

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 13th August, 2026

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Aldermen McCoubrey and McCullough;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, T. Brooks, Collins,
M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly; S. Douglas, Groogan,
Long, Magee, Meenehan and Walsh.

In attendance: Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth
and Anti-Poverty;
Ms. S. Healy-Thow, Food Systems Coordinator;
Mr. O. Croll, Local Energy Systems Advisor; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

(Councillor Anglin, Deputy Chairperson, in the Chair)

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairperson, Councillor Lyons, and Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th May were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st June.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Withdrawn items

The Committee was advised that the following items (5 and 6) had been withdrawn from the agenda:

- Request to present at a future meeting - UK100
- Tree planting / 1 Million trees - Councillor Lyons to raise

Presentations

**Belfast's Heat Highway - Integrating heat
networks into the wider energy system –
SAV EnergiRaven**

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed Mr. S. Kerr to the meeting.

He set out the case for heat networks as a key part of a more secure, flexible and de-carbonised energy system. He described a heat network as a system of pipes which transported heat from locations where it was readily available to where it was needed. A major advantage was that a network could use a wide range of current and future heat sources rather than relying on a single fuel.

He outlined that energy systems remained vulnerable when they depended heavily on particular fuels or sources, and that greater diversification was required. He highlighted previous periods of energy insecurity, including post-war coal rationing, the oil crises of the 1970s, the energy disruption associated with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the recent Strait of Hormuz crisis.

The Committee was advised that heat networks could help balance electricity demand. Strategically sized thermal storage would allow heat to be produced when electricity was plentiful or inexpensive and stored for later use. During periods of high electricity prices or constrained supply, heat generation could be reduced and the stored heat released.

He highlighted to the Members that significant amounts of usable heat were currently being wasted. He illustrated the potential for a Belfast heat transmission network to connect multiple sources of heat with areas of demand. He suggested potential sources including power generation, waste-to-energy, wastewater treatment, industrial processes which could potentially provide heat for around 100,000 homes. He also highlighted the potential of Northern Ireland's geothermal resource.

The Members were advised to look towards future heat opportunities, including industrial clusters, agricultural and biogas CHP, biochar production and data centres. He illustrated how heat that would otherwise be rejected could become a useful resource within a local energy system.

He demonstrated that the approach was already being used in Denmark, where the Triangle Region Heat Transmission Company (TVIS) operated a 123km heat transmission system, connecting heat suppliers with nine district heating companies and supplying more than 60,000 consumers. The model demonstrated how industrial clustering and sector integration enabled low-cost waste heat to be shared across a wider area. He also highlighted Shetland Heat Energy and Power, with around 1,300 homes already connected, and Lothian Heat, established in 2025, with plans to connect more than 100,000 homes by 2031.

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Overall, he stated that heat networks could address the energy “trilemma” of security, affordability and de-carbonisation simultaneously. Using multiple heat sources reduced dependence on any single fuel; thermal storage allowed the cheapest available heat to be used at the most appropriate time; and the network could maximise renewable energy while capturing heat which would otherwise be wasted by industry.

He highlighted that the transition to net zero should not simply focus on producing more energy, but on making better use of energy which was currently being wasted.

During discussion, he provided the Committee with details of the East Lothian and Tallaght schemes.

In response to a Member’s question as to what pitfalls Belfast should be wary not to make, Mr. Kerr outlined that the design, installation and quality of the pipe insulation was key to a successful, long-term project. He also highlighted that it was important for authorities not to ignore the fuel poor in their considerations.

In response to further comments regarding data centres, he explained that Switzerland and Denmark had regulated water-intensive cooling methods often used in data centres with heat generation minimised and waste heat recovered where possible.

A Member stated that he and his Party’s position on net zero was clear and that they felt it was common sense to use whatever resources we had. He and another Member also stated that their constituents would not want the city’s roads to be dug up for the installation of the pipes required for the scheme.

Mr. Kerr advised the Committee that there were billions of pounds sitting in green pension pots, with investors always looking for something to invest in.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Kerr for his presentation and he retired from the meeting.

Noted.

**Aggregating excess rooftop solar and
wind generation in Belfast - Reverse Energy**

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. Doyle to the meeting.

The Local Energy Systems Advisor advised the Committee that Reverse had recently won the mini “hackathon” which the Council had held to explore how innovators in the market could deliver and improve the commercial viability of a heat network in Belfast.

