is within the affordability limits of the Council; and note that capital costs can be met via an existing reserve along with either external funding or a growth proposal as part of the Revenue Estimates 2025/26 & Medium-Term Financial Planning report.

3.6 EV Charging Network

Members will be aware that the Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) Strategy was approved by Council in September 2024. This project arises from the strategy and will see the development of a publicly accessible electric vehicle charging point network on Council owned assets, working with a commercial partner. The switch to LEVs, and particularly to Electric Vehicles, alongside a significant shift away from private car use, will be critical to Council's success in meeting its net zero targets. Action will also demonstrate leadership and provide a service to residents, visitors, and businesses.

Members are asked to agree that 'EV Charging Network' is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging*, arising from the agreed LEV Strategy, to allow a business case to be developed.

3.7 Capital Programme - Fleet Programme 2025/26 - including replacement of the Lord Mayor's car

Members will know that the Council needs to run and maintain a substantial fleet in order to deliver its services. There is a rolling allocation of £2.2m towards the Fleet Programme for 2025/26. The Fleet Programme has been developed in conjunction with Council departments and reflects the service needs of the organisation, and there are ongoing issues caused by the high age profile and condition of the fleet operating well beyond its recommended operational life cycle. The agreed Fleet Programme for 2025/26 is attached at Appendix 1. Members are advised that this includes the replacement of the Lord Mayor's official car, last considered by this Committee in February 2020, the lease contract for which ends in October 2025. As previously, the Fleet Unit have engaged with the Lord Mayor's Unit to ensure that the requirements, duties and obligations of the Office of the Lord Mayor are considered along with mileage requirements and capability. In keeping with the Council's previous decision the replacement car will be fully electric. The replacement car will be a four door executive saloon type vehicle with higher range than the existing vehicle, considered to be more in keeping with the operational requirements of the role. Due to delivery lead times it is anticipated to take a minimum of six months to acquire the new replacement lease/hire vehicle once ordered. Members are asked to note the agreed Fleet Programme for 2025/26.

Project Updates

3.8 North Foreshore – Development Site Infrastructure Works

This project was moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* on the Capital Programme in March 2016 and a total budget of £6.9m was allocated in September 2016 to be met by capital receipts from the site as well as the Landfill Closure provision. The project involves the development of a gas ring main and edging gas membranes, storms drains, access ramps and associated landscaping as a pre-requisite to the development of individual sites and to ensure that the economic, regenerative and social impacts of the North Foreshore site are maximised. Substantial works on this

project have already been completed. One of the most significant elements to deliver is an NIE substation and overall NIE upgrade connection to meet greater capacity power needs on the site. This is required now given the significant developments on the North Foreshore including the completion of Phase 2A of the Film Studios and the commencement of the works on the commercial led development sites. Engagement with NIE to move this element forward has been ongoing for a number of years, and NIE have now confirmed that the specification required and the passage of time since the initial agreements means that costs have increased. Legal Services have advised that the terms and conditions set out initially mean that any further challenge on this matter from the Council would be difficult given the pandemic and other mitigating factors. Members are asked to note the cost increase related to the NIE substation since the original budget was allocated in 2016, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council and can be met via capital receipts from the North Foreshore site as previously agreed by Members; and agree to a budget increase of £1.8m.

3.9 IT Programme – HR/Payroll Replacement HR/Payroll/Time and Attendance System

Members are reminded that in August 2016 it was agreed to move the Replacement HR/Payroll/Time and Attendance system to *Stage 3 - Committed* on the Capital Programme with a maximum budget of £328,910 allocated, with a further allocation of £64,000 in April 2020. This project is nearing completion and due to additional system requirements an additional £93,000 is requested. Members are asked to note the cost increase for this project since the original budget was allocated in 2016, that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree to a budget increase of £93,000 up to a maximum total allocation of £486,000.

3.10 Approval to Procure 2025/26

Members are asked to agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated for any Physical Programme projects in 2025/26 including Fleet Replacement Programme, non-recurrent programme and externally funded projects as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.11 UK Shared Prosperity Fund update and additional schemes

Members will recall that the Council secured £1,787,615 from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) for 2024-25, covering both revenue and capital projects. The capital funding is targeted at pitch and playground improvements and delivery of these now externally funded projects is well underway with several already completed on site. As previously highlighted, a total of £1.1m of capital budget has therefore been recouped and can be directed towards a range of additional small scale local capital schemes.

