

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



**Belfast
City Council**

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet both online and in-person, in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Friday, 22nd May, 2026 at 9.30 am, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. **Routine Matters**

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

2. **Presentations**

- (a) Retail NI/USDAW (Sunday Trading consultation)
- (b) Belfast One Business Improvement District (Sunday Trading consultation)

3. **Restricted Items**

- (a) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (Report to Follow)
- (b) Requests for Funding (Pages 1 - 16)
- (c) Asset Management (Pages 17 - 24)
- (d) Belfast Stories - Community Grants (Pages 25 - 34)

4. **Matters referred by Council**

- (a) Bonfire Update - Temporary Fencing (RESTRICTED - Pages 35 - 36)

5. **Governance**

- (a) Governance Review (Report to follow)

6. **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (a) Performance Improvement Plan 2026/27 (Pages 37 - 92)
- (b) Workstyles Policy (Pages 93 - 108)
- (c) Sunday Trading (Report to follow)
- (d) Belfast Child - Seamless Pathway for Children and Families (Pages 109 - 156)
- (e) Outcome of the Judicial Review in relation to Animal Welfare Services and new Animal Welfare Legislation (Pages 157 - 162)
- (f) Accessibility and Inclusion Update (Report to follow)
- (g) Call for Evidence by Criminal Justice Committee (Report to follow)
- (h) Summer Schemes Small Grant Funding 26/27 (Report to follow)

7. **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

- (a) Physical Programme Update (Report to follow)

8. **Finance, Procurement and Performance**

- (a) Contracts Update (Report to follow)
- (b) Diversity Mark Summit 2026 - Sponsorship (Pages 163 - 166)

9. **Equality and Good Relations**

- (a) Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting of 6th May, 2026 (Pages 167 - 224)

10. **Operational Issues**

- (a) Minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 14th May, 2026 (Pages 225 - 230)
- (b) Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality (Pages 231 - 236)
- (c) Minutes of the Language Strategy Working Group of 27th April, 2026 (Pages 237 - 240)

- (d) Request for use of City Hall grounds for Summer Cinema 2026 (Pages 241 - 244)

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Subject:	Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27
Date:	22 May 2026
Reporting Officers:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officers:	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty, Karen Anderson-Gillespie, Strategic Performance Manager

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

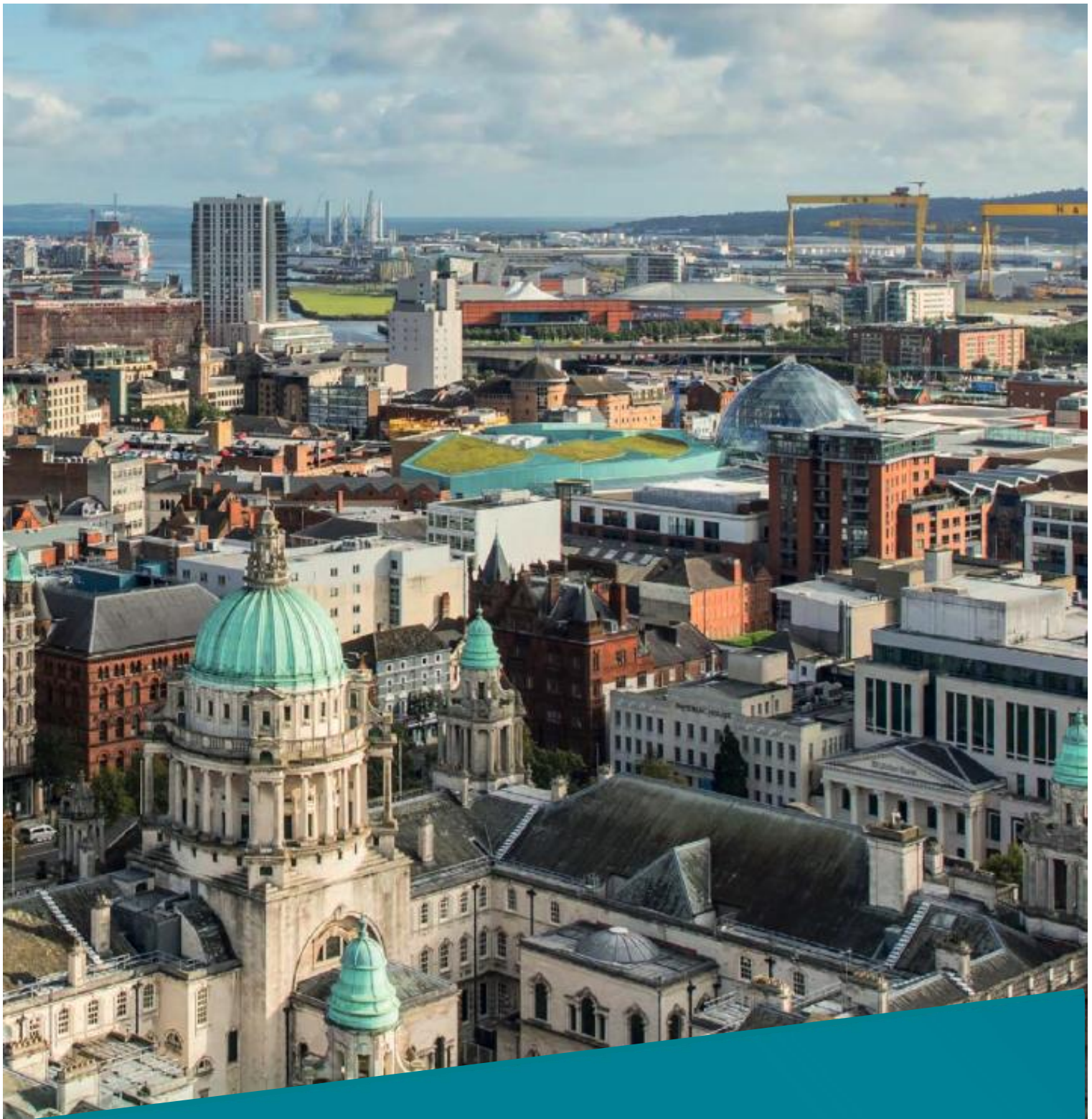
Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update members on the findings of the public consultation on the draft performance improvement objectives and to present the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2026-27 for Committee consideration and approval.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2026-27 attached in Appendix 1, for publication on the council's website, subject to minor edits and formal ratification by the full council on 1 June 2026.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires councils to consult residents on proposed improvement objectives and to publish an annual Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) by the 30 June. The PIP identifies the agreed improvement objectives for the year ahead, the actions to be delivered and the measures of success to be achieved. The PIP helps to meet the outcomes and objectives of the Community Plan and the Corporate Plan 2025-28. The PIP doesn't include everything that the council plans to do in a given year, it focuses specifically on areas for improvement and feeds into the Annual Corporate Delivery Plan 2026-27. The performance improvement objectives are aligned to the key themes and priorities identified within the Corporate Plan 2025-28 and the Belfast Agenda 2024-28.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Consultation exercise and findings</u></p> <p>Committee will be aware that we carried out an eight-week public consultation in relation to the council's draft improvement objectives 2026-27 and associated actions between 18 February 2026 and 15 April 2026. The public consultation process included an online survey via council's Your Say Belfast consultation and engagement website and two targeted focus groups. The survey was promoted using a range of communication methods including social media posts, posters in community buildings, email marketing to existing mailing lists, intranet promotion and websites.</p>
3.3	<p>Out of the 135 people that completed the survey, it should be noted that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ there was broad consensus across majority of respondents supporting the improvement objectives. ▪ the highest level of 85.8% was received from respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with 'Our people and communities' improvement objective to support our residents to become healthier and engaged. ▪ the lowest of level of 76.8% was received from respondents who strong agreed or agreed with the 'Our Planet' improvement objective to create a sustainable, nature-positive city.
3.4	<p>In addition, two focus groups with young people and older people were facilitated to enable participants to reflect their priorities and areas for improvement. A detailed summary of the feedback received is included in the consultation report in Appendix 1.</p>

3.5	<p>The qualitative feedback and comments received was shared and reviewed internally by key officers from the relevant departments to consider for inclusion within the PIP and to also help inform future delivery and/ or amend current activity. As a result, some minor amendments were made to the actions included within the PIP. Members will also be aware that some of the areas suggested are being progressed through existing strategies, plans, programmes and practices, and in partnership as part of the Belfast Agenda 2024-28 including addressing key issues across the city such as housing provision, homelessness and addiction.</p> <p><u>Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27</u></p>
3.6	<p>The updated Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27 is attached in Appendix 2 which reflects public consultation feedback and engagement with key council officers.</p>
3.7	<p>Committee members are asked to approve the Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27 in Appendix 2, subject to minor edits and to authorise its publication on the council website by 30 June 2026. In order to meet our statutory deadline, the plan will be published subject to formal ratification by the full council on the 1 June 2026.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The improvement plan has already been reflected in the formal planning and budgeting processes of council; there are no resource implications contained in this report.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no direct equality, good relations or rural needs implications of the Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1: Consultation feedback report: performance improvement objectives 2026-27. Appendix 2: Draft Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27.</p>

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Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2026-27

Consultation Summary Report

1. Introduction

1.1 Context

The purpose of this report is to provide a high-level summary of the findings of the public consultation process underpinning Council’s draft performance improvement objectives 2026-27. The report outlines Council’s approach to the development of its draft improvement objectives and the feedback received during the consultation process.

2. Developing our draft improvement objectives

Council implemented a three-phased approach to support the development of draft improvement objectives and related actions for 2026-27 which is depicted in the figure below. This report focuses on the findings from Phase 3 of the approach.

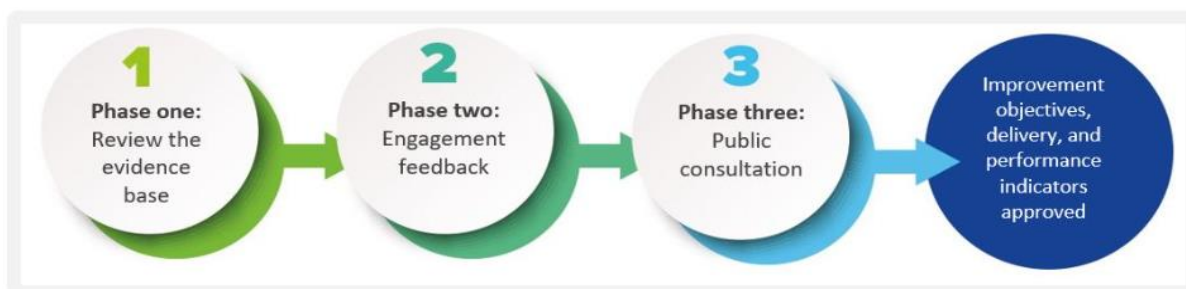


Figure 1: Three-phased approach

Phase 1: Review the evidence base
<p>Conducted a review of existing baseline information and data to contextualise potential improvement opportunities. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Results and trend data from our 2025-26 Performance Improvement Assessment report.✓ Ongoing monitoring and review of 2025-26 Corporate Delivery Plan (via quarterly reporting).✓ Inclusion of guidance issued by the Department for Communities and recommendations provided by the NI auditor (including the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) Section 95 report).✓ Evidence and issues arising from committee and meetings of the Full Council.✓ Areas for improvement emerging from the internal audit and risk management processes.✓ Priorities identified during the development of the new Corporate Plan 2025-28 and rate setting process.✓ Alignment with key city and Council strategies including The Belfast Agenda and the Corporate Plan 2025-28.✓ A review of customer complaints received.

- ✓ Good practice data benchmarking with other local authorities.

Phase 2: Engagement feedback

A series of internal engagements were carried out with members, Chief Officers, departments and key staff across Council. This included:

- ✓ Completion of templates and initial meetings with departments to identify priorities and improvement activity.
- ✓ Regular engagement with departmental teams and key officers, at every phase – ensuring alignment to departmental and service level budget setting and planning processes.
- ✓ Reports presented and discussed at Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Strategic Policy and Resources (SP&R) Committee, Audit and Risk Panel, Audit and Assurance Board and the Full Council.
- ✓ Approval granted via scheduled meetings with senior management teams, CMT, Committee and Full Council meetings.

Phase 3: Public consultation

An eight-week public consultation process was carried out between 18 February – 15 April 2026, to enable residents and stakeholders to inform our improvement objectives 2026-27. This included an online survey via council’s Your Say Belfast consultation and engagement website (yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk) and two targeted focus groups. The survey was promoted using a range of communication methods including social media posts, posters in community buildings, email marketing to existing mailing lists, intranet promotion and websites. As part of phase three, we:

- ✓ Received 135 survey completions via the Your Say Belfast website.
- ✓ Facilitated 2 focus groups with 8 young people and 9 older people to reflect their priorities and areas for improvement.
- ✓ Worked closely with departmental teams and key officers to consider consultation feedback and refine the Performance Improvement Plan.
- ✓ Secured approval of the final objectives through the normal Council governance cycle (CMT, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the Full Council meeting).

2.1 Our draft improvement objectives 2026/27

1. Our services

We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.

2. Our people and communities

We will improve our local areas and provide opportunities to support our residents to become healthier and engaged.

3. Our place

We will create a more vibrant, attractive, and connected city (including the city centre).

4. Our planet

We will create a more sustainable, nature-positive city.

5. 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.

6. Compassionate city

We will support our most vulnerable people to make Belfast a more caring, safe and inclusive city.

3. Consultation on our draft improvement objectives

3.1 Public Consultation Details



8-week consultation period
(18 Feb – 15 Apr 2026)



Consultation carried out via online survey and 2 targeted focus groups

152

Individuals engaged in the consultation process

3.2 Online survey

3.2.1 Respondents

135

survey responses in total

6

organisations responded

129

individuals responded

- 36.6% were aged 40 – 54
- 21.1% were aged 55 – 64
- 19.5% were aged 25 – 39
- 18.7% were aged 65+
- 4.1% were aged 16-24



- 22.8% live in South Belfast
- 21.1% live outside Belfast
- 19.5% live in East Belfast
- 16.3% live in North Belfast
- 15.4% live in West Belfast
- 4.9% live in the city centre



3.2.2 Agreement on draft improvement objectives

81.9%

agreed or strongly agreed with 'Our services' objective

85.8%

agreed or strongly agreed with 'Our people and communities' objective

80.6%

agreed or strongly agreed with 'Our place' objective

76.8%

agreed or strongly agreed with 'Our planet' objective

83.6%

agreed or strongly agreed with 'Our economy' objective

77.6%

agreed or strongly agreed with 'Compassionate city' objective

3.2.3 Thematic survey feedback

A summary of the anecdotal feedback provided by respondents has been thematically presented below as it relates to the relevant draft improvement objective:

Our services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Prioritise the delivery effective street cleansing across the city.✓ Increase presence of dog wardens and parks wardens in our parks and open spaces to reduce anti-social behaviour and improve cleanliness.✓ Ensure missed bin collections are adequately and efficiently addressed, and food caddy bags are available when requested.✓ Work with partners to address the growing issue of city centre homelessness and progress with proposed plans for safe injecting facility.✓ More focus on the delivery of key services with less involvement in areas that sit within the remit of central government.✓ Consideration of the use of AI in terms of how it could enhance service delivery and the organisation.
Our people and communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Improve parks, facilities and open spaces.✓ Additional funding should be prioritised to increase and enhance the availability of sports pitches and facilities.✓ Consider the self-sustainability and income generating potential of existing facilities and pitches.✓ Improve engagement in local communities to ensure delivery reflects local need which may vary across the city.✓ Prioritise more investment and facilities for women and girls to ensure equity of access and opportunities.
Our place
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Expand and enhance active travel infrastructure to reduce congestion, improve air quality and encourage more people to improve health and wellbeing.✓ The Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 represents a significant opportunity to promote arts and culture throughout the city.✓ Increase opportunities for inner city living to enhance city centre vibrancy.✓ Enhance and increase playground provision – make better use of natural resources and consider ways to connect with other infrastructure i.e. greenways or active travel routes.✓ Prioritise more and better-quality housing not only for the homeless but also for growing families.✓ Develop an alleys and entries strategy to support inner city communities.

- ✓ Increase visibility of 'arts and culture' around the city and more support for our arts.

Our planet

- ✓ Decarbonisation needs to commence inhouse – the council should work to improve the efficiency of its own estate.
- ✓ Important that the council leads the way and sets an example for others in the city, for example ceasing the promotion of single use cups and plastics in promotional activity.

Our economy

No feedback provided.

Compassionate city

- ✓ Clear comittment as to how Council will lead and support work to End Violence Against Women and Girls.
- ✓ More targeted support for families struggling with cost-of-living.
- ✓ Ensure that facilities provide warm spaces for people to meet, learn and play.

3.2.4 General survey feedback

In addition to the thematic feedback aligned to the proposed improvement objectives, respondents also provided more general feedback relating to the improvement process and plan and wider Council activity, which will be actioned by Council as part of business-as-usual practices.

3.3 Focus groups

Council officers carried out two focus groups with traditionally under-represented cohorts to ensure their views could be reflected and considered as part of the consultation process. A summary of the focus group feedback is presented below:

Youth Focus Group @ Hammer Community Centre (8 young people)

- Better equipment and quality of playground facilities within the local area.
- Improve sensory facilities and provide more opportunities, activities and equipment within community centres. Invest in centres to make them more welcoming and attractive for young people to access.
- Cleaner and safer streets to allow young people to play (do more about dog waste).
- More outdoor green spaces and allotments for play and to allow young people to participate in horticultural activities.

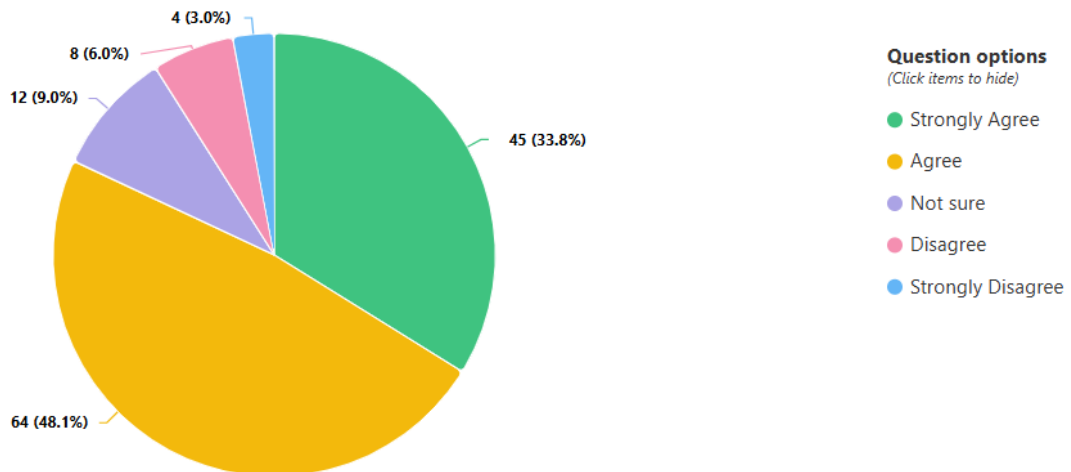
Older People Focus Group with Greater Belfast Seniors Forum (9 older people)

- Increase the provision of accessible toilet facilities particularly within city centre to encourage more older people into the city.
- Improved awareness and access to Council's online grant schemes – older people's groups often not aware of when grants become available or how to access information.
- Continue to ensure that the views of older people are reflected in strategic decision making so that their needs are continually considered.
- Valued the use of 2 Royal Avenue as a resource and hub to engage in community life.

Appendix 1 – Consultation survey findings

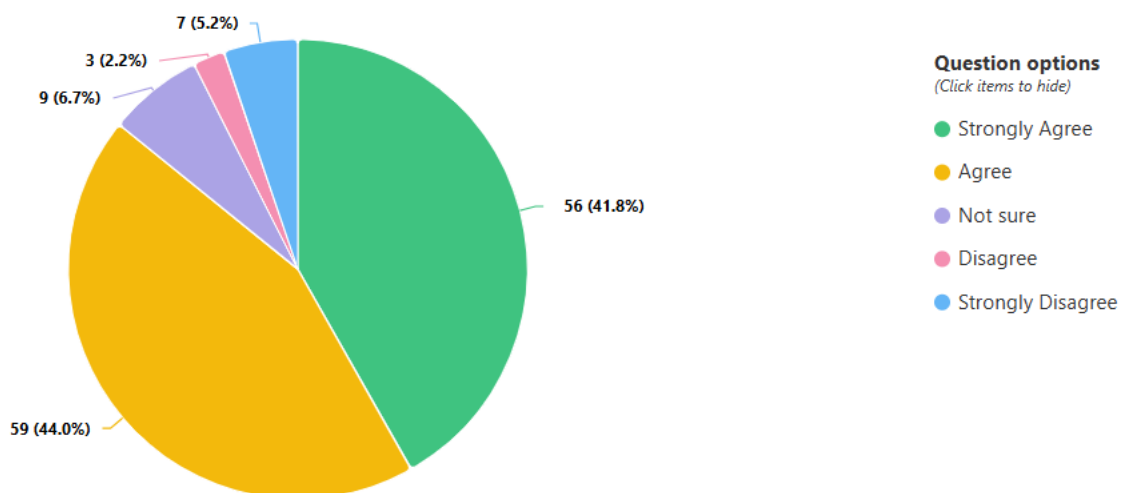
‘Our services’ draft improvement objective

We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.



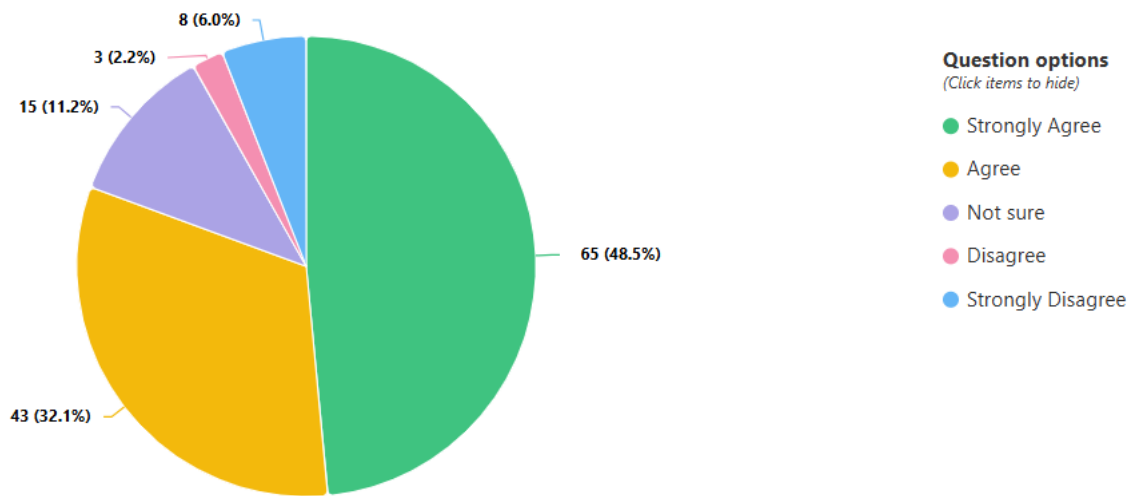
‘Our people and communities’ draft improvement objective

We will improve our local areas and provide opportunities to support our residents to become healthier and engaged.



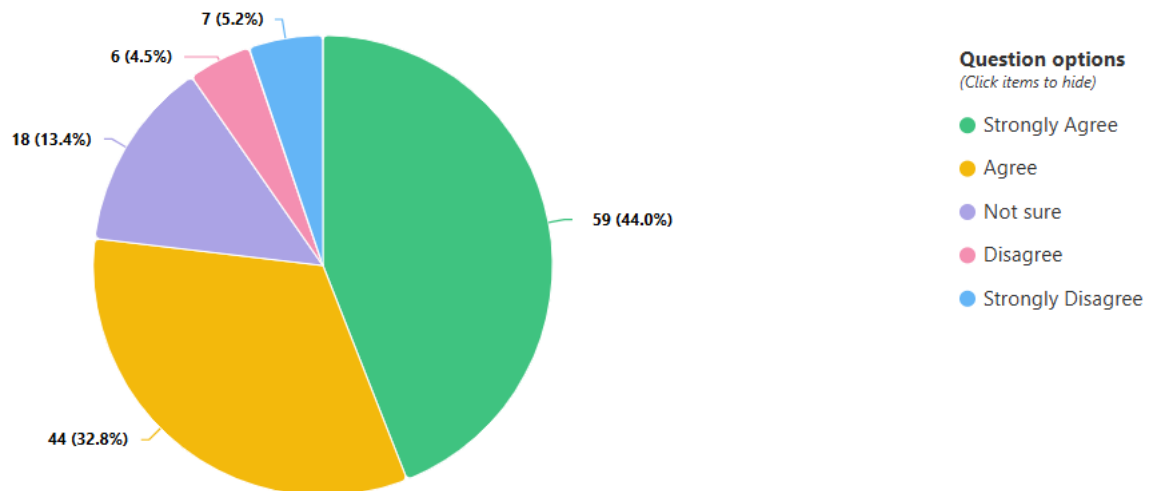
'Our place' draft improvement objective

We will create a more vibrant, attractive, and connected city (including the city centre).