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Mr. Doyle outlined Reverse's proposal to help decarbonise Belfast's district heat network by using renewable electricity which would otherwise be curtailed. He advised the Committee that Northern Ireland currently produced more wind energy than the electricity grid could accommodate, with around 25% of wind generation being curtailed. Reverse's proposition was to capture the surplus electricity, store it in batteries and use it to power heat pumps, providing a low-carbon source of heat for the City.

Reverse proposed creating a Virtual Power Plant (VPP) made up of hundreds of distributed sites across Northern Ireland. The sites would have solar panels and battery storage. The system would use curtailed wind as the main source of electricity during winter, with solar providing a greater contribution during summer. Batteries would allow renewable electricity to be stored when it was available and dispatched when required.

He described how the proposed system was designed to provide around 67 GWh of zero-carbon heat per year, using approximately 500 participating sites. Electricity would be converted into heat through air-to-water heat pumps and supplied to Belfast's district heat network. Reverse's objective was for this electricity to be supplied under a long-term Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) at a price competitive with natural gas, while also providing greater long-term price stability.

The Committee was advised that participating commercial and public buildings would also benefit from the model. Reverse proposed to install additional solar generation and battery storage, with the aim of significantly reducing electricity costs. He stated that generating sites could reduce their power costs by up to 90%, with core assets paid off within five years and additional generation and storage provided at zero net cost to the customer. In return, participating sites would make surplus electricity available to the heat network and other off-takers at a 40% discount.

He outlined a particular opportunity for social housing, whereby tenants could achieve around a 40% reduction in winter heating costs through access to cheaper, battery-shifted renewable electricity.

The Committee was advised that the commercial model would depend heavily on a long-term commitment from Belfast City Council and other off-takers. Reverse proposed a multi-year PPA under which the Council would purchase around 67 GWh of renewable electricity each year for the heat network. The intention being that the long-term commitment would unlock the investment required to develop the wider system.

The longer-term vision was for Belfast to develop a city-wide energy network. Buildings could generate and store electricity, receive heat, or potentially do both. The model could expand gradually to include Housing Executive estates, council buildings, schools, leisure centres, GP practices and commercial or industrial sites, allowing Belfast to build the network incrementally rather than relying on one large centralised system.

Overall, Reverse's proposal aimed to solve several problems at once: reduce wasted wind energy, provide a low-carbon alternative to gas for heating, reduce energy

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costs for participating buildings and create a more flexible electricity system. He stated that Belfast could be a potential pioneer for the type of distributed heat and energy network, with a model that could eventually be replicated elsewhere in the UK.

In response to Member's questions, he confirmed that the price of solar and battery technology had dropped dramatically enabling the new business model to be tested and rolled out in Northern Ireland.

In response to further questions, he advised the Members that customers would be rewarded financially when they shared their stored energy and releasing it at the time of most need.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked Mr. Doyle for his presentation and he retired from the meeting.

Noted.

Draft Belfast Sustainable Food Strategy - The Belfast Way

The Food Systems Coordinator presented the following report to the Committee:

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To present the Draft Belfast Sustainable Food Strategy – The Belfast Way, Action Plans and Communications Plan to SPR for consideration.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Climate and City Resilience Committee is asked to:

- i. note that the draft Belfast Sustainable Food Strategy was co-designed by the Belfast Food Partnership (BFP), a cross-sectoral group of 29 partners working together to improve the food system and informed by significant engagement and good practice research.**
- ii. consider and approve, in principle, the direction and focus of the draft 'Belfast Sustainable Food Strategy: The Belfast Way' (as attached at Appendix 1).**
- iii. note that whilst some of the action plan can commence within existing budget provision, further proactive work is underway to secure external funding that will support delivery of the multi-year Strategy.**