The proposals for the additional schemes as a consequence of the successful bid to UKSPF are now brought forward as follows: upgrades to basketball provision – west, east, south; a modular changing and flexible space facility at Loughside, and a series of inclusive and accessibility projects including a mobile Changing Places facility, Makaton communications boards in playgrounds and sensory garden schemes. An update will be brought to the next series of Area Working Groups with more details on the list of projects for consideration. Members are asked to note the update provided on the proposed additional local capital schemes as a consequence of the UKSPF funding and that a further update will be brought to the AWGs for consideration.

3.12 Capital Letters of Offer

Members are asked to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer accepted in Q3 2024/25 at Appendix 2.

3.13 Contracts Awarded

Members are asked to note the award of tenders for capital works including services related to works in Q3 2024/25 at Appendix 3.

3.14 Financial and Resource Implications

Financial Implications –

IT Programme – Folder Inserter Equipment - a maximum of £69,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

City Hall Stained Glass Windows – a maximum of £70,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

Belfast Bikes - The Director of Finance has confirmed that the new operator contract is within the affordability limits of the Council - capital costs can be met via an existing reserve along with either external funding or a growth proposal.

Fleet Replacement Programme 2025/26 – this is an existing rolling allocation of £2.2m on the Capital Programme.

North Foreshore Development Sites – Infrastructure Works – a maximum of £8.7m is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council and can be met by capital receipts from the site.

IT Programme – Corporate HR/Payroll System - a maximum of £486,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

Resource Implications – Officer time to deliver.

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

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2 of the report, but agreed to defer consideration of the replacement of the Lord Mayor's official car until further information had been provided to the Committee on the specification and the cost.

Assets Management

The Committee:

- i) First Floor Office, The Stables, Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park - Lease Renewal** - approved a new lease being entered into between the Council and Church Mission Society Ireland T/A CMS Ireland for use of the First Floor Office, The Stables, Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Contracts Update

The Committee:

- Approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1);
- Approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2);
- Approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3); and
- Noted the process changes detailed in Section 6.0 Procurement Governance – retrospective STAs.

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Soft floor coverings including installation and repair services	Up to 5 years	£500,000	S Grimes	Recurring measured term contract to ensure soft floor coverings continue to meet standards across the Council estate. Specialist service.
Swimming pool filtration and ozone generator installations including callouts, repairs and planned maintenance	Up to 5 years	£2,300,000	S Grimes	Recurring measured term contract to ensure swimming pool filtration and ozone generator installations remain operational across the Council estate. Specialist service
Asbestos analyst services including inspection, testing and certification	Up to 5 years	£125,000	S Grimes	Statutory duty to manage asbestos containing materials across the Council estate. Specialist service.

Small tools contract	Up to 3 years	£36,000	S Leonard	Operational requirement to ensure all tools within the Fleet Management Unit are regularly inspected and repaired/replaced as required.
Strategic support programme for the VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel and citywide network	Up to 4 years	£120,000	J Tully	The VCSE Panel plays an important role in driving the Belfast Agenda forward through articulating the voice of VCSE sectors in strategic planning; supporting the development of cross-sectoral relationships and improved partnership working and promoting ongoing and effective community engagement. Specialist support required.
Asylum Support and Community Link Advisor Project	Up to 2 years	£170,000	D Sales	To support services to asylum seekers
Asylum Support and Organisational Development and Capacity Programme	Up to 1 year	£100,000	J Girvan	To support organisations providing services to asylum seekers
Traffic management services at Council events and emergency works related to dangerous buildings	Up to 2 years	£200,000	D Martin	To support the delivery of large-scale BCC led public events that require traffic management provision to close roads, manage traffic and when applicable give access to public transport. Building control also have a requirement for this service and will utilise this contract in respect of traffic

				management around emergency works. Specialist service.
Receipt, stock control and delivery of waste containers	Up to 4 years	£780,000	D Sales	To support waste management operations with the supply of waste containers to households for recycling.
Procurement of external Security Operations Centre (SOC) Services to augment the security team in Digital Services Previously approved Dec 2024 for 3 years at £500,000. Duration and value updated following review.	Up to 5 years	£1,000,000	S McNicholl	There is an increasing risk of a serious cyber security attack or a significant data breach that cannot be managed by the security team in Digital Services. This has the potential to severely disrupt the operational delivery of all council services for a sustained period.