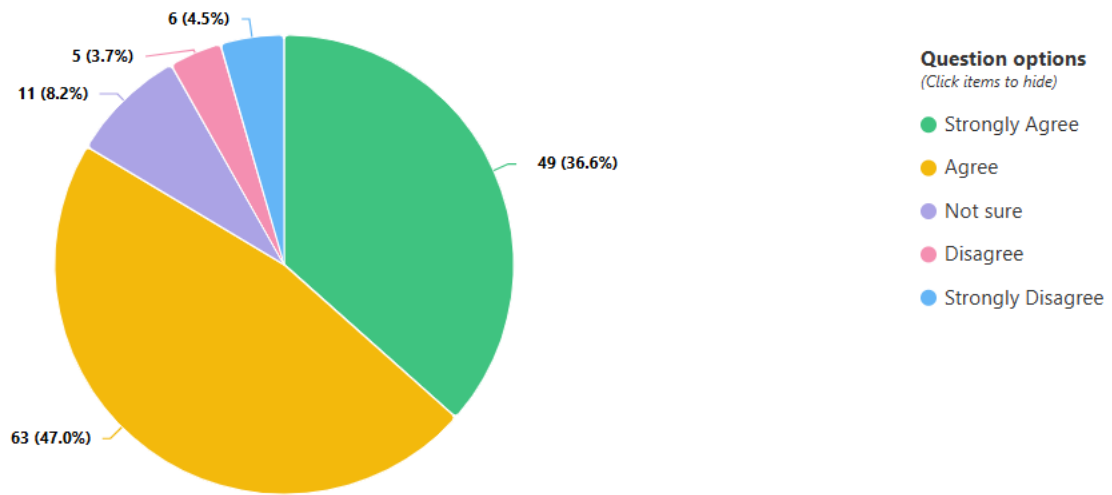
'Our planet' draft improvement objective

We will create a more sustainable, nature-positive city.



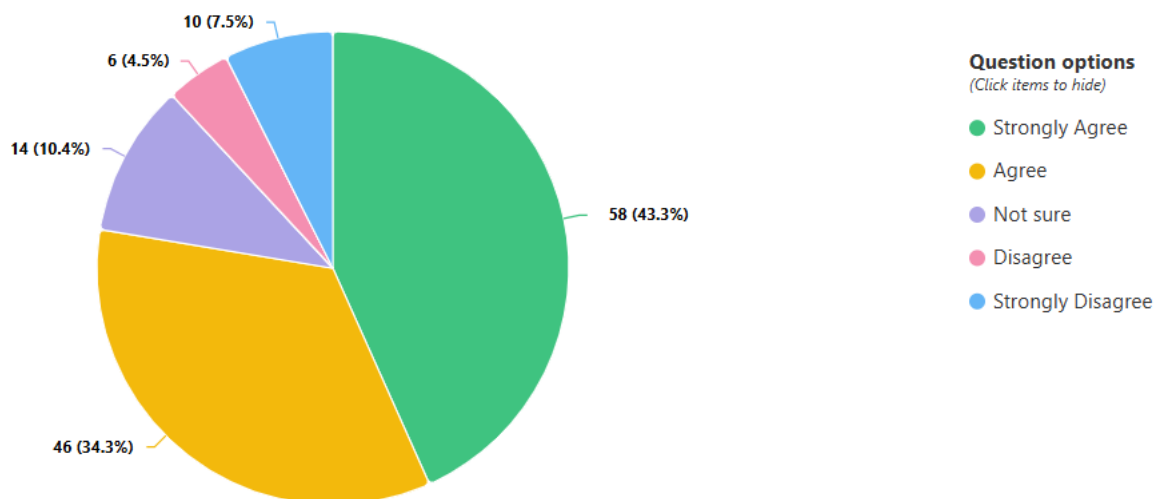
'Our economy' draft improvement objective

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' draft improvement objective

We will support our most vulnerable people to make Belfast a more caring, safe and inclusive city.



Appendix 2 – Consultation promotion

Social media posts

Belfast City Council
1h · 🌐


Every year, councils in Northern Ireland must publish a Performance Improvement Plan that sets out improvement objectives for the year ahead.

This plan focuses on key improvements that we believe will make the greatest difference to our city and the people who live in Belfast.

As a council we remain committed to improving the quality of life and environment for our ratepayers and communities over the next year and beyond.

Have your say on our improvement objectives & actions for 2026-27 by filling out the survey: <https://ow.ly/1lqU50YkhQC>

We will use your feedback to finalise our Performance Improvement Plan 2026-2027.



Belfast City Council
30,888 followers · 2w · 🌐


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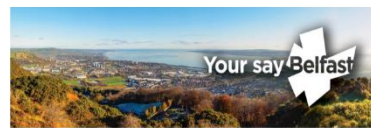
We will use your feedback to finalise our Performance Improvement Plan 2026-2027.



Council intranet (Interlink)



Have your say - final reminder!
Final chance to complete a short, seven question survey to share your opinion on our improvement objectives and actions for 2026-27.



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This plan focuses on key improvements that we believe will make the greatest difference to our city and the people who live in Belfast.

As a council we remain committed to improving the quality of life and environment for our ratepayers and communities over the next year and beyond.

Have your say on our improvement objectives and actions for 2026-27 by [filling out the survey](#).

We will use your feedback to finalise our Performance Improvement Plan 2026-2027.

[Complete the survey](#)

Only 7 questions!

The short easy to complete survey has six themes - services, people and communities, place, planet, economy and compassionate city - a question per theme. You simply tick whether you agree or disagree with the improvement objective and actions. These include things like - delivering phase three kerbside glass expansion programme; progressing improvements to our leisure, pitch and park facilities; and delivering the Belfast Learning Festival to increase awareness of the opportunities to engage in lifelong learning across the city.

At the end of the survey, you have the opportunity to put forward your ideas and suggestions to help support our improvement objectives.



Community NI Website (NICVA)

Have Your Say!

Tell us what you think of our proposed improvement objectives for 2026-27 or feedback on our new (draft) Good Relations Strategy

WEDNESDAY / 04 MARCH 2026 3:06PM

We currently have two consultations that you might be interested in.

- > **Draft Improvement Objectives 2026-2027** closes 15 April
- > **Draft Good Relations Strategy** – closes 5 May

If you wish to receive notifications about upcoming council consultations, please go to <https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/> and register on our site. Remember to tick the box indicating that you consent to be contacted about future Belfast City Council consultation and engagement.

Your say Belfast Team

Last updated 1 month 1 week ago

Tags

consultation



Belfast City Council – Strategy, Policy And Partnership

Strategy, Policy & Partnerships

City Hall

Belfast

BT15GS

<https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/belfastagen-da>

Posters at Council facilities





Performance Improvement Plan

2026–2027



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Foreword

I'm delighted to share Belfast City Council's Performance Improvement Plan 2026-27 which sets out our ongoing commitment to deliver continuous improvement as an organisation and for the people of Belfast.

In the wake of significant challenges facing our society, from geopolitical instability to the cost-of-living crisis, we recognise our role and duty to ensure that we can show leadership and support to people, communities and stakeholders across the city.

As a council, delivering improvement is non-negotiable. From our elected members, corporate management team and throughout our talented workforce, it is the responsibility of everyone to deliver continuous improvement. This is reflected in our new emerging Planning and Performance Management Framework which is a critical tool that will embed a consistent, streamlined approach to planning and performance management throughout the organisation.

I reflect proudly on our performance and what we have achieved over the last 12 months. In relation to our Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26, I am delighted that we were able to achieve our six improvement objectives. Particular highlights include far exceeding our target in terms of customer satisfaction levels with customer hub contacts and the extension of our highly successful Vacant to Vibrant intervention which supported the transformation of 24 previously derelict properties and brought them back into economic use for local businesses across Belfast.

We progressed 220 projects through our Physical Programme, improving existing facilities whilst developing new and transformative facilities within our communities.



In addition, we were delighted to secure Belfast as host of the Comhaltas Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the world's biggest celebration of Irish music and culture, for the first time from 2 to 9 August 2026. We look forward to welcoming 800,000 people to the city which will provide huge economic, social and cultural benefits for the city.

Looking ahead, we will continue to focus on ensuring that we can deliver effective and efficient services that demonstrate value for money. We will concentrate on delivering investment within the city and our communities to improve the quality of life for all our residents.

Delivering on our climate commitments remains an important priority for the council as we play our part in protecting the planet. We will also work to ensure that Belfast's economy can grow and prosper through business support and creating more and better jobs.

Finally, we will continue to support those most in need across the city to ensure that Belfast is a safe, inclusive and welcoming place for everyone – ensuring no one is left behind.

John Walsh, Chief Executive

Introduction

Aligned to our city's refreshed community plan (the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028), Belfast City Council Corporate Plan 2025-2028 and the annual Corporate Delivery Plan 2026-2027, our Performance Improvement Plan 2026-2027 sets out the council's key priorities for improvement over the next 12-month period to ensure that we fulfil our 'Duty to Improve'.

Duty to improve

Under the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, we have a statutory duty to agree improvement objectives, publish an annual Improvement Plan and ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place to achieve them.

Defining improvement

In accordance with the Act and accompanying guidance, for us 'improvement' is about *enhancing the sustainable quality of life and environment for ratepayers and communities* rather than limited to gains in service output or efficiencies.

Our Performance Improvement Plan has been developed against the backdrop of the council's new emerging Planning and Performance Management Framework to embed a consistent, streamlined approach to planning and performance management throughout the organisation. It will also help to build an effective culture of performance management to ensure all members, staff and stakeholders work to achieve the best possible outcomes and value for money for the residents and communities in Belfast. The Framework will also be a crucial tool to support informed decision-making, more effective use of resources and drive improvement across the organisation.

Our medium and longer-term arrangements to ensure continuous improvement are outlined in Figure 1. This plan sets out our performance improvement objectives for 2026–2027 which are compliant with the requirement for them to be:

- **legitimate** - making a *demonstrable contribution* to at least one (or, probably, more than one) of the aspects of improvement listed in the Local Government Act.
- **clear** - setting out the *visible improvement* that citizens can expect.
- **robust** - with defined *terms of success* (whether *quantitative* or *qualitative*).
- **deliverable** - with established *links to individual service programmes and budgets*.
- **demonstrable** - capable of being supported by *objective* (but *not necessarily measured or quantitative*) evidence.



Looking back - performance improvement summary achievements 2025-26

We will publish our 2025-2026 year-end self-assessment online in September 2026. This is a summary of some key achievements:

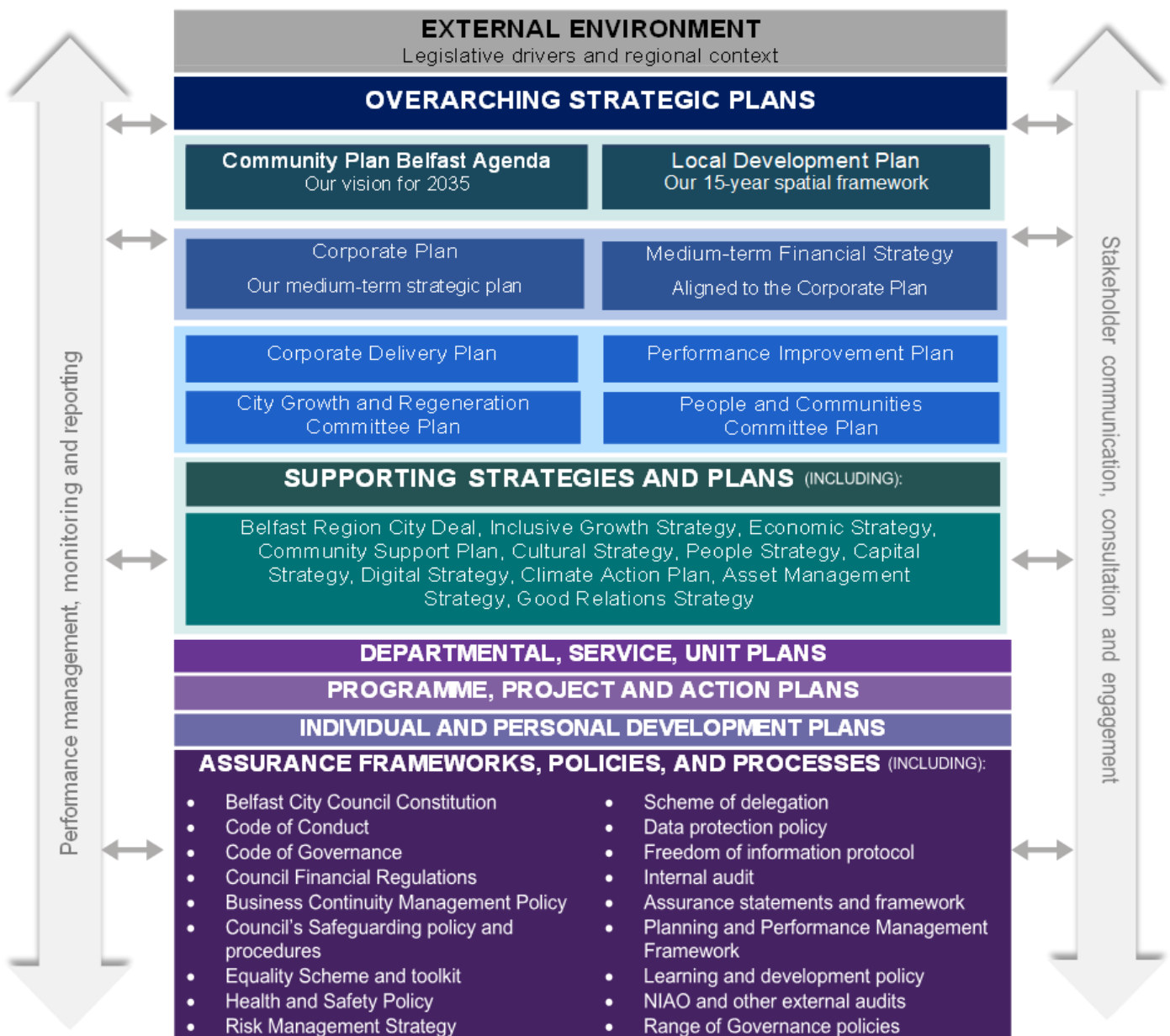


Our arrangements to ensure continuous improvement

The council has a statutory duty to ensure continuous performance improvement. We are also required to produce an annual Performance Improvement Plan (PIP). However, everything we do in the council is focused on improving the lives of people who live in or visit Belfast.

Figure 1 shows the legal context, plans and strategies that form our strategic framework for improving outcomes for the people of Belfast. It also shows how the council’s corporate objectives are implemented throughout the organisation.

FIGURE 1: The council’s Strategic Framework



The diagram above illustrates the need for connections between all levels. The components listed are illustrative and are not an exhaustive list.

These arrangements are in accordance with Part 12 (Section 84 (2)) of the Local Government Act which states that they should improve our functions in terms of:



Strategic context

Our community plan, the Belfast Agenda was updated in 2024, with input from partners, residents, and other stakeholders to reflect the city’s current priorities. The overarching strategic plan explains **what** we are doing and **why**. It provides a clear view of the needs and aspirations of the city and sets out five long-term outcomes. It outlines how partners will work together to support the most vulnerable in our city, grow the economy, regenerate neighbourhoods, support communities, while working to achieve our climate targets. Figure 2 shows the five strategic themes and priorities, the five things people want for Belfast by 2035 (our outcomes) and our ambitions which set out our key targets to make our vision a reality.

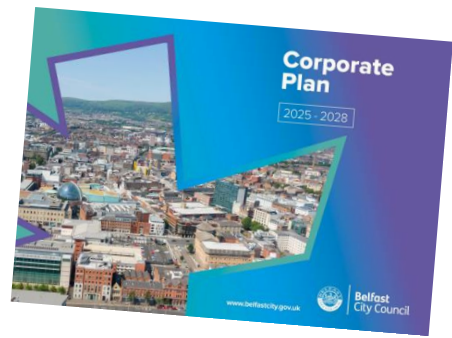


FIGURE 2: Strategic themes and priorities, The Belfast Agenda 2024-2035



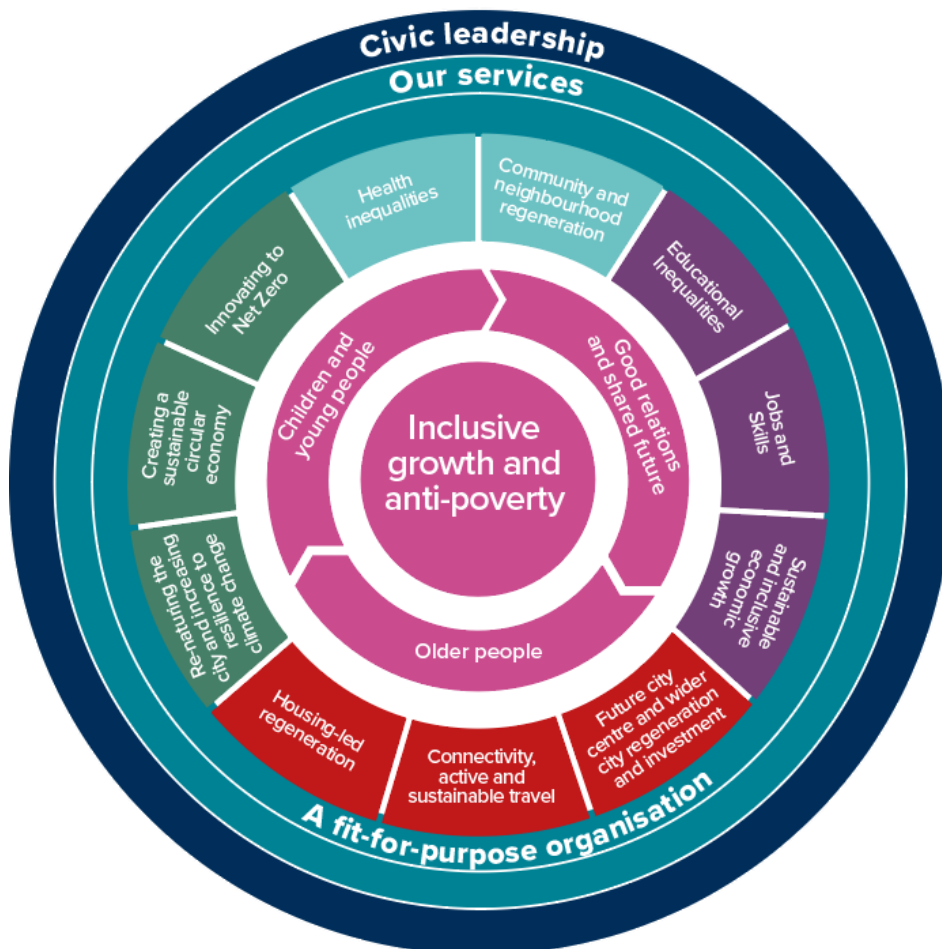
The Council’s Corporate Plan

2025-2028 sets out our approach to delivering for local people in a time of both significant opportunity and considerable challenges for our city. The Corporate Plan is closely linked to the Belfast Agenda and explains **what** the council will do to contribute to the outcomes set out in Figure 2 as well as outlining the key priorities for us as an organisation. Finally, committee plans, and other departmental and business plans set out **how** this will be delivered.



Our corporate priority themes for three years, up to 2028 are outlined in Figure 3.

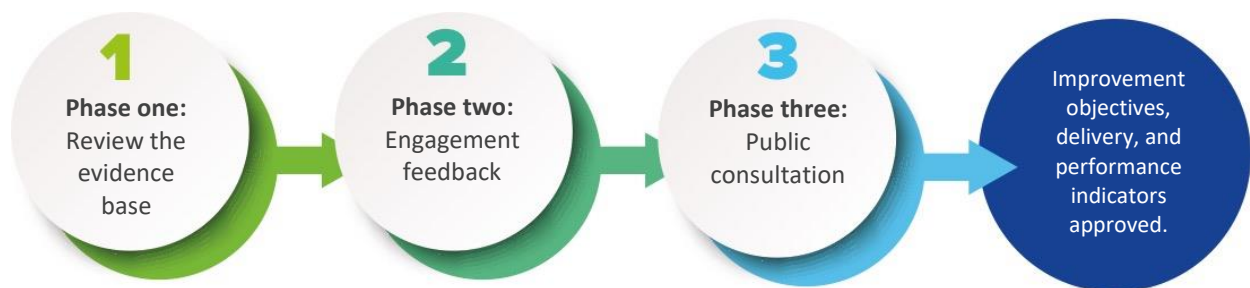
FIGURE 3: Corporate Priority Themes – Belfast City Council’s Corporate Plan 2025-28



Identifying our performance improvement objectives for 2026-27

All our key strategies and plans are informed and developed by listening to our residents, businesses, partners, staff, and elected representatives. Our 2026-2027 performance improvement objectives were developed through a three-phase process. In phase one, we reviewed the evidence base, in phase two, we engaged internally and in phase three, we conducted public consultation. The rich and diverse analysis and feedback we received throughout this process have shaped this refreshed Performance Improvement Plan 2026-2027.

FIGURE 4: Three-phase process



Phase one: Reviewing the evidence base

Understanding the needs of users, citizens and the internal and external environment is critically important. We analysed baseline evidence drawn from existing engagement findings, survey results, performance data and a review of relevant strategies and plans. These included:

- results and trend data from our 2025-2026 Performance Improvement Assessment report.
- ongoing monitoring and review of 2025-2026 Corporate Delivery Plan (reported quarterly) to identify areas of potential under-performance.
- guidance issued by the Department for Communities and recommendations provided by the NI auditor (including the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) Section 95 report).
- evidence and issues arising from committee and meetings of the full council.
- areas for improvement emerging from the internal audit and risk management processes.
- priorities identified during the development of the new Corporate Plan 2025-2028 and rate setting process.
- alignment with key city and council strategies including The Belfast Agenda and the Corporate Plan 2025-2028.
- a review of customer complaints received.
- good practice data benchmarking with other local authorities (regional and UK-wide).

Phase two: Engagement feedback

Feedback was gathered and approved through a series of internal engagements with members, chief officers, departments and key staff across the council. This included:

- templates completed and initial meetings held with departments to identify priorities and improvement activity.
- regular engagement with departmental teams and key officers, at every phase – ensuring alignment with departmental and service level budget setting and planning processes.
- priorities identified during engagement with party group leaders, elected members and the corporate management team (CMT).
- reports presented and discussed at CMT, Strategic Policy and Resources (SP&R) Committee and the full council.
- approval granted through scheduled meetings with senior management teams, CMT, committee and full council meetings.

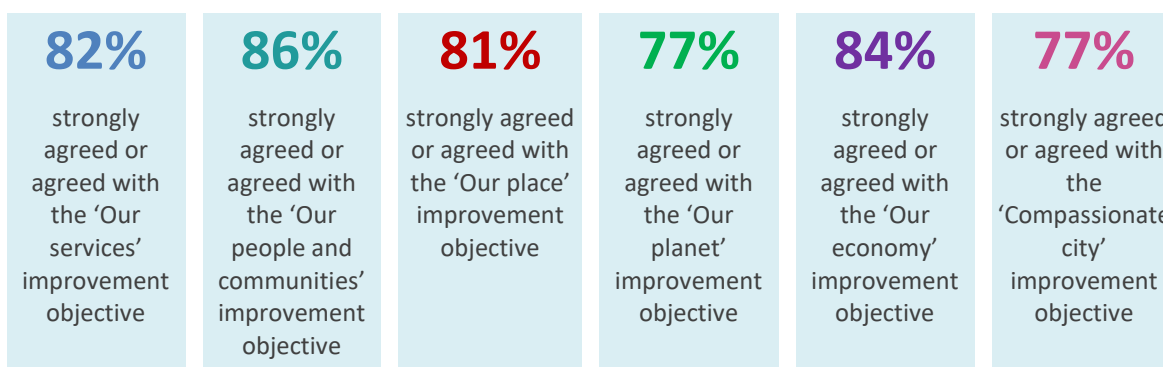
Phase three: Public consultation

An eight-week public consultation process was carried out to enable residents and stakeholders to inform our improvement objectives 2026-2027. This included an online survey via the council’s Your Say Belfast consultation and engagement website and two targeted focus groups. The survey was promoted using a range of communication methods including social media posts, posters in community buildings, email marketing to existing mailing lists, intranet promotion and websites. As part of phase three, we:

- received 135 survey responses via the Your Say Belfast website.
- facilitated two focus groups with eight young people and nine older people to reflect their priorities and areas for improvement.
- worked closely with departmental teams and key officers to consider consultation feedback and refine the final Performance Improvement Plan.
- secured approval of the final objectives through the normal council governance cycle (CMT, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the full council meeting).

