

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 21st March, 2025

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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

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

Apologies

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 3rd March, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Groogan, R-M Donnelly and Duffy declared an interest in item 7(a) Minutes of the Shared City Partnership in so far as it related to PEACEPLUS in that they worked for organisations which had applied for funding. As the item did not become the subject of debate, they were not required to leave the meeting.

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

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

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

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

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

Restricted Items

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

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

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

In- housing of external security services

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

update on analysis undertaken to date in respect of the request and which set out the proposed next steps.

The Committee agreed the following:

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

Support for businesses affected by August disorder – update

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

Update on Hardship Programme 2024/25

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

The Committee:

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

Social Supermarket Fund

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

Contracts Update

The Committee:

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

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

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

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

The Committee noted:

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

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Notice of Motion – Action to Address Empty Homes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Summer Community Diversionary Programme Assessments

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

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

The Committee considered the undernote report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To update members on the Community Support Plan and associated timeframe to develop the funding programme contained within the Plan which was deferred by P&C Committee on 4th March 2025.**
- 1.2 This report will outline a suggested way forward to undertake engagement with current funded groups and a public consultation on the overall Community Support Plan.**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the contents of the report.**
- ii. Note the March P&C committee report and appendices (appendices i, ii, iii).**
- iii. Note the specific questions that are suggested as part of Stage 1 Engagement that was agreed at March P&C committee.**
- iv. Advise if members are content that the proposal for one large funding programme as outlined in the draft CSP that will replace the current Capacity and Revenue grants and that this is consulted on in the coming weeks as Stage 2 of the process.**

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

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

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

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

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

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

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

3.3 Stage 1 Engagement with Current Groups

Action	Date by
Engagement with selection of current grant recipients (sample of 30 across city, Capacity and Revenue grants) and collation of findings as requested by March P&C	April 25
Incorporate findings with public consultation findings and bring final draft CSP back to SP&R.	20 June 2025

3.4 Questions for Funded Groups

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

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

Officers will ask for evidence of the above information.

3.5 Stage 2 - Consultation

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

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

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

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

3.6 Funding limit options for consultation

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

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

3.7 Consultation Timeline

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

3.8 Community Centre Scoping exercise

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

This analysis will include;

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

3.9 Presentation of Consultation, Engagement & Scoping exercise

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

Process 1 – Finding from the engagement with the 30 Organisations

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

Process 3 – Findings from the Community Centre Scoping Exercise

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

3.10 Timeline for implementation

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

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

Action	Completion Date
Open call for application submissions (following call in period)	28 July
Submission deadline for application	26 September
Eligibility check applications by CGU	19 September – 17 October
Applications passed by CGU to Officers for scoring	26 September – 24 October
CGU check of final recommendations and duplicate check	2 December

Action	Completion Date
CGU Independent Assessment Panel	5 December
Committee Approval of awards	January 26

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.11 Staff and financial resources to complete this work will be taken from existing budgets. The council element is included in existing budgets and the DfC contribution comes from the Community Support Programme LoO.
- 3.12 The CSP LoO provides a one-year commitment from DfC for funding on an annual basis, although the CSP has been in place across all councils for a number of years. Members may wish to note that in 24/25 DfC is providing £831,192 toward the Capacity and Revenue grants. Council increased its financial allocation in March 2023 by almost £1.4 million per annum providing an annual commitment of £2,446,918. This combined amount provides the overall budget of £3,278,110.
- 3.13 A one off annual increase to the Revenue Programme totaling £1.5million was included for the 25/26 year.
- 3.14 Members should note that any increases to the recurrent budget would impact on the rate. These impacts would be approximately as follows for 26/27; £1m 0.45%, £1.5m 0.675%, £3m 1.35%, £4.5m 2.025%

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.15 Given the significant impact which any changes to the large grant funding programme will have on the VCSE sector and communities across the city, an equality screening exercise and rural impact assessment are being undertaken on any resulting change in policy/programme. Any potential additional equality considerations have been factored into the timeline.”

The Committee:

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

Planning Update

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

Proposed Planning Application Validation Checklist

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

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

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

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

3.0 Main Report

Background

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

Format of Public Consultation

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

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

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

Consultation Responses

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

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

Summary of representations

- 3.8 The main themes arising from the consultation included:

- Broad agreement that the checklist is relevant and necessary.
- No consensus on how user friendly the checklist is – some felt that it was user friendly, others not, and most neither agreed nor disagreed.
- Some criticism as to the complexity of the checklist and that the information requirements may be onerous. In contrast, views that the information is needed, provided that it is reasonable and proportionate.
- Recognition that the indicative guide as to information requirements by type of planning application is overall very helpful.
- Some views that it would be useful to have some best practice examples of some of the requirements

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

Planning Committee

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

Proposed Validation Checklist

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

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

Next steps

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

Financial & Resource Implications

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

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

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

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Portfolio Manager presented the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

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

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

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

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

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

Physical Programme

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. The Council also delivers externally focused funding streams such as Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Local Investment Fund (LIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF), as well as numerous physical programmes and standalone projects that we deliver for central government. Our funding partners include National Lottery

Heritage Fund, SEUPB PeacePLUS, the Executive Office, DfC, DfI including the Living with Water Programme, DAERA, Ulster Garden Villages, Levelling Up Fund (LUF), UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and others. When appropriate, the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange site visits to any projects that have been completed.

Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

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

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

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

IT Programme – EDRMS

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

Fleet Programme – Small Vehicles Service

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

Duncrue Masterplan

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

Leisure Programme

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

City Hall Preservation

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

Bridges Improvement Programme

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

Beacon Programme

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

Girdwood Hub H&S Works

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

Capital Programme - Fleet Programme 2026/27

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

- 3.12 **Financial & Resource Implications**

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

Resource Implications – Officer time to deliver.

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

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Update on Area Working Groups

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

Finance, Procurement and Performance

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

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

"1.0 Purpose of Report

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

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- note the contents of this report and the prudential and treasury management indicators included within the appendices to the report.

And agree:

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

3.0 Main report

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

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

Financial & Resource Implications

3.7 As detailed in the report

Equality or Good Relations Implications

3.8 None.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

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

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

Equality and Good Relations

Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting on 10th March 2025

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

Segregation and Environment Report - Update

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

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

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

PEACE IV – Secretariat Update

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

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

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

Update from Partnership Members

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

Operational Issues

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

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

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Committee:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Minutes of Belfast Stories Working Group 11 March

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

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Issues raised in advance by Members

LORAG – Youth Club Development – Council Land

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

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

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

Chairperson