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason
Publisure Annual License	Up to 3 years	£78,818	P Gribben	Publisure provides a secure email and consolidation platform (including test/backup server). Service Level Management Ltd are the only supplier who provide Publisure.	Service Level Management Ltd	3. Technical reasons

Belfast Maritime Festival presents 'Festival of Fools.'	Up to 10 months	£40,000	D Martin	The 'Festival of Fools' brand has an established brand identity with exclusive rights that will complement the 'Belfast Maritime Festival' and enhance the visitor experience.	Festival of Fools	4. Intellectual property
Provision of Clockwise System	Up to 1 year	£63,489	P Gribben	The replacement HR/payroll/time management system is in implementation stage and continued use of Clockworks is required. Softworks Ltd are the only supplier who provide Clockworks.	Softworks Limited	3. Technical reasons
Provision of a Case Management Solution for C&NS	Up 2 years	£197,828	S McNicholl	There is no other supplier who can offer the license and support requirements for this case management solution. 2 year STA is required to ensure continuity of service whilst a comprehensive procurement exercise is conducted for a new case management solution.	Civica	3. Technical reasons

Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration & Value	Modification	SRO	Description	Supplier
T2014 – supply and delivery of paper and plastic sacks	Up to 4 years & £620k	Additional 3 months and £40,000	S Grimes	3-month extension of existing contract to help facilitate a re-tender exercise. Work is underway on the re-tender exercise with a pre-market engagement exercise started to help with specification revisions and address current supply performance issues.	Cromwell Polythene Limited
T1978 – supply and delivery of mechanical sweeper brushes Reporting Retrospectively	Up to 4 years & £410k	Additional 4 months and £30,000	D Sales	A contract modification is required to allow for a new tender process to be completed. Work is underway to review and update the current specification in line with departmental requirements.	R D Mechanical Services Ltd

T1998 (3) - Provision of catering at the Stables Café.	Up to 61 months (Income based contract)	Up to 2 months	S Leonard	The evaluation of the replacement tender is underway and a 2 month contract extension is required to ensure continuity of service and sufficient time for potential handover to a new service provider (depending on the outcome of the evaluation process).	USEL
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Equality and Good Relations

**Minutes of Shared City Partnership
Meeting on 13th January 2025**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 13th January 2025, including:

Good Relations Action Plan 24/25 Quarter 3 Update

- That Members recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that they note the contents of the report, including the reallocation of £7,500 from BCC9 into BCC7 to support the Christmas Interface Events as well as the allocation of the additional funding from TEO.

PEACE IV – Secretariat Update

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

PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan – Update

- Members note the contents of the report and agree acceptance of the Letter of Offer and recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report and agree acceptance of the Letter of Offer.

AOB

- Members agreed to undertake a walking tour of the Forth Meadow Greenway on either Thursday, 27th March, at 13.30, or Wednesday, 30th April, at 13.30, Officers to progress.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of Party Group
Leaders Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 16th January.

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Youth Action NI	9 April 2025	80th Birthday Celebration Dinner - Reception, Dinner, Speeches, entertainment and dancing. Numbers attending: 200	C	Current rate free as charity	

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Bready Ulster Scots	5 April 2025	European Highland Dance Championships Celebration Evening - Reception, Dinner, Speeches, entertainment and ceili dancing for guests attending the Highland Festival. Numbers attending: 200	A &B	Current rate free as charity	
Community Arts Partnership	12 April 2025	The Trash Fashion Show to celebrate 25th Anniversary of CAP providing art projects in the community. The show will showcase fashion pieces made during community workshops. Numbers attending: 200 -250	C & D	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception as Voluntary Community Group
Queen's University Women Graduates (QUWG)	25 April 2025	Centenary Celebration of QUWG and Opening Reception for the Triennial conference of the Irish Federation of University Women for guests attending this 3 day events programme.	A &.B	Current rate free as charity	