Consultation feedback summary

This is a summary of the consultation results:



The issues or improvements that respondents felt should be considered in relation to the draft 2026-2027 improvement objectives are thematically summarised below. It is important to note that some of the areas highlighted as part of the public consultation process are being progressed through existing strategies, plans, programmes and practices, and in partnership as part of the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028.

Survey feedback summary

Our services

- ✓ Prioritise the delivery of effective street cleansing across the city.
- ✓ Increase the presence of dog wardens and park wardens in our parks and open spaces to reduce anti-social behaviour and improve cleanliness.
- ✓ Ensure missed bin collections are dealt with efficiently, and food caddy bags are available when requested.
- ✓ Work with partners to address the growing issue of city centre homelessness and progress with proposed plans for safe injecting facility.
- ✓ Focus more on delivering key services and less on areas that are the responsibility of central government.
- ✓ Consider how artificial intelligence (AI) could enhance service delivery and the organisation.

Our people and communities

- ✓ Improve parks, facilities and opens spaces.
- ✓ Prioritise additional funding to increase and enhance the availability of sports pitches and facilities.
- ✓ Consider the self-sustainability and income-generating potential of existing facilities and pitches.
- ✓ Improve engagement in local communities to ensure that delivery reflects local need which may vary across the city.
- ✓ Prioritise more investment and facilities for women and girls to ensure equity of access and opportunities.

Our place

- ✓ Expand and enhance active travel infrastructure to reduce congestion, improve air quality and encourage more people to improve their health and wellbeing.
- ✓ The Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 represents a significant opportunity to promote arts and culture throughout the city.
- ✓ Increase opportunities for inner city living to enhance city centre vibrancy.
- ✓ Enhance and increase playground provision – make better use of natural resources and consider ways to connect with other infrastructure, for example, greenways or active travel routes.
- ✓ Prioritise more and better-quality housing not only for people experiencing homelessness but also for growing families.
- ✓ Develop an alleys and entries strategy to support inner city communities.
- ✓ Increase visibility of ‘arts and culture’ around the city and more support for our arts.

Our planet

- ✓ Decarbonisation needs to commence in-house – the council should work to improve the efficiency of its own estate.
- ✓ Important that the council leads the way and sets an example for others in the city, for example ceasing the promotion of single-use cups and plastics in promotional activity.

Our economy

No specific feedback provided.

Compassionate city

- ✓ Clear commitment on how the council will lead and support work to End Violence Against Women and Girls.
- ✓ Provide more targeted support for families struggling with the cost-of-living.
- ✓ Ensure that facilities provide warm spaces for people to meet, learn and play.

Focus group feedback

Two focus groups were carried out with eight young people and nine older people to better understand the needs and priorities of these traditionally under-represented target groups.

A summary of the key feedback from each focus group is set out below:

Older people focus group

Older People Focus Group with Greater Belfast Seniors Forum (nine older people)

- Increase the provision of accessible toilet facilities, particularly within city centre, to encourage more older people into the city.
- Improved awareness and access to the council's online grant schemes – older people's groups are often not aware of when grants become available or how to access information.
- Continue to ensure that the views of older people are reflected in strategic decision making so that their needs are continually considered.
- Valued the use of 2 Royal Avenue as a resource and hub to engage in community life.

Young people focus group

Youth Focus Group @ Hammer Community Centre (eight young people)

- Improve equipment and the quality of playground facilities within the local area.
- Improve sensory facilities and provide more opportunities, activities and equipment in community centres. Invest in centres to make them more welcoming and attractive for young people.
- Cleaner and safer streets to allow young people to play (do more about dog waste).
- More outdoor green spaces and allotments for play and to allow young people to participate in horticultural activities.

Looking forward –

Performance improvement objectives 2026-2027

Our performance improvement objectives, are clearly aligned with the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028 and Corporate Plan 2025-2028. Reflecting on our 2025-2026 performance and feedback from residents and stakeholders, we will continue to progress five out of the six performance objectives identified in the previous year, with refined associated actions. To meet the evolving needs of the city we have broadened the scope of our planet objective:



We are, therefore, committed to the following improvement objectives during 2026-2027:

- 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 create a sustainable, nature-positive city
- 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.

We have assessed each of these objectives and consider that they all meet the following statutory aspects of improvement:

Strategic effectiveness	Service quality, availability, and fairness	Sustainability	Efficiency	Innovation
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Improvement objective 1: Our services

In addition to the specific improvement activities set out below, we will implement our regular programme of service redesign and adjustments to ways of working through the implementation of risk and audit actions to continually adapt and improve our services.

<p>Belfast Agenda Outcome</p>	<p>Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable city.</p>
<p>Corporate Plan themes and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our services – Delivering effective and efficient services. • Foundations for success - Creating a fit for purpose organisation
<p>Improvement objective</p>	<p>We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.</p>
<p>Why is this important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback from residents focused on improving the delivery of services. • Identified as a priority by elected members. • Aligned to the Corporate Plan.
<p>What will we do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to deliver the Customer Focus Programme, to enhance our services and customer experience. • Continue to deliver the Planning Service Improvement Plan. • Deliver a street cleansing programme to create a cleaner and greener city. • Deliver phase three of the kerbside glass expansion programme to enhance customer service and improve recycling rates.

How we will measure success?					
Measures of success	Cross-cutting themes and objectives				
	Our people and communities	Our place	Our planet	Our economy	Compassionate City
Resolving 65 per cent of corporate complaints within timeframe	✓				
Introducing improvement actions for 80 per cent of corporate complaints	✓				
Submitting one bid to the BRCD AI readiness fund to develop an AI solution that enhances the customer experience	✓				
Achieving the 30-week target for average processing time for major planning applications (statutory indicator)		✓			
Achieving the 15-week target for average processing time for local planning applications (statutory indicator)		✓			
Processing 70 per cent of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks (statutory indicator)		✓			
Achieving less than 12 week-average processing time for householder applications and advertisement consent applications		✓			
Achieving less than six-week average processing time of tree works applications and Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs)		✓	✓		
Providing 23,000 additional households with kerbside glass collections			✓		
Collecting an additional 650 tonnes of glass			✓		

What is
our wider
policy
impact?

- **Regional:** Waste Legislation NI (various), Waste Management Plan NI, Local Government Finance Act 2011, Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS).
- **Local:** Belfast City Council – Local Development Plan (LDP) 2035, Financial Regulations 2015, Putting You First: Transforming Customer Experience, Belfast City Council Complaints, Comments and Compliments policy, Our People Strategy and Achieving Through People Framework and Digital Strategy.

Improvement objective 2: Our people and communities

In addition to the specifics set out below, we will improve our local areas and improve health and wellbeing for our residents, by delivering programmes of work and activities contained within the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028, the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028, committee plans and supporting departmental and business plans.

Belfast Agenda Outcome

Belfast will be a city where everyone experiences good health and wellbeing.

Corporate Plan themes and priorities

- Our people and communities – Making life better for all our residents.
- Health inequalities and community and neighbourhood regeneration.

Improvement objective

We will improve our local areas and provide opportunities to support our residents to become healthier and engaged.

Why is this important?

- Recent health data shows that life expectancy overall has stopped increasing and there is a growing need to tackle obesity and increase the levels of physical activity across Belfast.
- Based on resident feedback.
- Aligned to Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan priorities.

What will we do?

- Enhance our playgrounds, to ensure that we continue to provide high quality facilities and equipment across the city.
- Increase the number of visits to our leisure centres, to participate in sport and physical activity.
- Deliver animation and outreach activities in community, play and leisure development programmes.
- Deliver improvements to parks and open spaces to improve people’s health and wellbeing as agreed under the Physical Programme.
- Progress the current Leisure Programme to transform the quality of council leisure facilities.
- Progress the development of projects in the Pitches Programme to enhance the quality and availability of sports pitches across the city.

What will we do?

- Progress delivery of the £10.28m Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund to help develop facilities that support neighbourhood tourism, improved environmental sustainability and social economy activity within communities.
- Progress the development and delivery of the council's Physical Programme to enable needs led investment across the city, for example, Capital Programme, Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, Belfast Investment Fund, Local Investment Fund, Social Outcomes Fund, PEACEPLUS, Urban Villages and other initiatives.

How we will measure success?					
Measures of success	Cross-cutting themes and objectives				
	Our Services	Our place	Our planet	Our economy	Compassionate City
Investing £580k and delivering the annual playground improvement programme		✓	✓		
Increasing the number of visits to our leisure centres to 3.4million	✓				
Increasing the number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school) to 31,750					
Increasing the number of community, play and leisure outreach programmes delivered to 250	✓				
Increasing the number of events in our parks to 360	✓				
Increasing the number of people attending events in our parks to 200,000	✓				
Delivering animation programmes in 5 new/ refurbished parks (Páirc an Lonnáin, Lower Shankill Park, Páirc Nua Chollan, Marrowbone and Pitt Park).	✓				
Progressing major improvements to three parks (Ballysillan Playing Fields, Waterworks, Alexandra Park)	✓	✓			
Progressing major improvements to one open space (Cathedral Gardens)	✓	✓			
Progressing three projects under the Leisure Programme.	✓	✓			
Completing 10 projects under the Physical Programme	✓	✓			
Developing 100 projects under the Physical Programme	✓	✓			
Progressing the construction of one pitch and the design development of four pitches	✓	✓			
Supporting 20 organisations under the £10.28million Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) programme	✓	✓			
Completing two projects under NRF	✓	✓			

What is
our wider
policy
impact?

- **Regional:** Programme for Government (PfG) 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most', Active Living the Sport and Physical Activity Strategy for NI (2022), Marking Life Better – Strategic Framework for public health, Whole Systems Approach to Obesity Prevention, Regional Development Strategy (2035), SPPS.
- **Local:** The Department of Health's Annual Health Inequalities report, The World Health Organisation's Belfast Healthy Cities Strategy, LDP, BOSS, Get Active Belfast – A framework for physical activity – Active Belfast Partnership.

Improvement objective 3: Our place

In addition to the improvement action below, we will create a more attractive, vibrant, and connected city by delivering programmes of work and activities contained within the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028, the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028, committee plans and supporting departmental and business plans.

<p>Belfast Agenda Outcome</p>	<p>Belfast will be a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable city</p>
<p>Corporate Plan themes and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our place – Creating a liveable and connected, vibrant and competitive city. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Connectivity, active and sustainable travel. ○ City regeneration and investment.
<p>Improvement objective</p>	<p>Our Place - we will create a more vibrant, attractive, and connected city (including the city centre).</p>
<p>Why is this important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on resident feedback. • Identified as a priority by elected members. • Aligned to Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan priorities.
<p>What will we do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake work to safeguard and enhance the council’s historic, heritage and tourism assets including Belfast Zoo, Historic Cemeteries, Wilmont House, Floral Hall, Fernhill House, and the Assembly Rooms. • Oversee the delivery of the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the world’s largest annual festival of Irish music, song and dance. • Continue to work with the preferred developer for the leisure led development at Giant’s Park. • Deliver the Greenways and the Access to the Hills Programme to improve the connectivity of the city. • Deliver the Vacant to Vibrant Programme 2026-27 to address city-wide vacancy rates.

How we will measure success?					
Measures of success	Cross-cutting themes and objectives				
	Our Services	Our People and Communities	Our planet	Our economy	Compassionate City
Delivering improvements to the Belfast Zoo		✓			
Completing condition surveys at three Historic Cemeteries		✓			
Completing the feasibility study for Wilmont House		✓			
Completing the health and safety works at Floral Hall		✓			
Commencing health and safety works at Fernhill House and courtyard		✓			
Installing new stalls in St. George's Market		✓			
Commencing health and safety works at the Assembly Rooms Cluster		✓			
Attracting 700,000 visitors to the Fleadh		✓		✓	✓
Creating 1000 volunteering opportunities to support the hosting of the Fleadh event		✓		✓	✓
Working with the developer to progress planning for Phase 1 Adventure Hub at Giant's Park					
Progressing four greenways to improve the connectivity of the city (Sydenham Greenway, Blackstaff Greenway, West Belfast Greenway and Colin Greenway)		✓	✓		
Progressing four trails including Black Mountain, Glencairn, Ligoniel and Squire's Hill		✓	✓		
Occupying 28 previously vacant citywide properties through the Vacant to Vibrant intervention		✓			
Awarding £700,000 through Vacant to Vibrant funding to citywide traders		✓			

**What is
our wider
policy
impact?**

- **Regional:** Eastern Transport Plan 2035 (under development); Regional Development Strategy 2035, PfG.
- **Local:** Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS); A Bolder Vision for Belfast; Belfast Resilience Strategy, LDP.

Improvement objective 4: Our planet

In addition to the specific improvement actions set out below, we will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast by delivering our normal programme of work contained within the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028, draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028, committee plans and supporting departmental and business plans.

<p>Belfast Agenda Outcome</p>	<p>Belfast is a vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable city.</p>
<p>Corporate Plan themes and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our services, our people and communities, our place, and our planet.
<p>Improvement objective</p>	<p>We will create a sustainable, nature-positive city.</p>
<p>Why is this important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change is a global concern. Since we declared a climate emergency in 2019, recognising the serious environmental, social and economic challenges posed by climate change, we have been taking action to transition the city to an inclusive, zero-emissions and climate-resilient economy in a generation. • The council has statutory responsibility. • Identified as a concern by residents and stakeholders. • Aligned to Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan priorities.
<p>What will we do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver an effective waste management service across the city. • Continue to deliver Belfast City Council's Tree Strategy and action plan to help manage and improve the tree scape in the city. • Continue to deliver the council's Corporate Climate Action Plan to increase the climate resilience of the council's assets and services and to achieve net zero emissions, and to increase the climate resilience of its assets and services (over 20 actions including a Sustainable Food Policy, energy audits of council buildings and retrofitting of council buildings). • Develop the Local Biodiversity Action Plan to set out our approach to address threatened species and habitats and protect and restore biological systems.

What will we do?

- Progress a potential heat network that aims to decarbonise the heat supply to buildings in the city.
- Protect and enhance our local environment and natural ecosystems.
- Embed sustainable food practices and partnership working in Belfast.
- Enable the city to decarbonise at scale.

How we will measure success?

Measures of success	Cross-cutting themes and objectives				
	Our Services	Our People and Communities	Our place	Our economy	Compassionate City
Achieving 40 per cent of council municipal waste sent for recycling	✓	✓	✓		
Reducing the tonnage of biodegradable council collected waste that is landfilled to 1,500 tonnes (statutory indicator)	✓	✓	✓		
Achieving 43 per cent of household waste collected sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use) (statutory indicator)	✓	✓	✓		
Achieving 160,000 tonnage of council collected municipal waste arisings (statutory indicator).	✓	✓	✓		
Delivering four projects as part of the Belfast Tree Strategy		✓	✓		
Completing at least 50 per cent of the council's Corporate Climate Action Plan short-term priorities	✓				
Establishing four new species rich grassland meadows in open spaces across the city		✓	✓		
Undertaking further studies, modelling and market engagement on a potential heat network to explore options to lower the cost of heat and secure grant finance					✓
Undertaking maintenance and monitoring of the demonstrator site and support the replication of co-designed nature-based solutions with communities in at least four satellite sites		✓			

Launching a city-wide Sustainable Food Strategy, to reduce food waste, support community growing and ongoing monitoring of activities.	Dark Blue	White with checkmark	Red	Purple	White with checkmark
Developing and launching a web-portal to increase the take up of rooftop solar across Belfast.	Dark Blue	White with checkmark	Red	Purple	Pink

What is our wider policy impact?

- **Regional:** The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland)2022, Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019-2024, Energy Strategy –The Path to Net Zero Energy, Draft Green Growth Strategy, PfG, Second Cycle NI Flood Risk Management Plan 2021-2027, Strategic Planning Policy Statement.
- **Local:** A Net Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast, A Bolder Vision for Belfast, Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP), Belfast Open Spaces Strategy, Belfast Air Quality Action Plan, Belfast Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan, Belfast (Draft) Economic Strategy, Belfast (Draft) Adaptation Strategy, Belfast Local Area Energy Plan.

Improvement objective 5: Our economy

In addition to the specifics set out below, we will stimulate inclusive growth and innovation, help businesses to start-up, grow and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment by delivering our normal programme of work contained within the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028, draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028, committee plans and supporting departmental and business plans.

<p>Belfast Agenda Outcome</p>	<p>Belfast is a place where everyone benefits from a thriving and prosperous economy.</p>
<p>Corporate Plan themes and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our economy – Creating inclusive and sustainable growth, learning and opportunity.
<p>Improvement objective</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Why is this important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on resident feedback. • Identified as a priority by elected members. • Aligned to Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan priorities.
<p>What will we do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the Enterprise Support Service to deliver ‘Go Succeed’ to increase the number of new business starts and help existing businesses to grow. • Deliver employment and upskilling academies in priority sectors in line with industry demand. • Deliver the Smart Belfast urban innovation programme to enhance Belfast’s capacity for digital innovation. • Deliver the Belfast Learning Festival to increase awareness of the opportunities to engage in lifelong learning across the city. • Deliver an enhanced Belfast Business Promise (BBP) programme implementing learning and recommendations from the programme review. • Continue to recruit suitable entry level posts, for example, placement opportunities, and run an annual apprenticeship programme as part of the council’s People Strategy action plan, to support our inclusive growth ambitions. • Support our suppliers by helping business cashflow through the

How we will measure success?					
Measures of success	Cross-cutting themes and objectives				
	Our Services	Our People and Communities	Our place	Our planet	Compassionate City
Promoting 325 jobs through business start-up activity (this equates to the delivery of 542 completed client-led business plans under business-start activity) (statutory indicator)		✓			
Supporting 712 Belfast individuals and, or entrepreneurs through start-up activity via Go Succeed		✓			
Supporting 323 Belfast businesses through business growth activity via Go Succeed		✓			
Supporting 75 per cent of participants to move into a positive outcome from an employment or upskilling academy		✓			
Supporting 425 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to engage in digital innovation		✓	✓		
Awarding £600,000 of funding to organisations to engage in digital innovation		✓	✓		
Enabling 70 per cent of festival participants to improve their awareness of lifelong learning opportunities		✓	✓		✓
Supporting 50 organisations to sign up to the Belfast Business Promise (BBP) ¹		✓			✓
Supporting 10 businesses (existing BBP members) to improve their recognition level (reaching Member or Ambassador status)		✓			✓
Producing six good practice case studies to highlight the Belfast Business Promise journey and inclusive growth practice		✓			✓
Increasing the number of work placements created to 60		✓			✓
Paying 90 per cent of invoices within 30 calendar days	✓				
Paying 80 per cent of invoices within 10 working days	✓				

¹ Please note that BBP is undergoing a process of review to transition to refresh the model.

What is
our wider
policy
impact?

- **Regional:** A 10X Economy - Northern Ireland's Decade of Innovation; Innovation Strategy for NI 2014-2025, Draft Circular Economy Strategy for Northern Ireland, Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor Action Plan, PfG.
- **Local:** Belfast LDP, Belfast Economic Strategy 2022-2030, Belfast Inclusive Growth Strategy, Belfast Region City Deal, SMART Belfast - Belfast Urban Innovation Framework 2022-2026, Belfast City Council Social Value Procurement Policy.

Improvement objective 6: Compassionate city

In addition to the specific actions set out below, we will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis by delivering our normal programme of work contained within the Belfast Agenda 2024-2028, the draft Corporate Plan 2025-2028, committee plans and supporting departmental and business plans.

<p>Belfast Agenda Outcome</p>	<p>Belfast is a place where everyone fulfils their potential.</p>
<p>Corporate Plan themes and priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compassionate City – Making Belfast a welcoming, caring, and inclusive city – leaving no-one behind. • Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty.
<p>Improvement objective</p>	<p>We will support our most vulnerable people to make Belfast a more caring, safe and inclusive city.</p>
<p>Why is this important?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on resident and stakeholder feedback. • Identified as a priority by elected members. • Part of our statutory duty. • Aligned to Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan priorities. • Evolution of policy environment (Strategic Framework to End Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG)).
<p>What will we do?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver local community action plans as part of the PEACEPLUS Programme, to fund community activities and infrastructure project that help build peace and reconciliation in Belfast. • Progress the delivery of the transformational €13.5million PEACE PLUS project Reconnected Belfast: Waterworks and Alexandra Park and up to five capital projects across the city as part of the PEACE PLUS Local Action Plan to promote inclusive and shared spaces across Belfast i.e. Sanctuary Theatre, Distillery Street Redevelopment Project, Annadale Open Space, Access to the Hills and LGBTQIA+ Hub. • Deliver a Community Support Plan to support local communities and residents across the city.

How we will measure success?					
Measures of success	Cross-cutting themes and objectives				
	Our Services	Our People and Communities	Our place	Our planet	Our economy
Delivering 10 Local Community Programmes		✓	✓		
Awarding £5.4million of Community Support Plan (CSP) funding through the large community support grant		✓			
Progressing five capital projects under the PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan		✓	✓	✓	
Administering £1.2million funding through the Regional Change Funding to EVAWG expert organisations		✓			
Increasing the knowledge of at least 70 per cent of participants about what violence against women and girls is		✓			
Improving the understanding of at least 70 per cent of participants who report a better understanding of the underlying causes of EVAWG		✓			
Increasing the confidence of at least 70 per cent of participants to help EVAWG		✓			

What is our wider policy impact?

- **Regional:** The Executive’s Child Poverty Strategy, NI Audit Office Child Poverty in Northern Ireland Report, The Trussell Trust State of Hunger Report, DfC Poverty, and Income Inequality (PII) Report, NI Act 1998 (Section 75), Race Relations Order 1997, PfG.
- **Local:** Belfast Inclusive Growth Strategy, Belfast City Council Social Value Procurement Policy, Equality Scheme, Good Relations Strategy, PEACEPLUS Programme.

Performance monitoring and reporting arrangements

To ensure that we continuously improve and meet the needs and outcomes of our city and residents, we have established governance arrangements in relation to corporate performance management, summarised and set out below.

Governance arrangements

Monitoring and regular reporting of performance is essential to ensure that priorities are achieved, and that the information that was collected informs decision making and plans.

Progress is monitored and reported on a quarterly basis to the Corporate Management Team (CMT), on a quarterly basis to the Audit Assurance Board and the Audit and Risk Panel, and regularly to relevant working groups, relevant committees, and the full council. At year end, corporate performance is assessed using the key below on Figure 5.

FIGURE 5: Performance status and trend key

Actions/milestones		Performance indicator target		Performance indicator trend	
	Not achieved		Adrift of target (5 per cent or more)	↓	Negative change
	Partially achieved		Slightly adrift of target (between 1 and 5 per cent)	↔	No significant change
	Achieved or completed		On target or exceeded target (within 1 per cent or better)	↑	Positive change

Corporate, committee and departmental business plans and strategies containing statutory or self-imposed performance indicators, are monitored, and reported both internally to departmental and the Corporate Management Team and formally to the relevant committee.

In addition, action plans and programme plans relating to the council’s key priority projects are monitored and reported through cross-departmental groups, management teams and boards, and regularly to the relevant committee.

Figure 6 summarises the high-level governance arrangements and the responsibilities for implementing these.