- iv. agree that council officials will continue to work on the two expressions of interest for significant funding as referred to in this report as well as other funding opportunities.
- v. note that updates will be brought back to Committee for consideration, with final approval of the budget allocation being sought from SP&R Committee.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 In 2023 the Sustainable Food Partnership was re-established in Belfast under the auspices of the Community Planning Partnership and in recognition of the growing pressures facing by many individuals and families in accessing affordable and healthy food. The Belfast Food Partnership, as it is now called, is hosted by the Climate Team through a full-time Food Systems Coordinator.
- 3.2 The Belfast Food Partnership (BFP) is part of the UK wide Sustainable Food Places (SFP) initiative, a network that brings together pioneering food partnerships across the UK who are driving innovation and best practice on all aspects of healthy and sustainable food. It is led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain. As well as offering support and coordination on NI and UK wide food challenges, the SFP runs an awards system designed to recognise and celebrate the success of those places taking a joined up, holistic approach to food and that are achieving significant positive change on a range of key food issues. The Belfast Food Partnership was awarded the Bronze Sustainable Food Places Award for Belfast in 2024.
- 3.3 The BFP is currently made up of 29 partners across Belfast working to improve food systems. It is co-chaired by two partners and coordinated by the Council's Food Systems Coordinator (within the Climate team). The BFP works across sectors and is driven by the following values, developed collaboratively over the past two years:
 - Systems Driven
 - Food Justice
 - Circular and Regenerative
 - Resilience
 - Place-based and sustainable

- Participatory and asset based
 - Community wealth building
- 3.4 Aligning with these values, a draft “The Belfast Way - Sustainable Food Strategy” has been co-designed with 6 underpinning action plans, which it is proposed will be delivered through 6 cross-sectoral working groups), 3 collective and flagship actions and importantly a costed implementation plan for the strategy.
- 3.5 The development of the strategy was led by a consortium of partners including the Council, Community Garden Support, Brink! Stories CIC, Grow NI, and Ulster University, supported by the Food Ethics Council (all members of the Belfast Food Partnership). The emerging draft strategy has been informed by local stakeholders and people with lived experience of growing and accessing food in the city.

Engagement process

- 3.6 The draft Strategy was collaboratively developed with respect for a plurality of views, opinions, and beliefs gathered via many workshops, conversations, and events, and is underpinned by a considerable amount of research and references. This included:
- Three Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership meetings and three working group meetings.
 - Presentations at each of the four Belfast City Council Area Working Groups.
 - Presentation to the Our Planet Board.
 - Three bespoke workshops involving people with lived experience of food insecurity.
 - Individual meetings with DAERA Food Policy Unit, Climate Co+ Centre, Co-Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, Food Farming and Countryside Alliance, Sustainable Food Places, Centre for Sustainability Equality and Climate Action, Unite, Nourish NI, Food NI, BCC officers, and others working across the food system in Belfast and Northern Ireland.
 - Six public-facing events.

Rationale for a Belfast Food Strategy

- 3.7 Belfast city needs a Sustainable Food Strategy to address a range of challenges facing its food system, which is part of a wider and interconnected complex global supply chain. As

the food system has globalised, we have moved further from the source of our food and the people who produce it. This has created vulnerabilities including price volatility, environmental strain, reduced resilience, health inequality, and growing food security risks. These issues disproportionately affect the city's most vulnerable communities.

- 3.8 The food system is estimated to account for up to 35% of greenhouse gas emissions globally. Belfast has set an ambitious target to reach net zero by 2050, and a strategy is needed so that the food system can contribute to efforts to reduce emissions. In addition to this, more people are accessing food aid in Belfast. According to University of Sheffield data:

- 14.8% of Belfast adults worry about not having enough food
- 5% struggle to access food; and
- 2.5% of people in Belfast are experiencing hunger.

- 3.9 In NI, £7.6bn is spent by society fighting the effects of an unhealthy diet. A Sustainable Food Strategy will help to strengthen local and regional food systems, reduce emissions, and improve public health outcomes, whilst supporting community resilience through urban growing, skills development, and circular economy initiatives. The vision of the sustainable food strategy is:

“To ensure that every person in Belfast can access, enjoy, and help shape a sustainable, resilient, and equitable food system that promotes human and planetary health. A food system that enables everyone in Belfast to have equitable access to nutrient rich, affordable food and one that creates conditions for a strong, circular and fair local economy for all”.

Taking a whole food systems approach as outlined in Belfast's Resilience Strategy 2020, enables the city to address root causes rather than symptoms, aligning efforts across health, climate, economy, and equity.

A focus on delivery

- 3.10 As referred to above, as part of this work six draft actions plans (attached at Appendix 2a) have been developed in

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support of the delivery of the Strategy. Each plan outlines the key outcomes to be realised as well as specific actions to deliver against such outcomes. The focus of these is:

1. Good Food Governance
2. Community Growing and Right to Grow
3. Food Access and Justice
4. Circular Food Economy
5. Transforming Procurement
6. Nature Friendly Farming

A short summary of the plans is attached at Appendix 2b.