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
		Numbers attending: 70			
Albert Foundry Football Club	10 May 2025	Club Centenary Celebration - Reception, Dinner, Speeches, entertainment and dancing. Numbers attending: 200 - 250	C & D	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception as Voluntary Community Group & Anniversary
The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB)	23 June 2025	Business Leaders Drinks Reception for guests attending the 5-day CIOB Members Forum in Belfast. Numbers attending: 120 -150	A &B	<i>Under review</i>	
Queen's University Belfast Faculty of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences	3 July 2025	International Summer School Farewell Event to mark the end of a three-week International Summer School hosted QUB- drinks reception and dinner and certificate presentation. Numbers attending: 100	A, B and C	<i>Under review</i>	

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Minorities Recognition Awards NI and University of Ulster	4 July 2025	International Inclusivity Conference Dinner for guests attending this 3-day conference at University of Ulster. Numbers attending: 350 - 400	A &B	<i>Under review</i>	
Paediatric ICU Team in Royal Belfast Hospital	11 September 2025	Paediatric Critical Care Society Gala Dinner for guests attending 3-day conference at ICC Belfast. Numbers attending: 200 - 250	A &B	<i>Under review</i>	
Ulster Journals Ltd	18 September 2025	Ulster Tatler Awards 2025 Drinks Reception, Awards, Dinner and entertainment. Numbers attending: 350 – 400	B	<i>Under review</i>	
International Brigade Commemoration Committee	3 October 2025	Opening Reception for of International Brigade Memorial Trust AGM for guest attending this 3-day AGM. Numbers attending: 75	D	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception as Voluntary Community Group

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Shankill Protestant Boys Arts and Cultural Society	11 October 2025	SHANKILL PROTESTANT BOYS FLUTE BAND 45TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION DRINKS RECEPTION, DINNER, PRESENTATIONS, AND ENTERTAINMENT. Numbers attending: 180 - 220	C & D	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception as Voluntary Community Group & Anniversary
Image Nation NI	25 October 2025	Belfast Diwali Celebrations – an evening of food and entertainment to celebrate one of the biggest celebrations in Hindu Calendar. Numbers attending – 350	C	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception as Voluntary Community Group
MKON – <i>Professional Conference Organiser</i>	4 June 2026	Gala Dinner for The Northern European Conference on Travel Medicine for guests attending their 3-day conference taking place in ICC. Numbers attending: 350 - 400	A & B	<i>Under review</i>	

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA)	23 June 2027	UKCISA Conference Drinks Reception for guests attending their 3-day conference taking place in ICC. Numbers attending: 250	A &B	<i>Under review</i>	

**Request for use of City Hall grounds –
Belfast Photo Festival Photographic
Exhibition in June 2025**

The Committee was reminded that requests for the use of City Hall were normally dealt with under the authority delegated by the Committee to the Director of Legal and Civic Services using criteria agreed for this purpose. Occasionally, however, it was necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the request for the use of the City Hall Grounds by the Belfast Photo Festival fell into this category.

The proposed event would take place from 9th till 30th June, 2025, with the exhibition content placed around the perimeter of the West and East Lawn allowing other events to be hosted and the lawns to remain available for recreational use.

The Committee authorised:

1. the use of City Hall grounds from 9th till 30th June, 2025; and
2. the events to take place on the basis of submission of an event management plan and risk assessment to ensure delivery of a safe public events.

Use of City Hall Grounds - Multiple Events in 2025

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

The City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services advised that requests have been received for events over the spring and summer period and that the report sought to update members on larger events using City Hall grounds, due to the larger scale of activities involved it was deemed necessary to seek Committee approval.

The proposed events would take place on the front lawns only and areas such as the Titanic Garden and Cenotaph would remain open to the public. Access to the City Hall building would not be affected.

The events would be free to enter. In each case, the organisers would be providing all stewarding/marshalling staff and 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.

Accordingly, the Committee was asked to approve the use of the grounds for the following, the details for each having been outlined in the report:

- Epic Journey to The Open 2025 – 29 April 2025
- Action Cancer Breast Foot Forward Walk – 6 June 2025
- Pride Picnic – 19 July 2025
- Féile Rock's Pride Concert – 26 July 2025
- Belfast One Film Screening – 2 and 3 August 2025
- Belfast Mela Carnival Parade Party – 16 August 2025

The Committee authorised:

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

Requests for the Use of the Council Chamber

The Committee authorised the use of the Council Chamber by two school groups in order to hold debating events.

Minutes of the Castle, Cavehill, Zoo
And North Foreshore Working Group

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Working Group of 7th January.

Chairperson