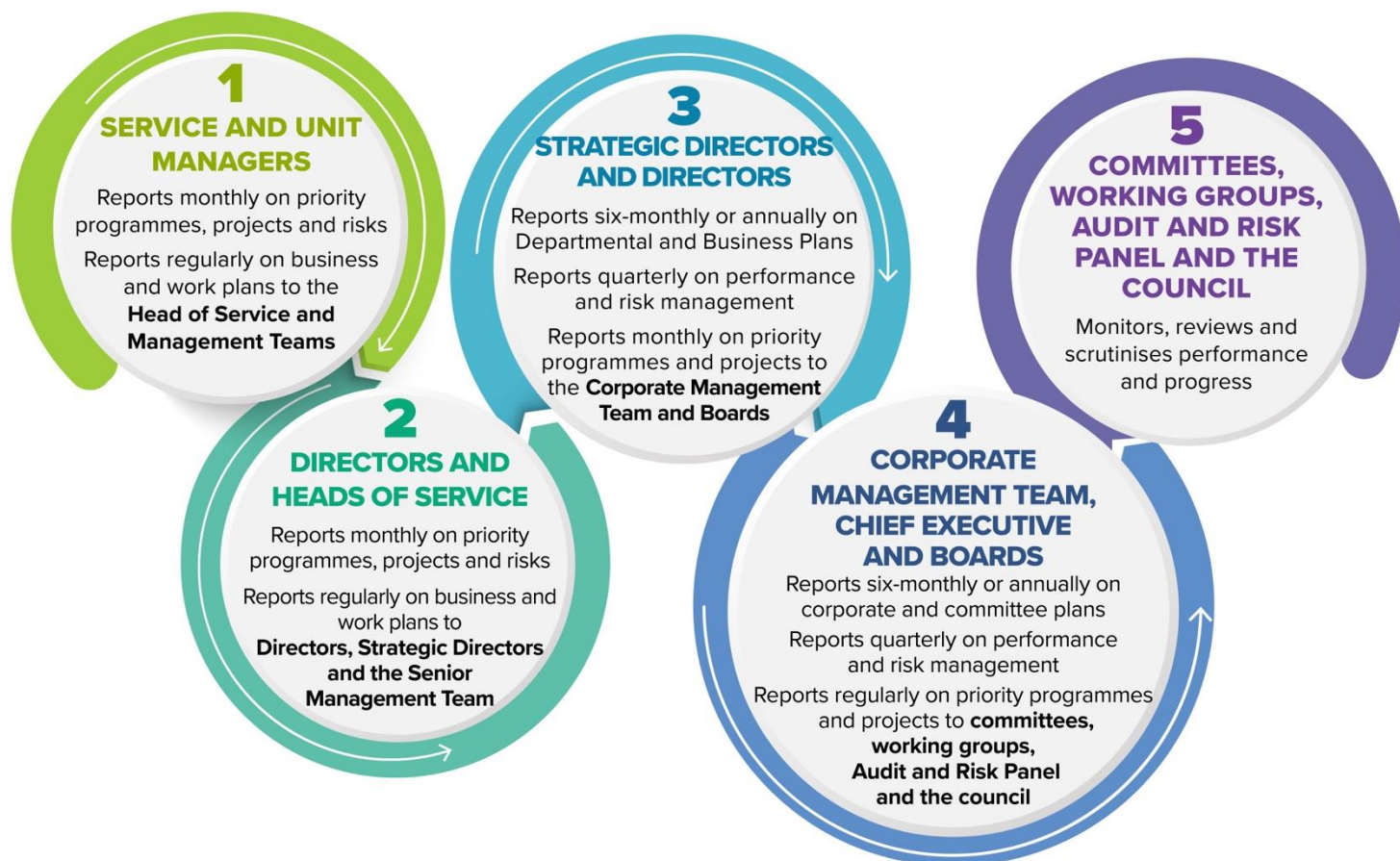
Each year, we publish a self-assessment report, setting out details of how we have performed as a council and benchmarked against other local authorities where possible. The council is a

member of the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE), which is a public sector benchmarking organisation. This enables us to compare and improve our performance across a range of services and activities, with other comparable councils.

The council’s internal audit team regularly review the improvement framework, and this is reported to the Audit and Risk Panel. Annually the NIAO reviews the processes and arrangements as part of the annual performance improvement audit and publicly publishes this.

A new planning and performance management framework is currently being developed which will refresh the current arrangements, provide a co-ordinated focus and a robust framework to enhance our continuous improvement journey. This new framework will enable us to deliver our collective responsibility with community planning partners, as well as supporting us to carry out our statutory duty to improve, deliver best value and achieve the best possible impact for the people of Belfast.

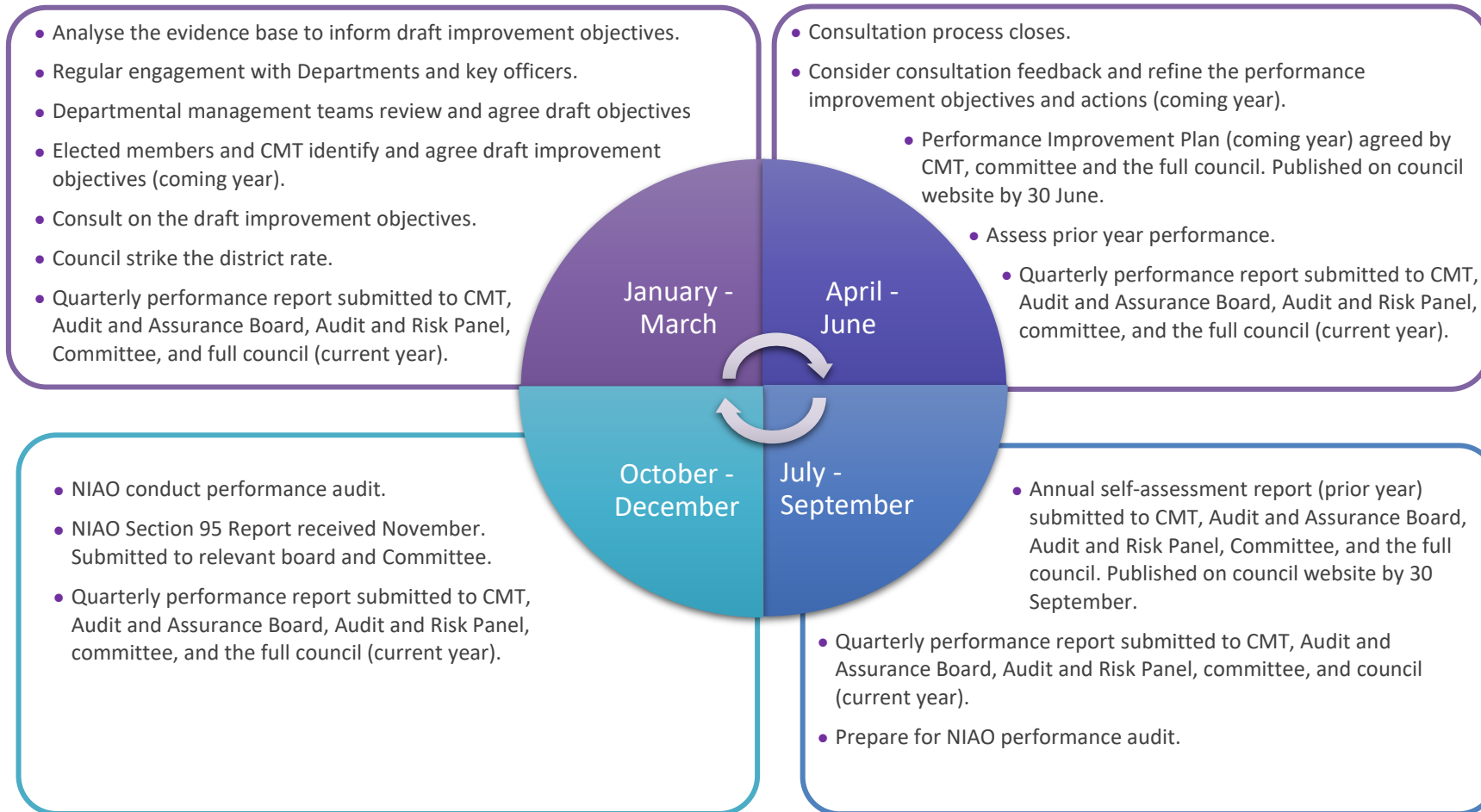
FIGURE 6: High-level governance arrangements



Annual performance management and improvement cycle

Every year, we review and update our performance improvement objectives and plan to ensure we are continuously improving. Our annual process to develop, monitor, report and review the council’s progress to deliver performance improvement is set out in Figure 7 below.

FIGURE 7: The council’s annual process to develop, monitor, report, and review progress.



Feedback on areas for improvement

We welcome ongoing feedback, comments, and suggestions on how we might improve our services and performance.

Your feedback matters

You can contact us with your comments or suggestions at any time:

Email: performance@belfastcity.gov.uk

Write to:

Strategic Performance Unit
City Organisational and Strategy Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Room 212
BT1 5GS

To provide your feedback or comments online, by email or telephone, go to our website:
www.belfastcity.gov.uk/contact/complaints-comments-compliments

Alternative formats

Our Performance Improvement Plan 2026-2027 is available in print and alternative formats. To ask for an alternative format, contact the Strategic Performance Unit. You can:

Email: performance@belfastcity.gov.uk

Write to:

Strategic Performance Unit
City Organisational and Strategy Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Room 212
BT1 5GS

You can also read or download a PDF version on our public consultation site - [YourSay Performance Improvement | Your say Belfast](#)

Contact us:

Strategic Performance Unit
City Organisational and Strategy Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Room 212
BT1 5GS



performance@belfastcity.gov.uk



028 9032 0202



www.belfastcity.gov.uk/corporateplan



Belfast
City Council

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Subject:	Workstyles Policy
Date:	22 May 2026
Reporting Officer:	Christine Sheridan, Director of HR
Contact Officer:	Andrea Anderson, Principal HR Advisor (Employee Relations)

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To present the Workstyles Policy for notation.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The committee is asked to note the contents of this report.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	In November 2021, a joint management and trade union working group (Return to the Office Working Group (RTO WG)) was established, to firstly review BCC services to support a return to the office for office-based staff who were working remotely during the pandemic, and secondly to consider the council's future operating model for office-based staff.
3.2	In September 2022, CMT agreed to implement a hybrid working arrangement, whereby office-based staff attend the office for 60% of their working week and work remotely for 40% of their working week. CMT also agreed that a policy should be developed to support the hybrid working arrangement. Accordingly, a pilot Workstyles Policy was developed by the RTO WG. The pilot policy was agreed by JNCC in December 2022, and by CMT in January 2023. The pilot Workstyles Policy was noted at Committee in January 2023 and implemented on 1 April 2023. To assist with the effective implementation and practical application of the policy, comprehensive guidance for employees and line managers and a FAQ document was developed.
3.3	The policy was implemented on the basis of an 18-month pilot and subject to review on a six-monthly basis throughout with review points at the end of September 2023, March 2024, and September 2024. The corporate review measures were building occupancy levels; customer complaints related to remote working; compliance with the 60% workplace / 40% remote strategy; and completion of the Homeworker and DSE self-assessment checklists and a pulse survey to gather participants' views on the policy and its overall personal impact; the views of line managers, managing in a hybrid environment; and the impact on individuals, the Council, and its customers / stakeholders when individuals are working remotely and when working in the office.
3.4	Consultation with management and trade unions on the revised policy took place in late 2025 / early 2026 and at its meeting on 26 March 2026, JNCC approved the revised policy. In addition, the revised policy was reviewed by subject matter experts from legal services, digital services, information governance, insurance services, finance and corporate health and safety.

	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.5	None
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.6	The Workstyles Policy has been subject to equality and rural needs screening.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix One – Workstyles Policy

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Workstyles Policy

Version 1 - xx 2026



Belfast
City Council

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Belfast City Council 'The Council' recognises that increased flexibility in respect of workstyles can assist with staff retention, in attracting new talent and in contributing to the Council's overall strategic objectives.
- 1.2 The Council's Workstyles Policy allows for BCC employees and where applicable, agency assignees¹, whose job role is defined as hybrid or field, to work remotely for 40% of their working week.
- 1.3 The policy aims to create a more agile, responsive, effective and efficient organisation which advances business performance, increases customer satisfaction and improves the health, wellbeing and diversity of our staff.
- 1.4 The policy formalises the Pilot Workstyles Policy and will be implemented from [date of implementation].
- 1.5 The policy replaces the Homeworking Information Pack (October 2004).
- 1.6 The policy is supported by guidance for managers and employees including a framework for identifying the most appropriate workstyle.
- 1.7 The policy has been developed in consultation with the Council's Trade Unions. Any revisions to the policy will be subject to consultation in accordance with the Council's Industrial Relations Framework.

2.0 Scope

- 2.1 The policy applies to all BCC employees and where applicable, agency assignees, whose role is defined as hybrid or field, as set out at 6.0.
- 2.2 The arrangements set out in the policy can be adapted as needed should they pose a challenge for disabled people in terms of access, participation or support required. The Council is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all its policies and procedures.
- 2.3 The policy does not form part of any contract of employment.

¹ For the purpose of the policy where 'employee' 'staff' or 'worker' is referenced this includes a comparable agency assignee.

3.0 Strategic position

- 3.1 The Council has opted for standardised office attendance, whereby individuals should work approximately 60% in the workplace. Therefore, individuals who work five days per week can work remotely two days per week (40%). Other working arrangements will be calculated on a pro-rata basis.
- 3.2 The implementation of the policy must not impact on the Council's ability to deliver its core business activities, to maintain its excellent levels of customer service, or to have a detrimental effect on individual and/or team performance and staff development.

4.0 General information

- 4.1 For employees with permanent formal homeworking arrangements in place, approved before 1 April 2023, and approved in accordance with the Homeworking Information Pack (2004) their formal homeworking agreement will continue to apply. Depending on the formal arrangement in place, that is, the number of days an individual currently works remotely, it may be the case that the individual can also avail of the Workstyles Policy.
- 4.2 Employees who apply for a formal homeworking arrangement after 2 June 2026 will be subject to the arrangements as set out in this policy.
- 4.3 As the policy formalises the pilot arrangements, as set out in the Pilot Workstyles Policy, employees whose formal homeworking arrangements were approved during the period 1 April 2023 and 1 June 2026, will continue to be subject to the arrangements as set out in this policy.
- 4.4 Should an individual wish to apply for homeworking or any other flexible working arrangement on a permanent basis they should follow the process as set out in the Council's Worklife Balance arrangements.
- 4.5 The remote working arrangement, as set out in the policy will not impact on an employee's contractual terms and conditions of employment in respect of hours of work or normal working location. The arrangement may be changed from time to time based on service, departmental or organisational need.
- 4.6 Individuals will be required to attend the workplace, outside of the policy arrangement, and on a particular day(s) at the request of management. This could include attendance at team meetings, training etc. or where for

operational reasons the meetings should be in-person or where management has determined that work is best conducted in-person.

- 4.7 In-person onboarding is considered to have significant benefits, such as, immediate interaction with colleagues and managers, hands on training and experience, social integration and learning in a supportive environment. Given this it is expected that individuals, as part of the induction process, will be required to attend the office for all or for the majority of their working week. Line managers will ensure that appropriate in-office arrangements are in place during the induction period to ensure individuals are supported in their new role. This may also require existing colleagues and line managers to attend the office on a more frequent basis and in excess of 60% of their working week during the on-boarding of new staff.
- 4.8 Individual working arrangements are subject to ongoing review. The Council reserves the right to modify or to withdraw an individual's hybrid working arrangement for reasons including a change in business need, lack of flexibility or performance concerns.
- 4.9 The policy seeks to offer choice to employees. As such, it is recognised that personal circumstances and preferences may influence an individual's decision with regards to remote working and there is no expectation for an individual to avail of the Workstyles Policy or to work remotely. An individual who does not wish to work remotely will be facilitated and a manager cannot force any member of their team to do so. Similarly, if an individual's personal circumstances change and they wish to increase their presence in the workplace this should be discussed with the line manager in the first instance.
- 4.10 Should it be the case that an individual does not have a suitable remote workstation and/or they cannot work safely and securely in their remote setting, the Workstyles Policy will not apply, and they will be required to attend the workplace.
- 4.11 Managers must apply the policy consistently and without exception.
- 4.12 Employees availing of the Workstyles Policy must adhere to the arrangements as set out.
- 4.13 Failure by managers or employees to apply or adhere to any of the policy arrangements may result in the arrangement being modified or withdrawn or formal action being initiated in accordance with the Council's HR processes.
- 4.14 Departmental Directors are ultimately responsible for ensuring that the policy is being applied correctly within their respective department.

5.0 Principles

- 5.1 The Council's approach to its Workstyles Policy is based on the following key principles:

Service delivery

The Council will continue to deliver its core business activities, to maintain its excellent levels of customer service, and to provide the best possible outcomes for residents and city visitors both now and in the future.

Visibility

Senior leaders will be visible in the workplace to provide leadership to the organisation.

Realism

While committed to providing modern working practices, managers and employees must be realistic and recognise that flexible workstyle options will not be appropriate for all jobs across all areas of the Council.

Trust and confidence

Managers and employees must be able to have trust and confidence in each other's ability to work effectively and perform well, wherever the working location.

Training and support

A more flexible workstyle presents unique challenges and demands on people managers and individuals who are working remotely. The Council will endeavour to support managers and employees by providing the correct tools, guidance, and training to maximise the success of the Workstyles Policy.

Managing performance

The introduction of a more flexible workstyle will mean, on occasions, moving away from physical supervision to managing outputs / performance and supporting individuals. Individuals will need to know what is expected of them and how they will be managed when working remotely.

Supporting external and internal organisational strategies

The introduction of this policy will assist the organisation in meeting its internal and external priorities, including climate, resilience, and sustainability and worklife balance.

6.0 Job role profiles

- 6.1 The default position for the Council will be a place based, role dependent working style model.
- 6.2 Identification of a workstyle is the responsibility of each Departmental Director.
- 6.3 For the purpose of the Workstyles Policy roles will be identified as one of the following:

Static worker (in the main the worker is in a fixed location)

An employee who spends the majority of their time working within an office location, or a centre or a depot, or are out daily in the public domain as a front-line worker and where there is a clear operational or business need for them to be present within Council premises or within the Council area and without the possibility of remote working.

Hybrid worker

An employee who spends the majority of their time working within an office location, (that is, approximately 60%) but with the possibility of remote working subject to operational and business need, service demands and a suitable remote workspace.

Field worker

An employee who uses an office or remote location as a base but predominately works in the field. There is a clear operational or business need for them to provide a service by operating in a mobile way for the majority of their time.

- 6.4 Given what is set out above, the Workstyles Policy will only apply to individuals who fall within the profile of a hybrid or field worker.
- 6.5 As set out at 4.6 regardless of an individual's employee profile, they will be required to attend the workplace, outside of the arrangements, and on particular day(s) at the request of management. This could include attendance at team meetings, training etc. or where for operational reasons the meetings should be in-person or where management has determined that work is best conducted in-person.

7.0 Arrangements for remote working

7.1 Remote working location

- 7.1.1 For the purpose of the policy, it is expected that an individual's remote working location will be their residential address.
- 7.1.2 It is not expected that individuals will work outside of Northern Ireland. In addition to the potential impact on tax and national insurance, there are a number of HR, technical and digital issues to be considered. Given this, a request to work outside of NI will need to be considered on its own merit.
- 7.1.3 Individuals are required to provide their remote working location on the Homeworker Self-Assessment checklist [further information in respect of this is set out at 7.11, 'Health and Safety']. Individuals must notify their line manager of any change of address and complete a new Homeworker Self-Assessment checklist and the Homeworking DSE Self-Assessment checklist.
- 7.1.4 Individuals are not permitted to work in settings such as cafes, co-working spaces, libraries, etc. where Council confidentiality could be compromised.
- 7.1.5 The ability to work remotely is not a substitute for childcare or other caring responsibilities or to facilitate individuals to carry out these responsibilities during core working hours. Individuals are required to have adequate provision in place to avoid conflict with work performance when working remotely.

7.2 Flexible Working

- 7.2.1 The Council's Flexi-time Scheme as set out in the Worklife Balance arrangements will continue to apply, if appropriate.
- 7.2.2 Individuals should use the on-line clocking system to record their hours worked when working remotely.
- 7.2.3 Individuals must only make clockings at their working location for the day in question unless there are specific circumstances which make this requirement impracticable, for example, an individual works remotely in the morning and attends the office in the afternoon or where the individual is attending another building for a business related meeting. Such circumstances should be discussed and agreed with the individual's line manager in advance.
- 7.2.4 Failure to apply or adhere to the arrangements, as set out above, may result in the flexible or remote working arrangement being modified or withdrawn or formal action being initiated in accordance with the Council's

HR processes.

7.3 ICT, equipment, and furniture

- 7.3.1 It is considered that the introduction of a more flexible workstyle is mutually beneficial and that the costs and benefits of working remotely will cancel each other out. Consequently, the Council will not provide individuals with equipment or furniture for the purpose of working remotely.
- 7.3.2 The use of laptops will continue to support the working model. In all cases, all equipment will remain the property of Belfast City Council.
- 7.3.3 As set out at 4.10 individuals when working remotely are required to have a suitable workstation where they can work safely and securely.
- 7.3.4 Individuals working remotely must have access to a reliable and secure broadband service capable of supporting the systems and applications required to carry out their duties effectively. It is the individual's responsibility to ensure that their home broadband is sufficient to permit remote working without disruption to performance, service delivery, or communication with colleagues and customers. Where broadband provision is inadequate and adversely impacts work, the Workstyles Policy will not apply, and the individual will be required to attend the workplace.

7.4 BCC policies, confidentiality, and security

- 7.4.1 Individuals are required to comply with all current Council policies, procedures, guidelines, agreed working practices and any relevant collective agreements.
- 7.4.2 Individuals are required to adhere to the rules on the processing of personal data and ensure the security of all personal information being processed, as set out in the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018 and Data Use and Access Act 2025.
- 7.4.3 Individuals should familiarise themselves with the guidance on Homeworking and Data Protection.
- 7.4.4 It is vital that individuals are vigilant against cybercrime, both for the security of Council information and for the security of their own personal and financial information.
- 7.4.5 Individuals should familiarise themselves with Appendix A of the Computer use policy - security tips for laptops and other mobile equipment and with the Provision of mobile and smartphones, terms and conditions of use.

7.4.6 Individuals must comply with all Digital/ICT, cybersecurity, and information governance policies, and any associated guidance, as a condition of remote working. This includes adherence to updated or newly issued policies and cyber security controls as technology, security standards and cyber-threats evolve. Individuals are responsible for ensuring their continued compliance to protect Council systems, data and equipment.

7.5 Communication

7.5.1 Individuals must be contactable during their working day by their line manager and by colleagues.

7.5.2 Individuals should ensure that their Outlook calendar is shared with their team and is kept up to date.

7.6 Annual leave

7.6.1 Annual leave should be applied for in the same way as it would if the individual was in the workplace. It is important that individuals take annual leave throughout the year not only to support operational planning but also for their own health and wellbeing and worklife balance.

7.6.2 Further information on annual leave can found in the Council's Worklife Balance arrangements.

7.7 Sickness absence

7.7.1 Individuals should not work if they are unwell / unfit. Regardless of working location, if an individual is unwell / unfit for work they should follow the absence reporting procedure in accordance with the Council's Attendance Policy and Attendance Booklet.

7.8 Remote working costs

7.8.1 Individuals will be responsible for all costs associated with their place of residence for example, heating, lighting and broadband.

7.8.2 Individuals will be responsible for any home insurance to cover loss or damage to personal property in use while they undertake work duties.

7.8.3 Individuals may need to inform their household insurer if they are working at home to ensure that buildings and contents insurance is not invalidated.

7.8.4 Individuals may need to refer to their tenancy agreement or landlord for advice to ensure that they have agreement to use the premises for work purposes.

7.9 Mileage claims

7.9.1 Mileage claims for car users will be in accordance with the Council's Car User Policy.

7.10 Health and well-being

7.10.1 Individuals should ensure that they are not overworking. Downtime from work is essential and individuals should make every effort to look after their own health and well-being.

7.10.2 Individuals should take adequate breaks throughout the working day and meetings should be scheduled to allow for adequate breaks in-between.

7.10.3 Individuals are encouraged to raise and discuss any concerns regarding their health and well-being with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.

7.11 Health and Safety

7.11.1 The Council is committed to providing and maintaining a safe and healthy working environment for all, ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of all employees.

7.11.2 A greater responsibility, in respect of health and safety, is inherently placed on individuals when working remotely given that options for supervision, control etc. are generally significantly reduced.

7.11.3 Individuals should familiarise themselves with the Homeworking Code of Practice which details the health and safety roles and responsibilities of both managers and employees and the procedure to be followed when an individual is working remotely.

7.11.4 Individuals must complete the Homeworker Self-Assessment checklist and the Homeworking DSE Self-Assessment checklist.

7.11.5 The Council will make every effort to meet the needs of those individuals, where possible, who require specialised equipment as a reasonable adjustment or if related to a disability.

7.11.6 In-person work meetings or other work-related activities with colleagues, customers, etc. should not be carried out at an individual's remote working location.

7.11.7 Any accident that occurs while working remotely, in connection with work-activities, must be reported to the line manager in accordance with BCC accident reporting procedures.

7.11.8 As set out at 4.10, should it be the case that an individual does not have a suitable workstation and/or they cannot work safely and securely in their remote setting, the Workstyles Policy will not apply, and they will be required to attend the workplace.