Initial cost projections and considerations

- 3.11 Delivering the ambitions of the Belfast Way requires sustained and diversified investment across the partnership. High level cost estimates have been developed for the six action plans over 3 a three-year below as set out below.**

Thematic Area / Action Plan	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total
Good Food Governance	£70,000	£70,000	£70,000	£210,000
Food Access and Justice	£38,000	£328,000	£323,000	£689,000
Community Growing and Right to Grow	£33,000	£65,000	£40,000	£138,000
Circular Food Economy	£15,300	£75,000	£20,000	£110,300
Transforming Procurement	£8,000	£105,000	£100,000	£213,000
Nature Friendly Farming	£12,000	£135,000	£100,000	£147,000
TOTALS	£176,300	£778,000	£653,000	£1,507,300

- 3.12 It considering these cost projections, it is important to note that:**

- An estimated £100,000 has already been secured by partners organisations through the Belfast Food Partnership which would be aligned (and offset) against an element of the costs above e.g:
 - Good Food Governance: £7,200
 - Food Access Working Group: £9,650
 - Community Growing and Right to Grow: £11,000
 - Transforming Procurement: £72,000
- The council has contributed £70k annually which includes funding the Food Systems Coordinator (a temporary post created for 18 months until April 2027)

- The Council's Food Systems Coordinator is involved in the development of the following Expressions of Interest which may secure significant funding to support the Food Strategy:
 - i. £7million EOI bid (over 5-year period) through the Belfast Food Partnership
 - ii. £6million EOI bid (over 5-year period) as part of a wider UK bid with England, Scotland and Wales for Public Diners.

3.13 The Sustainable Food Places network has consistently highlighted that underfunding of local food partnerships represents one of the principal barriers to translating food strategy into systemic change. As with other food partnerships across the UK, long-term financial sustainability remains a strategic challenge and work will continue to identify and seek to secure other available funding opportunities. There is also a need for ongoing coordination and engagement across a wide range of funders, including DAERA, public health bodies, the community and voluntary sector, and European-successor funding streams.

3.14 Looking ahead, the alignment of the Belfast Way with the 'Northern Ireland's Third Climate Change Adaptation Programme, (NICCAP3)' and regional food strategy further strengthens the case for dedicated government investment, positioning Belfast's food partnership infrastructure not as a discretionary addition to Council services, but as an essential delivery mechanism for regional food, climate, and public health commitments.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 There are no current financial or resource implications for BCC in approving the Strategy. The implementation of the associated action plans will remain subject to external funding being secured, with a further report to be brought back to Committee on the funding model and seeking agreement to proceed with implementation.

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

An EQIA screening for the strategy is underway and will be available in due course.

The draft strategy is available to view [here](#).

In response to a Member's query, the officers confirmed that they were seeking the Members' comments and endorsement of the strategy but that its delivery would be dependent on securing external funding.

During discussion, a Member stated that he and his party were not in favour of the strategy and that he had a different view, politically, on a number of the issues within it.

A further Member commended the officers on the work completed to date and stated that it was important to map out the whole strategy to ensure the city got maximum value from it.

After further discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations within the report.

Notices of Motion Quarterly Update

After discussion, the Committee agreed:

- to keep the "New Ireland Forum and Citizens Assemblies" issue open, and to write to the Taoiseach's office one final time, outlining that the Council had written twice before with no response; and
- that the "Climate and City Resilience Dashboard" issue would be closed, given that the dashboard was now available on Interlink.

**BCC response to the DfC Consultation
on Warm Healthy Homes Fund (WHHF)**

The Committee considered the draft response, available [here](#).

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. agreed, subject to the following amendments suggested by Members, that it be submitted to the Department for Communities in line with the closing date of 19th August 2026;
 - a. regarding the eligibility thresholds, to tick "no" and outline that, while the Council would be supportive on many of the proposals

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set out, including the exclusion of certain disability and health benefits from the income threshold, it was important to recognise the nuances around adopting a whole-house approach to any such income thresholds in terms of outgoing financial requirements and therefore available income; and

- b. that landlords should have to contribute 20-25% of the cost for properties availing of the scheme, with protections considered for existing tenants in any properties which were upgraded under the scheme, in order to prevent landlords increasing the rent as a result of said upgrades; and
- ii. noted that the Council's response would be submitted on the basis that it would remain subject to full Council ratification on 1st September, with any further comments submitted at that point.

Chairperson