Subject:	Belfast Child – Seamless Pathway Model for Children & Families
Date:	22 May 2026
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Brian Carr, Portfolio Manager Michelle McParland, Portfolio & Programme Co-ordinator

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this paper is to submit for the consideration of Members the 'Belfast Child' Strategy document for formal endorsement, following its consideration at the Community Planning Partnership on 16 April 2026.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. note the work undertaken by the Belfast Area Outcomes Group to develop ‘Belfast Child’ blueprint under the auspices of the Belfast Agenda commitments. ii. note that the Community Planning Partnership considered the Belfast Child document on 16 April 2026, and requested that individual partner organisations seek endorsement through their respective governance and decision-making processes. iii. note the next steps for the development of an associated action plan, to be brought back to the Partnership in due course; and iv. consider and agree that Council endorses the ‘Belfast Child’ blueprint, in principle, with any specific resource considerations emerging from the action plan relating to the Council brought back for members consideration and approval. v. agree that the Chief Executive (or a nominee) attend the proposed launch event.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Members will be aware of the importance given within the Belfast Agenda to supporting our children and young people to reach their full potential and achieve the best educational outcomes and life chances possible. As part of the associated 4-year implementation plan, there is a commitment to “design a seamless developmental pathway” for children and create a joint resourced delivery model” for children aged 0-8 years.</p>
3.2	<p>In line with this commitment, the Belfast Area Outcomes Group (convened by the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust) has led the development of the ‘Belfast Child’ pathway framework’ which is attached at Appendix 1. This blueprint sets out a citywide vision to ensure that every child aged 0-8 years in Belfast can benefit from a seamless developmental journey. It’s built on a shared commitment to a whole-child, whole-family, and whole-community model, which creates support networks where families, communities, and services all play a crucial role.</p>
3.3	<p>This document shares the story of how a vision has been collaboratively designed, drawing on the wisdom of experts and the vast experience of Belfast’s community and government partners. Ultimately, this document provides a clear roadmap for how partners will work together to create an environment where every child in Belfast can truly thrive. The shared vision is that every child in the city is supported to realise their full potential through a clear commitment by agencies and services in Belfast to align, connect and collaborate around families. This collaborative approach aims to deliver the best possible outcomes for children.</p>
3.4	<p>The Belfast Child is intentionally ambitious. It seeks to build an integrated, city-wide support ecosystem capable of providing timely and effective intervention beginning at pre-conception and continuing until at least age eight. This represents the first stage of a journey that will, over</p>

	time, extend to all children and young people under 18, aligning with the Belfast Agenda's 2035 vision.
3.5	At the Community Planning Partnership meeting on 16 April 2026, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust presented the final draft of the Belfast Child document for the consideration of the CPP. Members will note that there was broad support for the Belfast Child framework and the ambitions contained therein including Belfast becoming a 'Child Friendly City'. It was acknowledged however, that further work still remained to create a supporting implementation/action plan as well as the need for individual partner organisations to seek endorsement through their respective governance and decision making processes of the Belfast Child framework.
3.6	Within this context, correspondence from the Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has been received by the Chief Executive (attached an Appendix 2), requesting that the Council consider the 'Belfast Child' document, with a view to supporting its endorsement. It outlines the opportunity presented to create important foundations for Belfast's development as a truly child friendly city and represents a significant opportunity to strengthen partnership delivery under the Belfast Agenda. The correspondence also requests the possible involvement of the Chief Executive in the future launch of the 'Belfast Child' document.
	<u>Next steps</u>
3.7	It is understood that the next steps for the Belfast Area Outcomes Group is to engage with partners to consider key actions and potential lead partners in the development of an action plan with clear resource considerations set out. It would be the intention that the emerging draft action plan would be brought back to the Community Planning Partnership for consideration in due course. Any proposals which relate to the Council would be subject to direct engagement and be subject to established governance and decision-making processes.
3.8	Members are asked to consider endorsing the Belfast Child Strategy Document, in principle, with any specific resource commitments emerging from the action planning process to be brought back for members consideration in due course.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.9	There are no immediate financial or human resource implications arising directly from this report. Resource implications will be understood and considered following the development of a detailed action plan, which will provide assurance around the delivery of the Belfast Child Strategy.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.10	The Belfast Child document has a strong focus on equality and inclusion. It explicitly recognises the need to support high-risk and vulnerable groups and promotes a preventative,

	whole system approach that will have positive equality and good relations impacts across the city. Any Equality Impact Assessment would be carried out by BHSCT who are the lead for this work. There are no rural needs implications.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Belfast Child Strategy Document Appendix 2: Letter from BHCST to Council seeking endorsement



The Belfast Child

A seamless journey of development
for Belfast children aged 0-8



'Belfast is a Child Friendly City'



The Belfast Child

A seamless journey of development
for Belfast children aged 0-8





Foreword

In the heart of Belfast, a place, a city built on resilience, community and hope, our children represent the brightest part of our shared future. They are the centre of everything we do.

As Chairperson of the Belfast Area Outcomes Group and Director of Children's Community Services, I am delighted to introduce 'The Belfast Child' seamless pathway plan for children from birth to eight years. This plan reflects a collective commitment across statutory, community, and voluntary partners in Belfast to give every child the strongest start in life and to make sure that the support they receive is connected, accessible and responsive to their needs.

The early years of a child's life shape their future health, learning, and wellbeing. Families should experience joined-up support — from pregnancy, through early childhood, and into the first years of school — without confusion or duplication. This pathway sets out how our organisations will work together to make that vision a reality.

It builds on the strengths that already exist in our communities: skilled practitioners, trusted relationships with families, and a shared belief that early intervention changes lives. Together, we have agreed clear priorities and actions to improve coordination, reduce gaps between services, and make it easier for parents to get the help they need when they need it.

Our success will depend on continued collaboration, transparency, and a focus on outcomes for children. I want to thank all partners — across health, education, early years, community and voluntary sectors — for their commitment to this joint endeavour.

By working together in this way, we can create a Belfast where every child's journey from birth to age eight is supported, connected, and full of opportunity.

On behalf of all the members of this partnership, statutory agencies and community and voluntary sector alike, I am delighted to commend this document to you all.

Kerrylee Weatherall

Director of Children's Community Services,
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

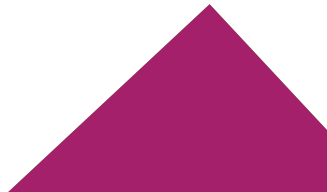
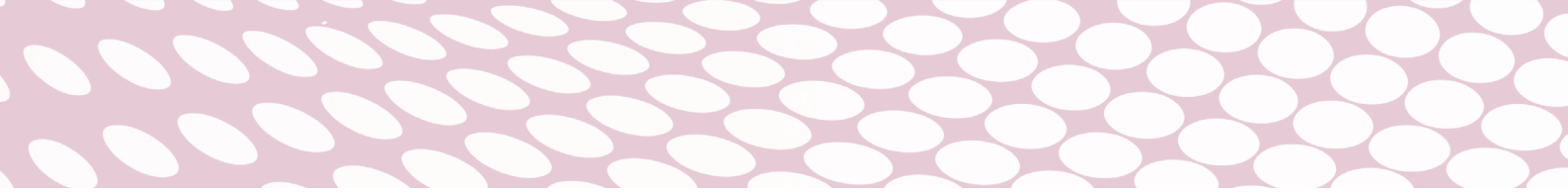


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I. Introduction

This document, 'The Belfast Child' is a blueprint for a new approach from the Belfast Area Outcomes Group, to help every child aged 0 to 8 years, to have a successful developmental journey. It's built on a shared commitment to a whole-child, whole-family, and whole-community model, which creates support networks where families, communities, and services all play a crucial role. This document shares the story of how we collaboratively designed this vision, drawing on the wisdom of experts and the vast experience of Belfast's community and government partners. Ultimately, this document provides a clear roadmap for how we will work together to create an environment where every child in Belfast can truly thrive.

Core beliefs

'The Belfast Child' is a child-centred initiative focused on a seamless developmental journey for all children aged 0-8. By prioritising children and their interests, in every decision that impacts their lives, we acknowledge their diverse experiences and learning styles. Our goal is to create safe, happy, and loving environments where children can grow up healthy, confident, and resilient. Since strong family relationships are vital for a child's emotional, social and cognitive development, we will support families to improve their overall well-being.

- Our vision is to build an integrated, citywide support system that provides appropriate, timely intervention for all Belfast children and their families, starting at the point of pre-conception and continuing throughout their childhood.
- Our approach includes equipping parents and families with resources and support to understand key developmental stages, which is essential for advancing equality of opportunity for our children.
- We believe it is essential to offer proactive support as soon as developmental milestones are identified as delayed and thus preventing minor issues from becoming major obstacles.
- Every Belfast child deserves a fair start. This is the foundation for more equitable outcomes for our children, families, and communities.
- The dividends of effective early support are evident in improved indicators of physical and mental health, increased educational attainment, and enhanced socio-economic mobility.

The core elements of the Belfast Child seamless pathway vision are:

- **INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY:** By bringing together local partners to support families in our most vulnerable communities, we will test the recommendations from the Jones and McAllister reviews. This focused approach will help us develop better, more effective family support services.
- **BELFAST CHILD RELATIONAL PRACTICE MODEL:** By providing a unified approach for all our partners, ensuring every organisation's efforts are focused on the child and family relationship.
- **CHILD FRIENDLY BELFAST:** Represents a collective promise from each of the city partnerships to invest in the well-being of our children and young people. We will draw on successful models of support from Northern Ireland, Ireland, the UK and beyond to inform our work.
- **BELFAST CHILD DASHBOARD:** An accessible tool for tracking performance and accountability, measuring the impact on children, families and the wider community.
- **BELFAST CHILD PARTNERSHIP DELIVERY:** Dedicated to building a unified network of support for Belfast's children and families. By collaborating across different services and sectors, we will smooth the developmental journey for every child and increase their chances of a happy, healthy and successful life.
- **BELFAST CHILD LOCAL NETWORKS:** By strengthening our existing partnerships, we will improve cross-sector collaboration at the local level through our Belfast Child networks. This expansion ensures organisations work more cohesively to support children and families in every neighbourhood.

Underpinning our entire approach is a consistent focus on strengthening and nurturing relationships by ensuring consistent messaging. This is critical for fostering positive engagement with children, families, and communities, and for aligning the efforts of all organisations and government departments involved in supporting the children of Belfast.

This blueprint will evolve through broad stakeholder engagement and partner contributions, shaping its detailed design, implementation and delivery over time.

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2. Our strategic context

2.1. Strategic alignment with a practical focus

Our work aligns with regional and local strategic goals for Belfast. We are committed to developing a cohesive journey for children and families in Belfast, ensuring that various policy aims are practically implemented using a joined up approach to improve their lives, ultimately improving outcomes for our children and families.

The key elements of strategic context are:

2.2. Programme for Government - Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS) 2020-30

The commitment that all of Northern Ireland's children will have the best start in life and flourish personally within a supportive society, illustrated by the below extract from the CYPS 2020-30:



The work we take forward on the seamless pathway will also align with the new Northern Ireland Programme for Government focus on early years.

2.3. Educational Inequalities

The 'A Fair Start' report and its action plan is committed to improving educational outcomes and tackling inequality, through a sharper focus on early childhood development. It advocates for a seamless journey from pregnancy onward, ensuring children receive timely and appropriate support. Research cited in this report, shows that investing early provides a more equitable foundation and yields long-term financial benefits for society. For example, earlier intervention reduces the need for costly future interventions in areas like special education, social services and criminal justice.

This report suggests reviewing current early year's programmes – Getting Ready for Baby (GRfB), Getting Ready for Toddler (GRfT) and Getting Ready to Learn (GRtL) – and boosting overall investment in the sector.

A key focus of our work is to address the underlying causes of underachievement, a goal shared with 'A Fair Start's' advocacy for a community-wide, place-based approach centred on equal opportunity.

Initiatives like the Raise Programme will support local partnerships in creating tailored strategic plans, fostering collaboration to identify and overcome learning barriers.

Aligning with other government initiatives is crucial to implementing the vision of prioritising early childhood care and education, while also maximising its impact on a child's future success.





2.4. Review of Children's Social Care in Northern Ireland

Our work is guided by the Independent Review of Children's Social Care in Northern Ireland, commissioned by Health Minister, Robin Swann and conducted by Professor Ray Jones.

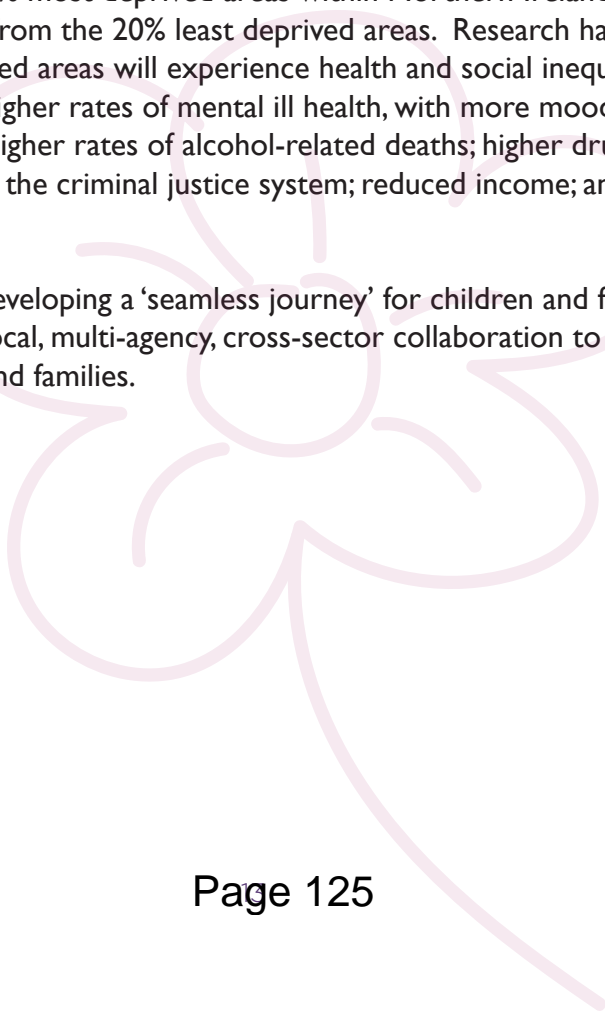
This aligns with the overarching Health and Wellbeing strategy, 'Delivering Together', which aims to provide early and intensive family support, fostering nurturing home environments to reduce the number children entering care, and ensure the public care system achieves optimal outcomes.

The Jones review specifically scrutinised the quality, equity, resilience and sustainability of Children's Services in HSC Trusts, assessing their ability to meet current and future demand, engage vulnerable families, and support staff. It also evaluated the efficiency of the Trust-based model for regional services.

Despite its social care focus, the review highlighted the vital need to re-orient the system towards family support through aligned locality working and integrated support – an approach essential for improving outcomes for children and families.

This is particularly pertinent given the disproportionate number of children entering care from Northern Ireland's most deprived areas (over 40%, with 50% of the top 100 most deprived SOA's (MDM's NISRA 2017) being in Belfast), where health and social inequalities are prevalent. In 2017/18, 43% of children taken into care were from the 20% most deprived areas within Northern Ireland; by way of comparison around 5% of children originated from the 20% least deprived areas. Research has shown it is more likely that children in those most deprived areas will experience health and social inequalities, such as lower life expectancy; higher suicide rates; higher rates of mental ill health, with more mood and anxiety disorders and more instances of self-harm; higher rates of alcohol-related deaths; higher drug-related deaths; greater likelihood of becoming involved in the criminal justice system; reduced income; and increased homelessness and unemployment.

The review's suggested path for developing a 'seamless journey' for children and families in Belfast is central to our proposals, advocating for local, multi-agency, cross-sector collaboration to meet the needs of the most vulnerable babies, children and families.




2.5. The Belfast Agenda 2024-28: Leadership priorities

The Belfast Community Planning Partnership requested the Belfast Area Outcomes Group to design a seamless pathway for children and families as proposed in the updated 2024 'Belfast Agenda'. In response, the 'Belfast Child' initiative was developed. 'The Belfast Agenda', Belfast's Community Plan prioritises critical, multi-agency collaborations that drive significant short, medium and long-term impact. These are issues which are identified as meeting the following criteria:

- ✓ **Urgent/of critical importance** for the City.
- ✓ Can only be delivered through **multi agency collaboration**.
- ✓ A **partnership delivery approach** can improve scale and pace of outcomes.
- ✓ **Can produce tangible and multiple impacts** in the short, medium and long-term.

Our focus on a seamless journey for babies, children and families, aimed at preventing young people from entering the care system, is one such priority. This work will receive strong leadership support as it is developed, tested and scaled. The initiative directly links to the Belfast Agenda's goals concerning educational inequality and creating skills and employment pathways for disadvantaged individuals and communities. Locally, these three areas of work will be joined up to support families and communities more effectively.





3. Why does a whole child, family, community and system approach matter?

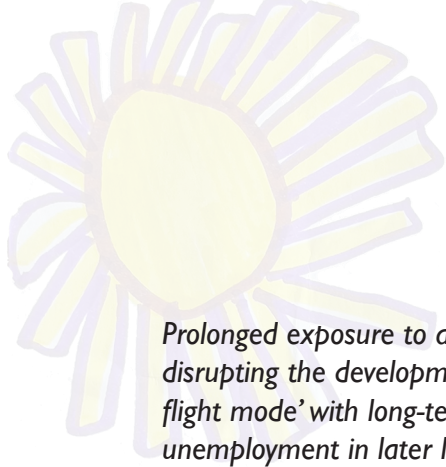
Extensive research confirms that providing early support and high-quality early years experiences creates the essential foundation for positive outcomes across individual, societal, and economic levels. This has informed our focus on adopting whole-child, whole-family, whole-community, and whole-system approaches in policy and practice, both locally and internationally. Specifically, the Northern Ireland ‘A Fair Start’ report recommends implementing targeted, community and place-based strategies to intensify support for young people in areas with high levels of disadvantage and educational under-achievement. The extract below from ‘A Fair Start’ illustrates this policy intent:

A ‘whole community approach to education’ has a ‘place-based’ focus that coheres the greatest concentration of effort in those localities with the greatest concentration of educational underachievement. At a minimum such approaches promise more integrated working practices at local level, but they also have the potential to shift the focus to how sources of support for children and young people can be configured strategically, creating greater collective impact.

Our explorations further afield have amplified the crucial nature of a whole system approach, summed up well in this extract from a Boston (USA) College for Thriving Children Publication ‘strengthening whole family supports in early childhood’:

The early years of life are a time of unparalleled growth that is deeply influenced by children’s environments and experiences. For healthy development and learning, all children need safe, affirming, and positive early experiences within their families and outside of their homes. These experiences include safe, stable, nurturing environments within the home where the wellbeing of mothers, fathers, and other caregivers are supported. A caregiver’s mental health and levels of stress influence children’s behaviors, language development, and brain development, thus the focus needs to be on whole child and whole family support. Experiences in the community are also important to ensure that children have opportunities to learn, play, and grow in spaces that are free from violence and harmful chemicals, and in environments that are culturally-affirming, promote positive relationships and access to resources that can reduce stress on both caregivers and children.

Toxic stress, defined by the Harvard Centre on the Developing Child as ‘prolonged activation of the stress response system,’ can be experienced when a child goes through frequent and significant adversity, such as deprivation, neglect, abuse, or exposure to violence without adequate adult support. Families experiencing poverty, and families that face systemic barriers that limit access to protective resources are especially at risk.



Prolonged exposure to adversity can potentially cause physical changes to the structure of children's brains, disrupting the development of strong brain architecture and heightening their propensity to be in 'fight or flight mode' with long-term implications for health and learning. Early childhood adversity is associated with unemployment in later life.

Fortunately, children thrive when their families thrive, and there are proven strategies for mitigating the effects of the adverse experiences of children and families while building on their strengths. Research demonstrates that: caring relationships, access to basic resources, access to opportunities, and safe and predictable early environments can buffer children and their families against the adverse consequences of toxic stress and boost healthy development and learning.

While this example originates from the US, its focus on stress, adversity, disadvantage, and trauma holds significant relevance in Belfast, given the city's troubled past and the context of our future work. A core element of our deliberations has been the pivotal role of connection: with parents, families, the wider community, and various support services. Our seamless journey framework was informed by a chronological understanding of a child's attachment, needs, drawing upon the Gordon Neufeld model of attachment, outlined below.

Children's attachment needs in the first 6 years

Years 0-1 - SENSES

Babies are sensory beings – they have an instinct to pursue closeness. Baby's needs are met by touch, taste, smell, hearing and sight by the parents / caregivers enabling opportunities for this. Each activity that you do with a new-born is an opportunity to connect – feeding, rocking, singing, changing the nappy – are all times when mum / dad / caregiver can connect to the child. Even in these earliest days the baby will be able to mimic their caregiver – and that is how the foundation of early language is developed.

Years 1-2 - CONSISTENCY, RELIABILITY AND REPITITION

Toddlers begin to talk and walk and their personality starts to develop from learned behaviours and mimicking those around them. What starts to emerge as their character is a collection of ways the child has learned to copy behaviour and the actions of people they are close to (nurture having a key influence on the development of the toddler). At this stage brain development is still key and the need for a consistent caregiver who can be attuned and attentive to the child, leads to a secure attachment.



Years 2-3 - BELONGING

At this stage the child has a strong sense of needing to belong – so those people who have been key in the early years of a child’s life continue to be really important. The early attachment relationships support the development of the foundational constructs of social communication. Social communication greatly impacts mental health across the lifespan and is also highly vulnerable to neurodevelopmental threats and adversities.

Years 3-4 - SIGNIFICANCE

At this stage the child wants to be special and loved by their parents or caregivers, they trust that you will respond consistently to their needs. They long for approval, hunger to be heard and want to matter to people that they are connected to. They need you to spend quality time with them and engage in activities that they enjoy. They need you to demonstrate positive relationships and emotional regulation in your own interactions.

Years 4-5 - LOVE

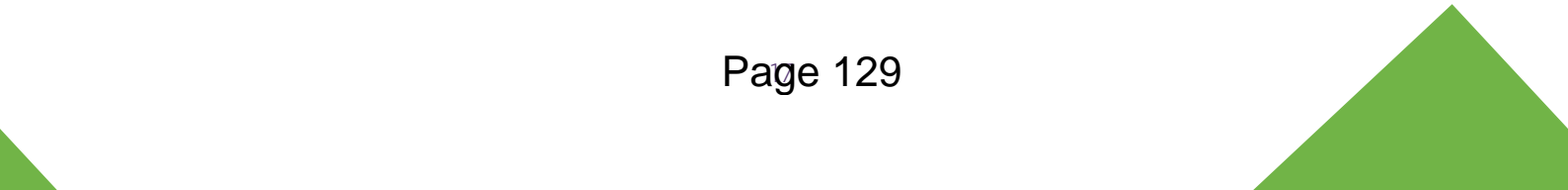
The child can express love to their special people – they can start to show empathy and become more aware of others and their needs. They need us to be available to them and to delight in them. They are learning to understand and regulate their emotions and need us to notice how they are feeling and help them to name those emotions and guide them in managing the full range of emotions.

Years 5-6 - BEING KNOWN

If the child feels secure then they will share their inner world with you – they are their own individual and want to be recognised as such. They will feel good, competent, worthwhile, wanted and lovable. They will regard their caregivers as responsive and trustworthy and see the world as a safe place to explore.

For children aged 6-8 years, attachment needs evolve as they navigate increased independence and social relationships beyond the family. Their need for a caregiver remains crucial, but the focus shifts from constant physical proximity to a secure “safe base” of emotional support. This secure base, consistency and emotional validation, fosters self-regulation, trust and healthy relationships.

Our design work, detailed in the next section, confirms our work must address the whole-life experience of children, extending beyond education. To achieve our desired outcomes, we must combine the efforts of schools and other public services with immediate and extended families, as well as communities and local organisations. This collaborative approach will create a seamless journey that delivers tangible results.



4. Our design approach – Building on our strengths

4.1. Appreciative inquiry

To create a seamless journey, our design process employed an asset-based appreciative inquiry methodology, deliberately building on current strengths. The work systematically advanced through discovery and design stages during collaborative workshops, ultimately leading to the production of this blueprint.

A short summary of three key workshops in the design process is provided here:

4.2. Workshop One: Shared Understanding and Objectives

4.2.1. 'All on the same page' – shared understandings

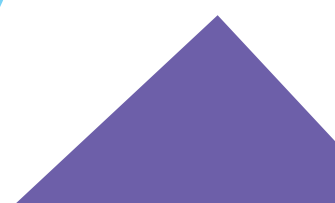
The primary goal of our initial whole-group workshop was to develop a common understanding of and gain consensus on the 'seamless development pathway'.

Using the metaphor of a 'seam' helped us discuss the critical transition points in a child's journey from 0-8. This exploration included examining the inevitable 'seams', or handovers, between services and stages of development in our complex, multi-sector system. The consensus was that our goal should be to make the system feel smooth and seamless for children and families. The key is not to eliminate these seams but to strengthen them, ensuring they are points of connection, not weakness.

The workshop discussions also centred on several key themes as principles to guide our approach. These are outlined as follows.

4.2.2. 'What's Strong?' – assets-based approach

A key element of our strategy is to adopt an asset-based approach from the outset. This means we will proactively support and build upon the existing strengths, interests, and skills of babies, children and families across Belfast. This focus on assets, rather than deficits, will enable a more preventative approach to our work.





4.2.3. Belfast Values Babies and Children

Our conversation centred on the macro-environment for Belfast's children and babies, considering how the city's policies and societal values affect their development. We specifically explored how strategic design and communication within city-wide policies could encourage Belfast to be recognised and function as a 'child friendly' city.

4.2.4. Belfast Values Families

We agreed on the vital need to acknowledge and support Belfast's parents and caregivers, particularly in challenging economic and social circumstances. Acknowledging that some policies and services can feel judgemental and unattainable to struggling families, we agreed that the system's role is to be a source of support, not judgement.

We recognised that factors like employment and income complicate the task of providing children with what they need.


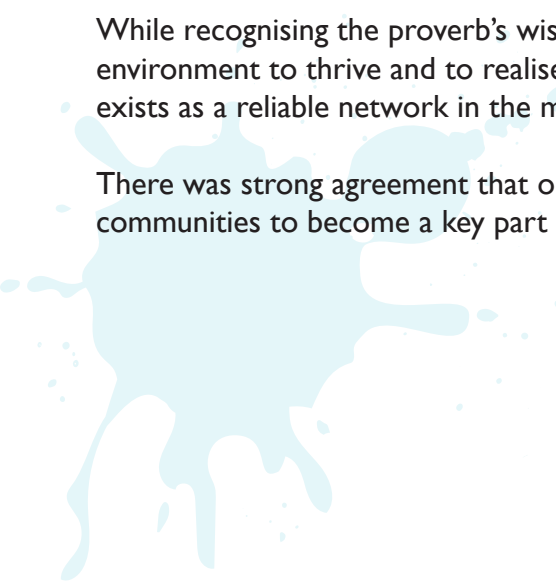
Parents and caregivers are crucial to a child's success, and so our future work will focus on supporting the entire family's journey, which ultimately benefits the child, family and wider community.

4.2.5. The role of 'The Village'

Our small group discussions examined the role of local communities in supporting child development, prompted by the proverb 'it takes a village to raise a child'.

While recognising the proverb's wisdom – that children need a broad, safe, healthy and supportive environment to thrive and to realise their hopes and dreams – participants discussed if 'the village' still exists as a reliable network in the modern world.

There was strong agreement that our future work must focus on supporting and empowering local communities to become a key part of providing a safe and nurturing environment for children.



4.2.6. The voice of Belfast Children and Families

There is strong support for actively involving Belfast's children and families, by ensuring their voices and lived experiences inform our work. This engagement will use a combination of existing methods and targeted, new initiatives as the work develops.

4.2.7. 'I Statements' - examples

We were encouraged to develop 'I statements' to articulate a child's perspective on what a future development journey might look like and feel like. Below are a number of examples of these statements:

- I am in a calm atmosphere in the womb
- I want a full-term birth with my caregiver able to give me stable care when I am born
- I need to be held, fed when hungry and kept dry and clean
- I can safely explore my environment and build relationships (first 1001 days)
- I enjoy being responded to
- I need opportunities to practice lifting my head and body to develop strength
- I have a relaxed caregiver, a calm home, with enough support, nutrition and resource to support me
- I have a house free of toxins such as smoke, drugs and alcohol
- I have caregivers, who are able to focus on our family and are free from substance dependency (alcohol / drugs / smoking)
- I need to be talked to and communicated with as I grow
- I love baby massage
- I am nurtured to look, see, sing and play
- I need to learn to feed myself, go to the toilet, wait a little for what I want
- I need a stable, consistent environment
- I live in a community that is supportive and accessible
- I have a home that is appropriate to meet my needs and allows me to feel safe and independent as I grow
- I have a family who are calm, safe and supportive
- I have all my basic needs met
- I have people around me who focus on my potential not my problems
- I am in a community that values children
- I am safe and secure
- I am supported to reach my potential
- I am in a supportive, nurturing family and community environment
- I have services around my family that are accessible and able to provide reliable support

The focus of this work, on engaging with children and families, will encourage us to gather these perspectives routinely as part of this approach to partnership delivery.

4.3. Workshop two: What's Strong?

In line with our appreciative inquiry approach, we have explored existing practices in Belfast. We discovered a strong and diverse range of practice, collaboration and experience across the city, providing a highly valuable platform for future work. The expertise of organisations in the community, voluntary and statutory sectors provides a rich and valuable platform to build upon. This rich network of support includes:

- Family Support Hubs – collaboratively bringing together organisations that offer timely, early intervention and support to children, young people and their carers.
- Midwives and Health Visitors including specialist midwives and health visiting teams for perinatal mental health and for postnatal mental health (Swans and Signets).
- Sure Start, covering the top 30% of SOA's as defined by deprivation. Sure Starts provide antenatal, postnatal and early years (0-3) services. Sure Start provides both universal and targeted services which can include more specialist additional needs programmes.
- Pre-schools, Nursery Schools, Primary Schools and Special Schools.
- Specialist services for children with additional needs e.g. SOLAS in South Belfast, Kids Together in West Belfast, Butterfly Club and MENCAP.
- Community and private daycare facilities.
- Womens Centres.
- Emotional Health and Wellbeing Team in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.
- Early Intervention Support Services.
- Numerous community organisations delivering early years and family support services.
- Family support and children's support projects supported by Children's community services in BHSCT.
- Larger voluntary organisations including Action for Children, Save the Children, Barnardos, and NCB.
- Anti-poverty and advice activity co-ordinated by Belfast City Council.



Delivery and commissioning structure

- Locality Planning Groups – identifying needs and supporting localities, wherever possible, to come up with their own answers to delivering seamless pathways locally.
- Belfast Area Outcomes Group – implements outcomes based planning for the Belfast Trust area.

Our exploration of this picture of delivery, included area-based presentations from group members focusing on several parts of Belfast and different elements of support and collaboration. These were:

- Greater Shankill Partnership and the Greater Shankill Children and Young People Zone presented by Nicola Verner and Jackie Redpath.
- West Belfast Community Education Improvement Programme presented by Angie Mervyn.
- East Belfast Early Learning Community presented by Tracey Ripley-McElvogue.

Our in-depth reviews confirmed the strong foundation of community organisations and local partnerships in Belfast. These networks provide crucial reach, insights and connections within neighbourhoods and communities.

Presentations and discussions reinforced that a community-based approach, which tailors support to local needs, is central to creating a seamless journey and delivering impact for children and families. While there are rich resources and skills to build upon for the ‘Belfast Child’ initiative, we must address the destabilisation effects of funding uncertainty.

There was also a consensus on the need for more systematic city-wide and local co-ordination of support systems. By focusing on scaling up exemplary practices, we can more efficiently and effectively serve Belfast’s children and families.

4.4. Workshop three: Expert inspiration, learning and advice

We gained valuable insights from academics and expert practitioners on the evidence base for effective children’s pathways.

Dr Sarah Meekin, BHSCT, Psychological Services.

Dr Meekin’s session focused on **‘Good Enough Parenting’ – Developing a Belfast Message Together**, exploring modern research on ‘Best Care’ in bringing up baby and how to effectively communicate this to the parents of Belfast.

Dr Glenda Walsh and Dr Suzanne McCartney, Stranmillis University College, Queens University.

Dr Walsh and Dr McCartney’s session highlighted the critical role of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Shaping Northern Ireland’s Future. This provided:





- An overview of the evidence base on the importance of Early Years Education and Care and how it impacts later educational, societal and economic outcomes
- A closer examination of the current situation for 0-3 year-olds in NI and what still needs to happen.
- A focus on the 4-8 year-olds in Northern Ireland and getting it right for them – this illustrated very strongly the importance of play as learning practice.

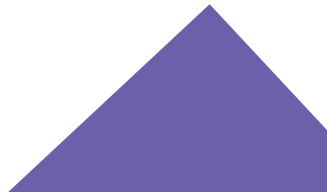
Dr Siobhan Fitzpatrick CBE, Early Childhood Peace Consortium.

Dr Fitzpatrick delivered a session focused on integrated, place-based approaches and the key challenges she saw in NI for:

- The need for strategic alignment between the Fair Start report and a new Early Years Care, Education and Development Strategy.
- Increasing funding by learning from countries like New Zealand, Finland and Ireland.
- Advocating for a later school starting age (raised to 6) – we have the youngest school starting age in the world.
- Developing a seamless, holistic curriculum that focuses on socio-emotional wellbeing, executive functioning and self-regulation in addition to language and motor skills - for babies, toddlers, preschool children and first stage of primary school.

These sessions were highly informative, and we intend to remain engaged with this expert group as our seamless journey blueprint develops.

The insights gained, from the experts, will be used to create practical pathways that deliver better outcomes for all children and families in Belfast, taking into consideration their specialised perspectives and the worldwide examples they focused on.



5. Objectives: what are we trying to achieve in Belfast?

Put simply, we want all children and young people in Belfast to have the best start in life.

The Belfast Child approach is designed to transform potential into positive outcomes by focusing on three key goals:

1. **Seamless Pathway:** We will align cross-sectoral skills and resources to design and deliver a cohesive early years pathway (aged 8 and under), helping children realise their full potential.
2. **Targeted Wrap-around Support:** We will strengthen our collective capacity to provide focused, wrap-around support, ensuring a positive developmental journey for all.
3. **Family Voice:** We will develop better methods for listening to and empowering children, young people and families to participate in decisions affecting their lives, in accordance with United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child (UNCRC), Article 12.

We have identified specific aims for each stage of a child's development journey which are set out later in this blueprint. These stages are:

- Pre-conception (education and awareness about parenthood and care giving relationships)
- Belfast parents to be – the antenatal stage
- Belfast babies
- Belfast toddlers
- Belfast children





6. Our commitments to Belfast children and their families

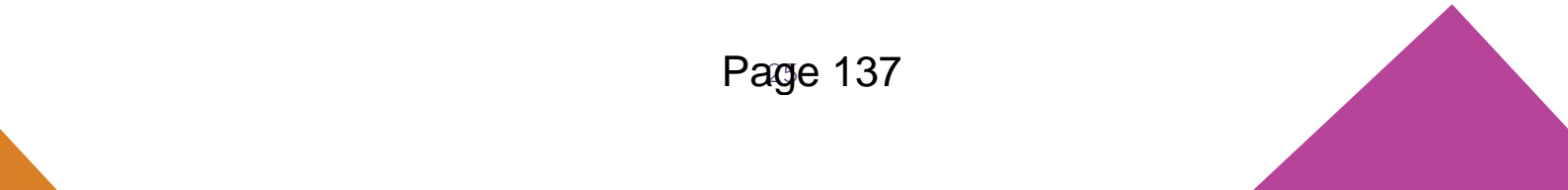
Following the discovery phase, we established a set of ten commitments. These commitments define the substance, focus and culture for creating a seamless developmental journey for children in Belfast. These are shown in the table below:

We want the best outcomes for Belfast Children and Families	We value and support parents and families of all kinds	We are united as a single support community for all families and children	We see the strengths of all children first – asset-based approach	We act early to address barriers to children achieving their potential
We are flexible and responsive to community contexts	We are trauma informed	We provide quality, evidence-based support for all Belfast children	We are strong at the seams, both between services and at moments of transition	We are accountable, open to scrutiny and learning

These commitments will serve as a framework for evaluating potential delivery models. We will test how a proposed seamless pathway can meet these commitments, support children and parents daily, and enhance children and families potential to develop and thrive.

Commitment 1: We want the best outcomes for all Belfast children and families.

Supporting the best outcomes for all the children of Belfast and their families is our central focus. To ensure that every child in Belfast is supported in a way that respects the UNCRC, we will embed its principles into all support services. By making the child’s best interests a primary consideration in every decision, we will ensure that the lives and lived experiences of Belfast children remain central to their journey.



Commitment 2: We value and support parents and families of all kinds.

Our work is built on a foundation of respect for the challenges and responsibilities of parenting and caring for children and we are committed to supporting families without judgement. We understand that grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings and other extended family members can play a central role in the lives of Belfast's children. Our approach will acknowledge and support all these caring roles, and we will work to support their unique needs.

Commitment 3: We are united as a single support community for all families and children.

We are united in our mission to support all children in Belfast and recognise that only through a united effort, combining our collective insights, resources and influence, can we provide the necessary support for Belfast's children and families to reach their potential.

No single organisation can achieve this alone. We are therefore committed to working as a single, integrated system, ambitiously aligning our services and teams. We will actively remove any barriers to cross-agency and cross-sector collaboration that prevent children from realising their potential.

Our work is built on the strength of relationships, and we recognise that our communities are one of our greatest assets. We will embed community-level support into the seamless journey, creating a city-wide approach that embodies the principal that 'it takes a village to raise a child'.

Commitment 4: We see the strengths of all children first – assets-based approach.

Our work is rooted in the belief that all children and families have inherent gifts and talents. Our commitment is to establish shared practice models that first recognise these strengths then empower children in Belfast to use and develop them. This asset-based strategy focuses on 'What is strong?' rather than 'What is wrong?' empowering children to express and develop their unique abilities on their journey.

Commitment 5: We act early to address barriers to children achieving their potential.

To help every child in Belfast reach their full potential, our seamless pathway will actively support their growth, development and transitions. We will focus particularly on critical transition points, such as developmental shifts or handovers between services, which represent vital opportunities for intervention. We are committed to collectively identifying and understanding these moments for every child and family. At these pivotal junctures, our collective efforts will be at their strongest, focusing on offering opportunities, providing support and collaborating to address any barriers to a child's success.



Commitment 6: We are flexible and responsive to community contexts.

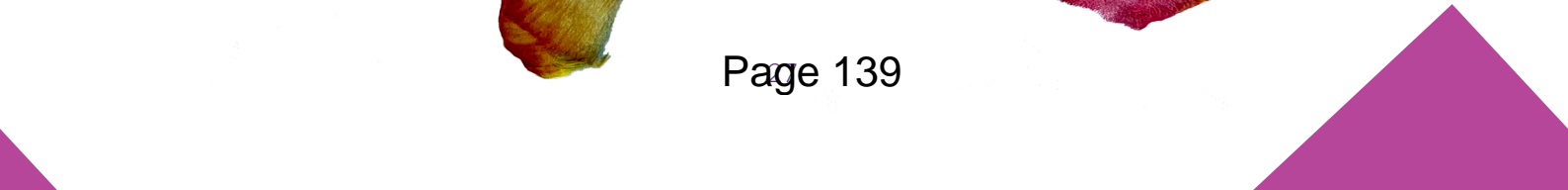
We acknowledge the strengths and needs of Belfast’s diverse communities and the varied landscape of services available. The seamless pathway we are developing will be flexible, adapting to local community dynamics and existing strengths. This neighbourhood-level approach, integrated within a broader family support system is focused on helping children to realise their full potential. This involves directly confronting the negative effects of poverty and the cost of living that impacts upon the ability for children and families to thrive.

Commitment 7: We are trauma informed.

We acknowledge that many of the children, families and communities we support have experienced significant trauma, including trauma linked to Belfast’s history. Our work, from frontline staff to leadership, is trauma-informed and based on an understanding of Adverse Childhood Experiences. We are also committed to addressing the impact of structural inequalities on the life chances of children, families and communities.

Commitment 8: We provide quality, evidence-based support for all Belfast children.

Moving forward, we will develop and provide a consistent ‘base offer’ of support and service for all children and families in Belfast. This will be informed by both global evidence on early childhood development, as well as proven approaches from our local work. We will then build on this foundation to create flexible, community-based services to address local needs.



Commitment 9: We are strong at the seams, both between services and at the moments of transition.

We will support all children in Belfast to realise their potential and we will act early and together to support children and families where there are barriers to making this happen. Recognising that some children face greater challenges than others in reaching their potential, our approach prioritises prevention and early intervention. Using data and insight we will strategically identify when and where children, communities and neighbourhoods need extra support. We understand that this requires seamless collaboration, particularly in complex and difficult situations.

Commitment 10: We are accountable, open to scrutiny and learning.

We understand the significance of our work and are committed to being accountable for its impact on the children, the families and the communities of Belfast. As partner organisations we are all on a developmental and learning journey. We will remain open to external advice and guidance, ready to adapt and change our approach as we evaluate its performance and learn from both our own efforts and best practices elsewhere.





7. The Belfast Child Seamless Journey – what will it look like in practice?

7.1. Stages of the Journey

Our work focuses on a child's journey up to age 8 years, a scope determined by our brief rather than the full developmental timeline extending into adulthood (18 years).

We have identified and agreed upon five key stages within this journey. Each stage requires effective, joined-up support delivered through a whole-child, whole-family, whole-community and whole-system approach.

The stages are:

- Pre-conception: parenting education and awareness.
- Belfast parents to be: the antenatal stage.
- Belfast babies: infancy (0-1).
- Belfast toddlers: ages 1-3.
- Belfast children: ages 3 and up.

The principles and approaches in this document will help all stakeholders – regardless of their specific role or organisation – to see how their efforts in supporting children and families fit into and contribute to the larger city-wide landscape.

7.2. Belfast child partnership delivery ‘at the seams’

Our first priority is to launch a set of partner actions to strengthen collaborative approaches for the developmental journey of Belfast children aged 0-8. We will work to ensure the city provides seamless support to children and families as they navigate developmental transitions, such as the child’s first step beyond home.

These partnership actions will connect the power of local knowledge and community connections to ensure all Belfast children and families can thrive.

A key focus is strengthening collective efforts to support parents and caregivers. While much information exists, we recognise that many families need clearer, more connected guidance on healthy child development. By uniting networks, local initiatives, communities and professionals, we can enhance universal understanding and support. This collaborative ‘village’ approach will ensure that every new parent feels confident and all Belfast babies receive the nurturing environment they need to reach their full potential.

7.2.1. Pre - conception stage

Key opportunities to support transitions

In preparation for parenthood we have identified the need, for a clearer, collective focus to improve universal education on baby and child development throughout life. While acknowledging the availability of information, it is not always effectively connected to families in need. The key challenge is to improve universal preparation for parenthood and create more effective connections between families and support systems, thereby ensuring that all babies in Belfast receive the nurturing required to fulfil their potential.

Belfast Child local partnership ‘seamless delivery across boundaries’

Effective local partnerships, delivering consistent core messages, reinforced within family homes and across community, voluntary and statutory settings, are key to improving life chances for children. It is a shared responsibility for all local partners to work alongside families and caregivers to drive this forward. The Belfast child approach will therefore develop an appropriate and accessible programme of universal messaging and education on:

- Brain development in infancy
- The child’s needs for security, love and boundaries to thrive

This approach will improve delivery of messaging/education in local contexts including schools and communities settings.

7.2.2. Belfast parents to be - the ante-natal stage

Key opportunities to support transitions

We've identified pregnancy and birth preparation as a crucial period where effective collaboration can significantly impact future parents. Evidence shows that current delivery approaches can struggle to reach individuals in more challenging or complex life situations. Some families can be reluctant to engage with messages from statutory bodies for various reasons. This can disconnect parents from vital support networks, which can result in some Belfast babies not receiving the care, attention and nurturing they need to thrive, both during the antenatal and postnatal stages.

Belfast child local partnership 'seamless delivery across boundaries'

We see the focus of added value of local partnership delivery to ensure that:

- Parents feel supported through their antenatal journey, including doctor's appointments, first hospital visit and ongoing scans.
- Antenatal classes are available for each first time parent involving the Togetherness approach and covering the importance of nurturing babies.
- Continuous support from a midwife through the journey from preparing for birth to postnatal.
- Promoting the connection of every new parent to local supports, in particular Sure Start if living in a Sure Start area.
- All families receive consistent information about the importance of connection and attuned parenting on brain development from early stages, delivered in a variety of settings and contexts.

7.2.3. The Belfast Baby

Key opportunities to support transitions

The seamless pathway's success hinges on a baby's experience during infancy. By providing seamless support during these formative months, we can best foster secure parent-baby attachment, which is fundamental to long-term positive outcomes.

Belfast Child local partnership 'seamless delivery across boundaries'

For the birth of baby


- Mothers should have every opportunity to make informed birthing choices. Any medical interventions or birthing arrangements must be mindful of the crucial importance of the first few days postpartum for parent-infant bonding. Addressing this is vital, as many mothers report that interventions can negatively impact a mother's focus on attunement during this critical period.
- To better support mothers, hospital stays should be long enough to ensure they are supported in attuning, resting and bonding with their babies.
- We acknowledge the critical importance of fathers and the positive influence their active involvement has on child development. Our approach will ensure fathers receive the support they need to fully embrace their vital role.

On return home with Baby

- Wrap around support for all new parents during the first few weeks, will focus on strengthening parent-baby connection.
- Our collective goal is to ensure all professionals emphasise responsive parenting and feeding. This approach is to support healthy infant-caregiver relationships and positive long-term developmental outcomes.
- We work together to ensure a supportive first midwife visit. The midwife will take time to discuss the mother's emotional health and support systems, and to effectively coordinate with the health visitor by sharing this important information.

Through infancy

- In addition to their core role, this pathway promotes Health Visitors as key community links to parents. This involves giving parents information on local support networks and groups, providing the name of a contact person, or asking for permission for that person to get in touch.
- To ensure families receive the appropriate level of support, we will collaborate to offer tiered services that include a flexible number of visits based on need. Early intervention will be prioritised by focusing on connecting new parents with external networks, like Sure Start and local community groups, within the first six weeks. This proactive approach will ensure families access support before a crisis point is reached and helps build stronger community connections.
- By making baby groups more accessible across the city, the aim will be to empower parents through peer-led and experiential learning. These groups offer a safe space for discussion on topics like sleep, weaning and self-care. We will proactively expand effective programmes such as Baby Massage, Baby Yoga and Sing and Rhyme beyond Sure Start areas to build stronger parent-baby connections and provide greater support to all new parents in Belfast.
- Supporting and developing local Parent and Toddler groups, which play a vital role in early family life is crucial. By investing in these groups, we can better embed the Togetherness Approach and focus on early language development. To ensure families get timely support we will strengthen links between Parent and Toddler groups and other services. This includes aligning Sure Start with local groups to build capacity and ensuring health visitors connect with groups in all areas, thereby providing robust support for all families.

- 
- Childminders and Daycare providers will be supported in enhancing their ability to apply the principles of the Togetherness Approach and a deeper understanding of baby brain development. This is critical for supporting the children in their care, many of whom begin soon after birth.
 - We are committed to actively supporting fathers throughout this critical period, recognising their positive influence on a child's development. Our approach will specifically address the unique challenges they face, including financial pressures, mental health issues, and feelings of isolation. We will provide targeted support and information that facilitates positive father-child bonding and encourages a more inclusive and supportive environment for fathers in early years services.

7.2.4. The Belfast Toddler

Key opportunities to support transitions

For the Belfast Child Approach we will develop a city-wide focus on collaboration and consistent messaging. Parents, particularly when facing challenges, can feel disconnected from support. This can be compounded by the influence of informal networks and social media, which may offer inconsistent or negative messaging. We will work as a city to ensure consistency in guidance, support and messaging for families. This proactive, coordinated effort aims to ensure every family receives reliable, consistent information throughout their child's developmental journey.

Belfast Child Local Partnership 'seamless delivery across boundaries'

- The seamless pathway demands an early childhood development system that is trauma-informed, strengths-based and actively involves families. This system must also be attuned to the growing emotional needs of every child in Belfast, ensuring safety and responsive care.
- A strong emphasis on family engagement and consistent messaging for children aged 0-3 is critical to ensuring they receive the necessary healthcare, advice and guidance. This proactive approach supports families by providing clear, coordinated information and resources, particularly during the early, formative years.
- Encourage seamless transitions from family and pre-school settings with relevant and child-centred information.
- We will place a greater emphasis on the opportunities that high-quality preschool settings, (of all types), offer for the development of toddlers in Belfast. This emphasis acknowledges that investing in high-quality early learning is a highly effective and equitable means of assuring the well-being and skills of the next generation.
- Create a smooth, connected, and low-stress transition for children moving from an early years setting to a formal primary school. This process involves coordinating efforts between the child, their family, the pre-school, and the primary school to ensure continuity of learning, care, and relationships.

7.2. 5. The Belfast Child

Key opportunities to support transitions

We will support every child in Belfast across Key Stage One, of their formal education, to develop the crucial social, language and play skills needed to realise their potential and achieve educational excellence. This requires cross-sector partnerships to maximise family and child engagement, ensuring that a love of learning is also a love for learning through play opportunities, choice and curiosity. Every child is unique and starting school is a significant step for the entire family. Instead of focusing solely on children being 'school ready', we will encourage schools to be 'child ready' by recognising each child's strengths, interests and needs and creating a safe and welcoming environment where they can thrive. Through collaboration with families, schools and communities we can make the start of school a positive and exciting experience for all Belfast children.

Belfast Child Local Partnership 'seamless delivery across boundaries'

The seamless pathway's ambition is to create city-wide environments of safety, love and clear boundaries where every child in Belfast can learn, explore, be curious, ask questions and feel seen and heard as an individual. We recognise the need to invest in and value the workforces that we entrust with these tasks. This means ensuring that in teacher training, daycare and other workforce learning settings the messaging of the Belfast Child approach is embedded in the approaches of the work force of tomorrow.

7.3. Belfast child whole system partnership development

The core purpose of our key building blocks is to enhance collaboration among local partners, ultimately benefiting the Belfast child and creating positive change for our families. By strengthening local partnership arrangements, we will enhance our collective ability to provide a well-integrated early help support system. This system will be better equipped to support all families, especially those facing barriers to fulfilling their potential.





The partnership development measures are:

7.3.1. Belfast Child Local Networks

We will enhance partnership working across Belfast at area level, involving multiple organisations and sectors. This will include providing communications and engagement opportunities to ensure that managers and frontline staff have the necessary support, resources and physical conditions to collaborate effectively. By systematically bringing these elements together we can better identify how to support existing services and address any gaps in delivery.

7.3.2. Integrated partnership delivery for children and families and for neighbourhoods where poorer outcomes are a current reality.

Our goal is to improve outcomes for children and families by advancing our collaborative efforts in targeted areas. This will involve implementing multi-agency and multi-disciplinary methods including ‘Team around the Family’ approaches, which draw from all sectors. Consistent with recommendations from the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, the Independent Review of Education and the Fair Start report, we envisage local integrated teams that bring practitioners from all sectors and communities closer together. These teams will serve as prototypes for the city-wide level of coordinated activity needed to achieve positive outcomes for every child in Belfast.

Our focus will include providing proactive support to children in Belfast and their families to prevent the need for care placements. By intervening early and addressing underlying issues such as neglect, family breakdown and poverty, we can provide families with the necessary resources and supports that can prevent the circumstances from escalating to a crisis point.

In response to the disadvantages and challenges experienced by many children and families, we will make it a priority to implement the Belfast Child approach to provide integrated support, ultimately mitigating the disadvantages and improving long-term outcomes for our city’s most vulnerable families.



7.3.3. A shared relational practice model

We will develop shared ways of working at practice, at managerial and at leadership levels, centred on the principles and frameworks outlined in the seamless pathway that are child friendly, asset based and trauma informed. This will foster more collaborative delivery, tailored to local communities to help realise our vision of networks, able to assist every child in Belfast to realise their full potential.

This will be supported by programmes to build support, skills, knowledge and confidence across partners so that teams and services can grow and learn together to best meet the needs of all families.

7.3.4. A Belfast Child Dashboard

We will establish an accessible, clear outcomes based performance framework that is designed to support a local multi-agency working model on which the pathway will deliver.

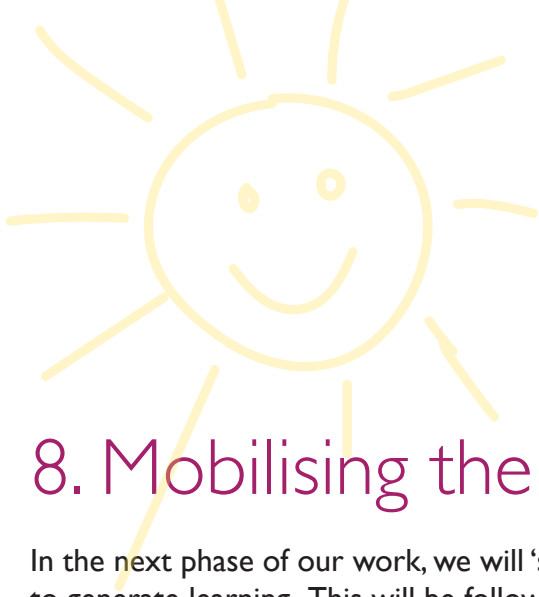
7.3.5. 'Child Friendly Belfast'

To achieve these goals, all community planning partners will collaborate to make Belfast a child friendly city. Clearly this will need wider ownership as well as executive and political leadership, but we believe this can signal a step change and add value to what we are trying to achieve for the children, young people and families of Belfast.

This will mean looking at the whole of the 'Belfast Agenda,' through the lens of children and young people, to realise the principles of seamlessness outlined in this document, in the lived experiences of families. This will help us to 'future proof' the development of our child focused city. It will also involve empowering children and young people to have a say in decisions that affect their lives and will be critical if we are to achieve a sustainable, inclusive and child friendly place to be.

This is a bold, but an essential ambition, requiring all communities, organisations and sectors to prioritise child and family development, and to take learning from other places in Northern Ireland, Ireland, and the rest of the UK alongside other examples across the world.





8. Mobilising the Belfast Child approach

In the next phase of our work, we will ‘socialise the approach’, seek feedback and test key aspects in order to generate learning. This will be followed by the formal launch of ‘The Belfast Child’ to raise awareness, confirm our commitment and set out our intentions.

Our next steps will involve prototyping a partnership delivery model for children at high risk of or already in the care system, focusing on areas with the highest need. The delivery plan will outline this integrated approach.

We will then prioritise implementing the remaining actions, aligning resources and committing to continuous learning and adaptation to ensure all children thrive.

9. Conclusion

This blueprint document presents the Belfast Area Outcomes Group’s work on creating a seamless pathway of support for children aged 0-8. The proposals for improving outcomes through local partnership delivery are based on evidence, expert input from workshops and extensive collective experience.

We believe this approach will significantly enhance existing arrangements, capitalising on the strengths of our organisations and communities.

Our ambitious plans reflect the aspirations we hold for the children and families in Belfast. Realising them will require regional, city-wide and community leadership and support from a wide range of agencies. We are confident of this support and will work to confirm specific commitments as we move forward.

***THE PRIZE WE SEEK IS THE MOST PRECIOUS OF ALL –
THAT ALL CHILDREN IN BELFAST WILL THRIVE AND ENJOY AND ACHIEVE
THEIR POTENTIAL IN LIFE.***

Acknowledgements

The Belfast Child is an ambitious proposal of creating a seamless pathway, for children in Belfast, across all of our organisations and services so we can achieve positive, long-lasting outcomes for them.

We would like to thank the following people and organisations who gave their time, knowledge and insight to the development of this blueprint document:

- Belfast Area Outcomes Group
- Belfast City Council
- Belfast H&SC Trust
- Claire Allen – Reach out Healthy Living Centre
- Dr Siobhan Fitzpatrick, CBE – Early Childhood Peace Consortium
- Hilda Kerlin – Artist of the Belfast landscape, Corporate Communications BHSCT
- Gerry Largey - BHSCT
- Chris Marsh – External independent consultant
- Dr Sarah Meekin – BHSCT, Head of Psychological Services
- Michael Murray – BHSCT
- Dr Suzanne McCartney – Stranmillis University College
- Jackie Redpath – Greater Shankill Partnership
- Tracey Ripley-McElvogue – East Belfast Surestart / East Belfast Early Learning Community
- Nicola Verner – Greater Shankill Partnership
- Deirdre Walsh – Whiterock Children’s Centre
- Dr Glenda Walsh – Course Director for the Post Graduate Certificate in Early Years, Stranmillis University College
- Kathy Watters – Belfast City Council





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Terms

BHSCT – Belfast Health and Social Care Trust

CAMHS – Child and Adult Mental Health Services

EISS – Early Intervention Support Services

Getting Ready for Baby (GRfB) – focused on transforming maternal care, both hospital and community based, from the initial GP appointment to delivery (co-ordinated by the Public Health Agency).

Getting Ready for Toddler (GRfT) – focused on embedding early intervention in core health visiting, with a focus on improving the social and emotional development of children attending pre-school (co-ordinated by the Public Health Agency)

Getting Ready to Learn (GRtL) – focused on improving outcomes for children in pre-school by engaging and empowering parents to help them create and sustain positive home learning environments (co-ordinated by the Education Authority on behalf of the Department of Education)

HSC – Health and Social Care

MDM's – Multiple Deprivation Measures

NISRA – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

SIGNETS – Parent-Infant Relationship Team. A specialist early intervention service within BHSCT supporting antenatal parents from 28 weeks of pregnancy and parents and primary care givers from birth to 4 years old with a range of social complexities.

SOA's – Super Output Areas

SWANS – Social Wellbeing and Antenatal Complexities team, BHSCT

Togetherness – rebranding and refreshing of the Solihull Approach to expand its reach across the world for real change and raising emotional wellbeing for everyone. This approach is about emotional health and wellbeing for all children, their parents, carers and grandparents with a focus on relationships. It is a theoretical model emerged from practice that can be applied to working with families, individuals, groups and communities and has a significant evidence base.

UNCRC – The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

US – United States

Inside back cover

Back cover



The Belfast Child

A seamless journey of development for Belfast children aged 0-8

Page 154

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2 April 2026

John Walsh
Chief Executive
Belfast City Council
Belfast City Hall
Belfast

Dear John

I am writing to you in your capacity as Chief Executive of Belfast City Council and as Chairperson of the Belfast Community Planning Partnership.

As you are aware, the Community Planning Partnership is scheduled to meet on 9 April. At this meeting, a jointly commissioned and long-developed piece of work, led by the Belfast Area Outcomes Group, will be presented to the Partnership: The Belfast Child document.

This correspondence is a request from the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust that Belfast City Council give advance consideration to the 'Belfast Child' document, with a view to Belfast City Council supporting its endorsement at the April Community Partnership meeting.

An electronic version has been attached to this email, and a pre-production printed mock-up (subject to minor amendment) is being forwarded along with the hard copy of this letter.

The origin of this work lies in the mandate for Belfast Area Outcomes Group to act as the Partnership's children and family early-intervention lead, and to develop a "seamless pathway" model for children and families in Belfast. This mandate reflects the strength of the relationships fostered through the community planning process in Belfast, as well as the collective vision that underpins it.

In line with this remit, Belfast Area Outcomes Group has developed the 'Belfast Child' document, which I am pleased to share with Belfast City Council colleagues. This blueprint sets out a city-wide vision to ensure that every child aged 0–8 years in Belfast can benefit from a seamless developmental pathway as they grow.

Our shared vision is that every child in the city is supported to realise their full potential through a clear commitment by agencies and services in Belfast, to align, connect and collaborate around families. This collaborative approach aims to deliver the best possible outcomes for children.

The Belfast Child document is intentionally ambitious and aspirational. It will seek endorsement and ownership from agencies and organisations across Belfast — from

senior leadership to local delivery partnerships. The goal is to build an integrated, city-wide support ecosystem capable of providing timely and effective intervention beginning at pre-conception and continuing until at least age eight. This represents the first stage of a journey that will, over time, extend to all children and young people under 18, aligning with the Belfast Agenda's 2035 vision.

The Belfast Area Outcomes Group intends to launch the document following the Partnership meeting. To that end, I look forward to aligning our respective diaries to secure an appropriate date for a city-level launch event, marking the beginning of this integrated approach to supporting children and families. We believe this work will form a foundation for Belfast's development as a truly child-friendly city.

Your ongoing support and collaboration remains crucial to the success of this initiative. We look forward to continuing to work closely with all Community Planning Partners, particularly Belfast City Council, as we move together toward making the vision set out in The Belfast Child a reality.

Yours sincerely



Jennifer Welsh
Chief Executive



Subject:	Outcome of the Judicial Review in relation to Animal Welfare Services and new Animal Welfare Legislation.
Date:	22 nd May 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor & Director of Legal Services David Sales, Strategic Director, City & Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	David Bone, City Service Manager, Helen Morrissey, City Protection Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the outcome of the High Court Judicial Review in relation to Animal Welfare Services and to advise the Committee

	about new Animal Welfare legislation that the Department intends to introduce in April 2027.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to approve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support to write to the AERA Committee (Appendix 1). 2. The continuation of the existing Animal Welfare Service Delivery Model to March 2027 subject to the agreement of respective Councils within each region, to enable continued service delivery. 3. Note that a review of future Service Delivery Options may be required depending upon the response from the AERA Committee.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Since April 2012, councils have held responsibility for the enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011, in relation to non-farmed animals, namely companion animals and equines.
3.2	The Animal Welfare Service delivery model is a five region model – Northern Region, Southern Region, Eastern Region, Western Region and Belfast which is a standalone region. The five regions employ a total of 10 Animal Welfare Officers (who are authorised to carry out work in all 11 council areas) and 5 administration staff across NI. Based on the contents of this report, members are asked to approve the continuation of the existing Animal Welfare Service Delivery Model to March 2027, subject to the agreement of the other councils to enable continued service delivery.
3.3	The Animal Welfare Service within councils was fully funded (approx. £1.25M per annum) by DAERA until August 2023, when DAERA advised that it was unable to continue to provide funding to support councils in relation to non-farmed animal welfare services.
3.4	A Judicial Review was then lodged in the High Court by Belfast City Council & Fermanagh Omagh District Council on behalf of SOLACE against DAERA, to challenge the Department’s decision to cease funding of the Animal Welfare Service.
3.5	The court found that there was a breach on the grounds of a procedural legitimate expectation. The Judge concluded that <i>‘the making of that decision by the Minister without giving advanced notice to the relevant Assembly Committee was in breach of a procedural expectation.’</i>

3.6	<p>The Judgement of the Court can be found at the following link: https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/2025-nikb-58</p>
3.7	<p>Members are advised that the final Court Order required the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before making any decision in respect of funding for non-farmed animal welfare services provided by district councils for the financial year 2026/2027 only, the Department must give such advance notice to the AERA Committee for its consideration and must notify councils once it has done so. • DAERA must reimburse the Councils' full legal costs in relation to the Judicial Review.
3.8	<p>At a meeting of councils CXs SOLACE on 6th March 2026, it was agreed that councils would:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Continue current delivery model for the Animal Welfare Service in 2026-27, which is subject to the consideration of the 11 councils on an individual basis; b) Consider options regarding the future delivery of the Animal Welfare Service from April 2027 onwards, in advance of the 2027-28 rates setting process, and when the funding position is clarified by the DAERA Minister.
3.9	<p>Officers are now aware that a letter from the Minister / Permanent Secretary was tabled at the AERA Committee on Thursday 16 April 2026. The letter advised the Committee that DAERA does not intend to provide funding to councils for Animal Welfare Services in 2026/27 due to budget constraints. Members of the Committee raised a query around the budget and requested further explanation as to why the budget changed, why the Department was deciding now when budget was not yet finalised and also asked if the Department had made a bid for the funding in 2026/27.</p>
3.10	<p>Members are asked to consider whether they wish to write to the AERA Committee setting out the Council's position in advance of the Departmental response to the questions raised and any further debate about funding.</p>
3.11	<p>On 18th February 2026, the Minister outlined that officials would now take forward legislation to require sellers and suppliers of puppies, and sellers of kittens, under six months of age, to register with their local council. The registered seller and/or supplier will be required to meet specified conditions of registration.</p>

3.12	Whilst officers welcome any steps to improve animal welfare it has been stressed to Departmental officials that councils do not have the capacity to implement this legislation and therefore there needs to be appropriate assurance around the resources which will be provided to councils to deliver this additional function.
3.13	The Department has indicated that the registration scheme would be self-financing. Officers have asked for evidence to demonstrate that would be the case. To date this additional, supporting financial information has not been provided by the Department.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.14	The annual cost of operating the basic shared Animal Welfare function within Belfast City Council is approx. £210k. Since funding ceased this has been met from reserves.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.15	No equality or good relations implications envisaged.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Draft Letter to AERA Committee

APPENDIX 1 - DRAFT LETTER

Being dealt with by: [Name]
Ext: [Extension]
Date: [To be inserted]

Dr. Janice Thompson, Committee Clerk
Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Room 285
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Dr. Thompson,

RE: SUSTAINABLE FUNDING FOR THE ANIMAL WELFARE SERVICE

I am writing to you regarding the recent correspondence submitted to the Committee on 16th April 2026 concerning the funding of the Animal Welfare Service. We were encouraged by the questions raised during that session and would like to provide further representations on behalf of Belfast City Council regarding the current challenges facing this vital regional service.

As you are aware, the 11 councils have enforced the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 for non-farmed animals since 2012. This collaborative model was designed and established in partnership with DAERA. While we understand the Department's difficult budgetary position, the decision to withdraw the annual £1.25M funding has left councils in a challenging position. Although the High Court recently clarified the procedural expectations regarding these funding decisions, our primary goal remains finding a constructive, long-term solution that ensures service continuity.

Operational Impact and Risks

The current lack of a sustainable funding commitment has created a "grey area" regarding the scale of service councils can realistically provide. Currently, the service is being maintained at a significant cost to local ratepayers, which is increasingly difficult to justify as veterinary, legal, and accommodation costs continue to rise.

Furthermore, the uncertainty has forced many councils to rely on short-term staff contracts. We are concerned that a loss of experienced enforcement officers will lead to a reduction in expertise and a weakened ability to undertake proactive investigations or complex prosecutions. Without a stable framework, there is a risk that councils may eventually be forced to prioritize only the most extreme cases, potentially leaving other vulnerable animals at risk for longer.

Pending Puppy and Kitten Regulations

Our concerns are compounded by the upcoming introduction of new legislation aimed at tackling puppy and kitten smuggling and improving breeding standards. While we wholeheartedly welcome these legislative advancements, they will undoubtedly place additional statutory demands on enforcement teams. To ensure this new legislation is effective and not merely a "paper exercise," it is essential that the enforcement of these new rules is backed by a stable funding model. We believe it is in our shared interest to ensure that the service is properly resourced to meet these new challenges from the outset. To be clear currently our Council would now have the capacity to take this on as additional new work.

Collaborative Path Forward

Belfast City Council, along with our partner councils, has acted responsibly to avoid any gap in animal welfare protection during this period of uncertainty. However, the current arrangement is not sustainable indefinitely. We remain eager to move past recent legal and procedural challenges to re-establish a partnership that reflects our shared commitment to animal welfare.

We would be grateful if the Committee would seek assurances from the Department that it will work closely with councils to establish a sustainable long-term funding and governance framework. This is essential to provide the stability needed to protect animals through a properly resourced and effective enforcement system.

Thank you for your time and for the Committee's ongoing work in this area.

Yours sincerely,

XXXX



Subject:	Diversity Mark Summit 2026 - Sponsorship
Date:	22 May 2026
Reporting Officer:	Christine Sheridan -Director of Human Resources
Contact Officer:	Julie Fleming – Principal HR Adviser – Development

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval to sponsor the Diversity Mark Summit 2026 taking place at Titanic Belfast on 7 October 2026.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree to the sponsorship of the Diversity Mark Summit 2026.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>At its meeting on 23 May 2025, the Committee approved sponsorship of the 2025 Diversity Mark Summit. Diversity Mark is an independent not-for-profit Diversity and Inclusion Accreditation in Northern Ireland and has to date accredited almost 200 organisations across the UK and Ireland on their path to a more inclusive workplace. Membership provides support to employers to make and demonstrate progressive improvement in creating an inclusive & diverse workplace. The Council holds Silver Diversity mark Accreditation and is currently working towards attaining Gold Accreditation. The Council continues to work closely with Diversity Mark on a number of initiatives and forums aimed at sharing and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion best practice.</p>
3.2	The Council has been invited again, along with a small number of other organisations to contribute to the 2026 summit as a supporting sponsor.
3.3	<p>The benefits for sponsoring organisations are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Involvement: Continued involvement in the EDI Forum. The forum will support on shaping the strategic direction of this annual summit and meet to explore best practice and global trends in EDI as identified by Diversity Mark. • Prominent Recognition: Elevate your organisation’s profile with extensive recognition and promotional opportunities throughout the summit as a valued supporting sponsor, ensuring visibility among industry leaders and decision-makers. • Exclusive Attendance: Secure up to 10 in-person summit passes for employees, promoting diversity from senior levels throughout, with the flexibility to invite guests or donate tickets to charitable organisations and a seat on the steering committee. • Thought Leadership Platform: Opportunity to showcase your expertise by speaking at the summit or suggesting influential speakers. • Comprehensive Branding: Benefit from extensive branding across all promotional materials, advertisements, and the website, with logo prominently displayed throughout the summit venue as a supporting sponsor, reinforcing your organisation’s commitment to EDI and its pivotal role in driving economic growth and inclusivity.

3.4	<p>Financial and Resource Implications</p> <p>The investment required for this sponsorship is £3000. this includes 10 places at the summit and a seat at the Steering Committee will be met from the existing Organisation Development budget.</p>
3.5	<p>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</p> <p>Sponsorship of this event will allow the Council to demonstrate its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion as well as showcase our best practice as an employer and civic leader.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	None

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Subject:	Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting on 6 th May 2026
Date:	22 nd May 2026
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Godfrey McCartney, Good Relations Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To report to committee on the key issues discussed at the Shared City Partnership meeting held on the 6 th May 2026.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	That the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on the 06 th May, including:
2.2	<p><u>Members Update – Red Cross Presentation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared City Partnership recommends that members note the presentation.
2.3	<p><u>Good Relations Interface Programme</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report and agree the proposed approach detailed in the Shared City Partnership Minutes.
2.4	<p><u>Asylum Funding Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee notes the contents of the report.
2.5	<p><u>TEO Framework for Race Relations Consultation – BCC Response</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership agreed the draft response and recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report and approve the draft response for submission to the Executive Office. • The Committee is asked to note that, in line with the consultation closing date of 3rd June, this will be submitted as a draft response, subject to ratification by Council on 1st June and any further comments or amendments at Council will be forwarded to the Executive Office.
2.6	<p><u>PEACEPLUS – Local Community Action Plan Secretariat Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report
2.7	<p><u>Peace Plus Thriving and Peaceful Communities Thematic Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report
2.8	<p><u>Peace Plus Celebrating Culture and Diversity Thematic Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report
2.9	<p><u>Community Regeneration & Transformation Thematic Update</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report
2.10	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared City Partnership thanked Mr. Gunn for his contributions to the Partnership and wished him well in his retirement.

3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Shared City Partnership is a Working Group of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee which consists of Elected members and representatives from various sectors across the city. The minutes from the Partnership are brought before the Committee for approval on a monthly basis.</p>
3.2	<p>The key issues on the agenda at the 06th May 2026 meeting were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership Papers of the 13th April 2026 • Members Update – Red Cross Presentation • Good Relations Interface Programme • Asylum Funding Update • TEO Framework for Race Relations Consultation – BCC Response • PEACEPLUS – Local Community Action Plan Secretariat Update • Peace Plus Thriving and Peaceful Communities Thematic Update • Peace Plus Celebrating Culture and Diversity Thematic Update • Community Regeneration & Transformation Thematic Update • Any Other Business
3.3	<p>More details regarding the above issues and recommendations are included in the following minutes of the meeting attached in Appendix 1: presentation from the Red Cross attached in Appendix 2; further details of Good Relations Interface Programme attached in Appendix 3; further details of the TEO Framework for Race Relations Consultation – BCC Response attached in Appendix 4 and further details of the PeacePlus Programme attached in Appendix 5.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>All financial implications are covered through existing budgets, and the Good Relations Action Plan is included in the current estimates process.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The recommendations of the Partnership are to promote the work of the Council in promoting good relations and will enhance equality and good relations impacts for the City of Belfast.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Minutes of the Shared City Partnership from the 6th May 2026</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Red Cross Presentation</p>

	Appendix 3 – Good Relations Interface Programme
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	Appendix 4 – TEO Framework for Race Relations Consultation – BCC Response
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	Appendix 5 – PeacePlus Dashboard and Expenditure Targets
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SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP

Wednesday 6th May, 2026

MEETING OF SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP

Members present: Councillor J. Duffy (Chairperson); and
Councillors Abernethy, I. McLaughlin and D Lyons.

External Members: Ms. B. Arthurs, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Ms. L. Euler, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
Mr. L. Gunn, Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
Ms. J. Irwin, Community Relations Council;
Mr. M. McBride, Education Authority;
Ms. T. Mimna, Executive Office;
Mr. W. Naeem, Interfaith Forum;
Ms. I. Sherry, Community and Voluntary Sector;
Mr. G. Walker, Community and Voluntary Sector; and
Ms. A. M. White, British Red Cross.

In attendance: Mr. G. McCartney, Good Relations Manager
Ms. L. Dolan, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer;
Mr. D. Robinson, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer;
Ms. R. Erskine, Project Manager
Ms. N. Lynch, Good Relations Officer;
Ms. F. McIntyre, Project Officer (Good Relations);
Mr. A. McMullan, Members' Services and Digital Support Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman S. Copeland, Councillor B. Smyth and Independent Members Ms. N. Creagh, Mr. J. Donnelly, Supt. A. Hagan, Rev. G. Kennedy and Ms. A. Roberts.

Apologies were also received from Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services, and from Ms. D. McKinney, PEACE Programme Manager, for their inability to attend the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 24th April.

Declarations of Interest

Ms. White declared an interest under item 4, Asylum Funding Update in that she was employed by an organisation which could apply for funding under that scheme.

Councillor Duffy, Ms. Arthurs and Ms. Sherry declared an interest under item 6a, Thriving and Peaceful Communities, in that they were associated with those organisations delivering projects under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

Councillor Abernethy and Mr. Naeem declared an interest under item 6b, Celebrating Cultures and Diversity Thematic Update in that they were associated with organisations delivering projects under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

Councillor Abernethy also declared an interest under item 6a, Thriving and Peaceful Communities, in that his family member was participating in a project delivered under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

As those items did not become subject to debate or discussion, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Members Update

Presentation from British Red Cross

Ms. White provided the Partnership with an overview of the refugee support services offered by the British Red Cross and highlighted the challenges facing the sector.

Following discussion Ms. White informed the Partnership that the Red Cross had found that community engagement was the most effective method in dispelling misconceptions surrounding asylum seekers and agreed that there was more work to be undertaken by a range of organisations to tackle that issue.

Noted.

Good Relations Action Plan Interfaces Programme 2026/2027

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer reported that a funding stream with a value of £70,000 under the Interfaces Engagement Programme was to launch in the summer of 2026. To ensure that groups operating and delivering work at interface areas were prioritised, it was proposed that a select list of groups be invited to apply through a closed call for that funding.

After discussion Mr. Robinson invited members of the Partnership to provide feedback on the list of groups and on the current application criteria.

The Partnership agreed the proposed approach and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report and agree the proposed approach.

Asylum Funding Update

Ms. Dolan reminded the Partnership that The Executive Office had previously allocated Asylum Dispersal Funding to the Council to support the delivery of services to people in the asylum process and to assist with their integration and inclusion.

She advised that The Executive Office had subsequently offered the Council an additional £593,903 to fund the three proposals adopted by the Shared City Partnership at its December, 2025 meeting, namely:

- Specialised advice service and interagency hub clinics;
- Community capacity-building and training programme; and
- An open call with a value of £20,000 for funded projects.

The Good Relations Manager advised that, should the open call be oversubscribed and the quality of the applications be acceptable, additional applications could be funded through BCC5 of the Good Relations Action Plan.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report.

TEO Framework for Race Relations consultation – BCC Response

Ms. Lynch presented the Council's response to consultation on The Executive Office's Draft Race Relations Framework.

The consultation sought views on a proposed strategic vision and on four key outcomes, namely: the elimination of racial inequality; combatting racism and race hate crime; equality of service; and community cohesion. The consultation also invited feedback on nine key interventions and proposals for the governance and monitoring arrangements to oversee the delivery of the framework.

Among the key recommendations suggested by the Council in its response were:

- That proposed interventions are developed to be more strategic, ambitious and cross-departmental, with an explicit focus on addressing structural inequalities.
- Alignment of the framework with existing strategies and commitments, to avoid duplication and ensure racial equality is embedded across all policy agendas.
- A clear commitment from departments to review and act on the structural factors driving racial inequality across education, employment, health and justice.
- Improved data, evidence and understanding, with the Executive Office taking a lead role in issuing guidance and setting standards for data collection across public bodies.
- Building capacity across public sector organisations through interventions that develop the competence of public bodies and departments to implement racial equality consistently and effectively.
- Strengthening the voluntary and community sector through long-term investment rather than short-term or project-based funding, supported by meaningful partnerships between the Executive and the sector.
- Improved access to justice and accountability, with stronger interventions focused on potential perpetrators and on addressing the fear and isolation experienced by many minority ethnic communities.
- A commitment to measurement and continuous improvement, including a review of existing thematic groups (such as the Race Equality Subgroup and other strategic delivery structures), to ensure meaningful involvement, representation and co-design with those who have lived experience.

The Partnership noted the report and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the report and agree the response be submitted to tThe Executive Office.

PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan Secretariat Update

The Partnership considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Shared City Partnership members with an update on the mobilisation of PEACEPLUS Belfast Local Community Action Plan (LCAP).

2.0 Recommendations

Members are requested to note the contents of the report and recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Mobilisation Contract Awards and Procurement

The Secretariat continue to support the mobilisation of the Action Plan through procurements and stakeholder engagement for the Community Regeneration and Transformation theme. The monitoring of implementation and results across the Thriving and Peaceful Communities and Celebrating Culture and Diversity themes are as outlined in the Thematic Reports.

3.2 Financial Controller

Members are advised that the verification process to date has been relatively smooth, and clarifications have been responded to within the 5 day timeframe.

KPMG verification control work of expenditure for Claims 1-6 has been completed, with reimbursement of £874,636.49, as detailed in the table at 3.4 below. The Period 6 verification control included 5 procurement exercises, which were deemed compliant and fully eligible.

KPMG invoices for the verification costs, based on actual time spent on the control work, are to be submitted.

3.3 Claims and Reporting

Programme expenditure, up to Period 9 (31 Mar 26), totals £2.1m approx, with Office & Administration costs resulting in

a total claim value of £2.3m, detailed by budget line as follows:

Incurring Expenditure1 January 2024 to 31 March 2026	Value
Salaries	£1,053,298.75
External Expertise Services (EES / Contract Payments)	£1,055,785.07
Infrastructure and Works (Capital)	£64,300.00
Equipment	£0.00
Total Expenditure	£2,173,383.81
Office & Administration (15% Overhead on Salary Costs)	£157,994.81
OVERALL TOTAL	£2,331,378.63

- 3.4 The Partnership is requested to note that expenditure not eligible for claiming from SEUPB is approx £69.5k. This expenditure relates to internal services, catering, venue hire and employee insurance and will be offset by the deferred income from the Office and Administration.

Claims up to Period 8, values as detailed in the table below, have been submitted to SEUPB and preparation for the submission of the Period 9 report and expenditure is progressing

Claim Period	Total	Verification Status
1 Jan – Mar 2024	£20,938.98	Fully Eligible & reimbursed
2 Apr – Jun 2024	£29,850.62	Fully Eligible & reimbursed
3 Jul – Sept 2024	£106,198.64	Fully Eligible & reimbursed
4 Oct- Dec 2024	£142,221.73	Fully Eligible & reimbursed
5 Jan – Mar 2025	£189,035.88	Fully Eligible & reimbursed
6 Apr – Jun 2025	£386,390.64	Fully Eligible & reimbursed
Total Reimbursed	£874,636.49	
7 Jul – Sept 2025	£568,565.25	KPMG Control commenced
8 Oct - Dec 2025	£328,380.94	Awaiting KPMG Control
9 Jan – Mar 2026 Approx	£559,795.95	Indicative Submission Values
Total	£2,331,378.63	

3.5 Exchange Rate Fluctuations

To date the cost to Council due to exchange rate fluctuations for claims 1-5 is £9,390.51 approx, as outlined in the table below. The variance will be offset by the deferred income from the office and administration budget.

Income	Remittance Value€	Following Exchange Rate £	£ / € Exchange Rate	£ Value at 1.15 Planning Rate	Variance Cost to Council
Lump Sum Preparation	€100,000.00	£85,836.91	1.16500	£86,956.52	£1,119.61
Advance	€1,500,000.00	£1,300,841.21	1.15310	£1,304,347.83	£3,506.62
				Claim £ Value	
Claims 1 – 5	€561,025.25	£483,481.57	1.16039	£488,245.85	£4,764.28
Claim 6	€443,159.32		Exchange Rate to be confirmed	£386,390.64	
Totals	€2,604,184.57	£1,870,159.69		£3,162,887.03	£9,390.51

Options for managing the exchange rate risk are ongoing with Council's Management Accounts.

The Partnership is requested to note that the second and final instalment of the advance, €750,000 is now payable following the submission, verification and reimbursement of Periods 1-4 claims. Officers are considering the exchange rate risk before progressing the request to SEUPB.

3.6 Forecasting and Expenditure Targets

As previously reported, SEUPB has requested formal acceptance of the expenditure targets for the Action Plan. It should be noted that the targets are forecasts based on a range of assumptions. Whilst acceptance is being progressed, the assumptions have been clearly outlined to SEUPB in the Acceptance Memo, as per Appendix I.

3.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

Delivery of project activity and progress towards the achievement of participant targets is underway.

As of 14 April 2026, 3,020 participants were registered to projects, with 1,874 completed the required activity/contact hours. Further data analysis and impact of the Programme is outlined in Appendix II Performance Dashboard.

Monitoring system issues continue to be address at the weekly troubleshooting meetings.

3.8 PEACEPLUS Additional Funding Opportunities

Members are advised that SEUPB informed Council in April 2026 of a Programme wide underspend, which could potentially be decommitted by the EU. SEUPB invited all Councils to submit proposals for funding of activity to be delivered during summer 2026 and claimed by September / October 2026. Project proposals should link to the existing Local PEACEPLUS Action Plan, as any additional agreed

proposal will require a modification to the current Local Action Plan Letter of Offer.

Given the truncated timeline potential proposals that meet the above parameters were identified as:

- Fleadh Cheoil 2026 Programme
- Forth Meadow Greenway Signage
- Positive Cultural Expression (Beacons)
- 2 Royal Avenue

The Partnership is requested to note that given the urgency for proposals, a report was submitted and agreed by the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in April 2026, for the proposals, as above, to be submitted to SEUPB for additional funding in the region of £2-3 million.

The proposals are currently being compiled and are due to be submitted to SEUPB imminently.

Members should note that SEUPB indicated that the level of participation will be proportion / reasonable, and that compliance with programme requirements is required, although in some instances, it may be lighter touch.

3.9 Staffing

As previously reported significant resource pressures within the PEACEPLUS team are continuing, due to 4 staff vacancies, and maternity leave.

Interviews for the Monitoring and Data Analyst are scheduled for 30 April 2026. Timeframes for the recruitment of the Finance and Data Support and Project Support Officer are being confirmed, advertising is scheduled for end of May 2026 with interviews late June 2026.

Further recruitment remains on hold pending consideration by Continuous Improvement.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

All expenditure associated with the PEACEPLUS Action Plan is reimbursed by SEUPB and is eligible from 1 January 2024. As referenced at 3.5 above, PEACEPLUS claimable expenditure to 31 December 2025 is approx. £1.771m.

4.1 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

The PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan has been screened for equality, good relations, and rural needs assessment, and has been screened out.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report.

Thriving and Peaceful Communities Thematic Update

The Partnership considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Shared City Partnership with a progress update on projects within the Thriving and Peaceful Communities (TPC) Theme of the PEACEPLUS Belfast Local Community Action Plan (LCAP).

2.0 Recommendations

Members are requested to note the contents of the report and recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

Project Delivery

An overview of project progress within the TPC theme is outlined below.

3.1 TPC 1 Community Empowerment – Lead Delivery Partner NICVA

Project Partners: Forward South Partnership (FSP), East Belfast Community Development Agency (EBCDA), West Belfast Partnership Board (WBPB), Falls Community Council (FCC), Greater Shankill Partnership (GSP) and Marrowbone Community Association (MCA).

The project currently has approximately 250 registered participants, with 150 achieved from a target of 1000.

A Best Practice Visit, facilitated by Eastside Greenways to CS Lewis Square took place in March 2026 with 16 participants in attendance.

Delivery of the Cohort 2 L2 OCN in Community Development (21 participants from 15 organisations) has commenced with 8 sessions delivered to date. Non accredited training sessions included 'developing a strong case for funding applications.'

The Partnership is reminded that Officers continue to liaise closely with NICVA on the M&E requirements to ensure data integrity and to update mechanisms for reporting across NICVA's CRM system and the PEACEPLUS M&E system. The update on the system is required to enable the level of contact hours to be agreed and verified.

Upcoming activity includes a cross border residential, and planning is underway for the third OCN programme scheduled to commence in September 2026.

3.2 TPC 2 Health & Wellbeing - Lead Delivery Partner Ashton

Project Partners: Shankill Partnership Board, East Belfast Community Development Agency, West Belfast Partnership Board, & North Belfast Community Partnership.

Delivery of activity is progressing, with flexibility of activity across the areas. Currently 251 registered participants and 250 achieved participants verifiable on the Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) system. The Delivery Partner is currently updating the data to align with the reported 465 registered participants, and further verification will then progress.

As reported in April 2026, a request to extend delivery of participants beyond the Areas of Interest (800 participants) and Influence (816 participants), and include District Electoral Area, is currently being progressed.

The Partnership is requested to note that SEUPB has advised that the change will require a formal project modification request,

Clarification on the requirements specified by SEUPB, including the participant targets for each area is being finalised. Once confirmed this will enable the formal modification to be submitted directly to SEUPB for consideration.

3.3 TPC 3 Youth Empowerment, Inspiring Future Belfast

3.3.1 Lot 1: 9–12 year olds (Juniors) - Lead Delivery Partner Giga Training

Project Partner BEAM Creative Network.

Currently 411 of 1500 participants have achieved the required activity and contact hours.

As reported previously, the delivery partner is continuing to plan for delivery of Year 2 activity via schools in West and Shankill Areas, with six school partnerships, a community programme and two Digital and two Arts Academies scheduled for commencement.

A significant amount of activity and targets will be delivered during the summer with plans being finalised presently.

3.3.2 Lot 2: 12–15 year olds (Intermediate) - Lead Delivery Partner Active Communities Network (ACN) Project Partners: Ledley Hall Boys & Girls Club, Lagmore and Rosario Youth.

Monitoring data evidence that 124 participants have completed activity and achieved the required contact hours, from a target of 350.

Engagement of participant groups is ongoing, and delivery of activity sessions are continuing. The day visits initially scheduled for March 2026 took place over the Easter.

3.3.3 Lot 3: 16–18 year olds (Seniors) - Lead Delivery Partner Streetbeat Youth Project Project Partner YEHA (Youth Educational Health Advice).

Participation evidence confirms 41 completing activity from a target of 160.

The Delivery Partner has given a commitment to over recruit to the project during Year 2 to ensure targets are on track.

Year 2 / Cohort 2 leadership sessions are progressing with 70 young people engaged across 5 groups. Monitoring data for this Cohort 2 is currently being verified.

An outdoor adventure day bringing all groups together took place on 2 April 2026.

The Partnership is requested to note that further additionality for participants is being delivered via the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

3.3.4 Lot 4: 19-25 years olds (Young adults) – Lead Partner GEMS NI

Project Partners: Diverse Youth NI (DYNI), Training Network for Women (TWN).

Monitoring data is currently evidencing 25 of 96 achieved participants, with a target of 40 more participants to be recruited by June 2026.

Cohort 1 participants, that participated in the International residential, completed the Social Action Project “A Wall of Journey” a visual art project depicting the journey the young person has experienced so far. Two site visits to City Hall and Clifton House have also taken place.

Delivery of session on employability/careers guidance have progressed, as well as ongoing recruitment and registration for Cohort 2.

3.4 TPC 4 Sport for Peace - Lead Delivery Partner Active Communities Network

Project Partners: Sport Changes Life Foundation, PeacePlayers NI and Community Sports Network.

Delivery of activity across all pillars for Cohort 2 participants is progressing well, with some groups scheduled to complete activity imminently.

Delivery of Pillar 1 coach education activity at Ulster University Belfast (UUB) and St Marys Grammar School, with 26 participants is now finalising, 17 participants have achieved an OCN Level 1 on Diversity within Society, alongside practical coaching experience through engagement with Pillar 2 participants.

Pillar 1 participants from St Mary's also completed First Aid training and a celebration event, including the presentation of certificates for UUB participants has taken place.

As previously reported, targets were realigned and remain under review.

3.5 TPC 5 Employability Language Up – Lead Delivery Partner People1st

Project Partners: Belfast City Mission, Conway Education, Donegall Pass, Fane Street Primary, Food Stock, Footprints, Holy Rosary Primary, Mears, Refuge Language, Russian Speaking Community, Street Soccer NI, The Suitcase Project, Wee Chicks, Windsor Women's Centre.

84 new participants have been registered bringing the total of registered participants to 355, which exceeds the current registration target of 305. However, completed participation is currently 85 from a target of 184, approx. 46%, due to ongoing attendance and retention issues. The delay in achieving the Phase 2b target, will subsequently impact the expenditure targets.

The Delivery Partner has agreed to increase the recruitment targets for the remainder of the project to offset the attrition levels. Further mitigations have also been proposed, including a reduction in contact hours from 36 to 28 and a realigned implementation plan.

The Partnership is advised that the issues affecting the project were previously highlighted and have also been discussed with SEUPB. The proposed change in contact

hours remains in line with approved project activity within the Local Action Plan and is proportionate and reasonable.

Members are requested to note that the Programme Board agreed, in principle, to reduce contact hours from 36 to 28, and to delegate authority to the Good Relations Manager and Programme Manager to approve the detailed request in line with the realigned Implementation Plan. Members should note the change request will be confirmed with SEUPB, with a further update to the Partnership.

**3.6 TPC 6 Arts Across the Genres – Delivery Partner MayWe
Project Partners: BEAM Creative Network**

Currently there are 230 participants registered and activity engaging in activity, with 166 of these participants having now achieved the required contact hours.

Project 1: Polyphonic (124 participants achieved) Target 120
All deliverables (capacity building, joint art sessions, site visits, mentoring, artwork development, social action and showcases) were achieved by end of March 2026.

Project 2: Suitcases & Skies (84 actively participating, 38 complete) Target 120

Activity is ongoing before showcases in mid-May at Chultúrlann and the Ulster Hall. The project's focus is on participants with additional needs, several of whom do not want to perform on stage, the project has offered additional training for auxiliary roles such as tech, sound, lighting and stage management.

The Partnership is requested to note, that as previously reported, a combined approach for the 4 site visits has been adopted. Officers have reviewed this approach and can confirm the approach meets the tender specification requirements of 4 site visits across the 4 arts projects. On this basis no change request is required. However, the Delivery Partner has been advised they should maximise opportunities for site visits, where possible.

Project 3: Target 120

Taster session is scheduled for this project, with some recruitment underway.

Project 5: Media Production (21 participants recruited, 18 actively participating) Target 16

Participants continued to attend Project 1 and 2 activity to capture content for the newsletter, socials and documentary. Participants attended a workshop and masterclass with Neal McClelland and interviewed Niamh Noade Britain's Got Talent Finalist.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

All expenditure associated with the PEACEPLUS Action Plan is eligible from 1 January 2024.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

The PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan has been screened for equality, good relations and rural needs assessment, and has been screened out.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report.

Celebrating Cultures and Diversity Thematic Update

The Partnership considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide the Shared City Partnership with a progress update on projects within the Celebrating Cultures and Diversity (CCD) Theme of the PEACEPLUS Belfast Local Community Action Plan (LCAP).

2.0 Recommendations

Members are requested to note the contents of the report and recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

Project Delivery

Members are reminded that projects are at various stages of implementation, with an overview of progress as outlined below.

3.1 CCD1 – Interfaith and Belief Lead Delivery Partner: Corrymeela Community Consortium Partners: Redeeming Our Communities, Belfast Islamic Centre, NI Inter-Faith Forum

An updated implementation plan with measurable targets for each stream of activity is being prioritised, and activity has progressed as follows:

Stream 1: Outreach education with pilot schools' activity has commenced, and engagement has been encouraging.

Stream 2: Unity and Welcoming Programme, Mapping of the welcome, care and social action work provided by faith and belief groups is progressing through surveys and a volunteer is undertaking dedicated outreach to ensure maximum update of surveys.

Stream 3: Scoping of further faith and belief festivals and events is currently under development.

3.2 CCD2 – Community Connections Lead Delivery Partner (DP): GEMS NI

Consortium Partners: Business in the Community (BITC), Belfast City of Sanctuary, Diverse Youth NI, Migrant Centre NI, Ballynafeigh Community Development Association

To date, 65 participants are actively participating with 10 participants having completed the required contact hours.

It should be noted that whilst registrations and activity are ongoing, the project remains behind schedule.

As reported in April 2026, a realigned implementation plan has now been provided, and clarification on the planned activity is currently being progressed to ensure the achievement of deliverables and results. The project RAG status remains red and will be reviewed on an ongoing basis with further mitigations as necessary

3.3 CCD3 – LGBTQIA+ Community Engagement Project (Out Connections Belfast) Lead Delivery Partner: The Rainbow Project Project Partners: Cara Friend, HRe NI

52 participants have achieved the required contact hours, which is in line with the realigned targets defined in the change request currently under review and previously reported.

Project staff are prioritising the delivery of activities for Strand 1 Coordination, Strand 2 Strategic Planning, and for recruitment and delivery of activities for Strand 4 Outreach and Strand 5 Focus Groups.

The Partnership is requested to note that the delivery partner has recruited an external researcher to analyse the Research survey results and develop the results publication. The publication research findings will be slightly delayed by two months, however there is no impact on the overall delivery phase.

3.4 CCD4 – Community Empowerment Ex Politically Motivated Prisoners Lead Delivery Partner: Coiste Project Partners: Tar Anall, Action for Community Transformation, Charter NI, and Tar Isteach.

The project is progressing, with 96 registrations across the Hens Shed, Support Engagement, Storytelling, Counselling, Advice and Welfare training elements.

Course options for the counselling training, offering a bespoke suite of training opportunities to meet the needs, specialism and current attainment level of the groups/organisations, are currently being finalised. The training will be completed during the lifetime of the project.

The Partnership is requested to note that a historical biography publication was submitted as an alternative to the storytelling element of the project. After consideration of the approach for developing the publication, and liaison with SEUPB, the delivery partner has been advised that publication does not meet the storytelling and PEACEPLUS requirements. A proposal for further storytelling aspect has been requested.

3.5 CCD5 From Multiculturalism to Interculturalism

3.5.1 Lot 1 – Language and Cultural Access

The Partnership is advised that the contract has been awarded to the Ulster Scots Agency, and the contract initiation phase is being progressed.

3.5.2 Lot 2 – Cultural Spaces (Come on Over) Lead Delivery Partner: MayWe

Project activity is now increasing, with 75 participants registered and actively participating, and 10 venues registered, of which 6 are actively participating on the steering group. Discussions are ongoing with four additional venues to participate in the project.

The first activity, capacity building for cultural venues and capacity building for grassroots groups, which was designed by the steering group is now progressing.

3.5.3 Lot 3 – Festivals and Flagship Events Lead Delivery Partner (DP): Féile an Phobail

42 participants are actively participating in the project in the Mentors/Mentees Programme, Flagship Events Steering Group and Musical Fusions Steering Group, from an overall project target of 404.

Members are requested to note that further Festival Event delivery includes a social action activity designed by participants, Don't Just Wear the T-Shirt, will be part of a larger May Day Rally/Festival.

3.5.4 Lot 4 – Culture and Shared Built Heritage - Lead Delivery Partner (DP): Arts Ekta
Project Partners: Cairde na Cille, Kabosh Theatre

Delivery of Phase 2 activity is progressing with Burial Traditions tours, and a Faith Trail event scheduled for April/ May 2026

Cohort 2 for Tour Guide Training is also progressing. Members should note the training was heavily over-subscribed, 75 expressions of interest. The Delivery Partner has developed a strong relationship with Belfast Met, and a further course on Tour Guide Training is being provided by the college.

Further visits and events are planned for Floral Hall, Family Picnic up at zoo as well as the Carnegie Libraries in North and West Belfast

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

All expenditure associated with the PEACEPLUS Action Plan is eligible from 1 January 2024.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

The PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan has been screened for equality, good relations and rural needs assessment, and has been screened out.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report.

Community Regeneration and Transformation Thematic Update

Ms. Erskine provided the Partnership with an update on the delivery of the Community Regeneration and Transformation Theme of the PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan.

She reported that the Stage 3 design stage of CRT1: LGBTQIA+ Hub was now completed and that the final designs had been presented to the Stakeholder Group in April. It was expected that construction would start in the autumn as the necessary statutory approvals through the Listed Buildings and Change of Use applications had now been submitted.

She further reported that the planning application for CRT2: Annadale Open Space had been compiled and would be submitted shortly with the capital works expected to be

completed by the summer of 2027. However, she noted that further discussions with the Stakeholder Steering Group were required prior to progressing further animation activity due to the lack of uptake of event management training.

The Project Manager highlighted that the consultation on the preliminary designs for CRT3: Distillery Street had closed and that the Department for Justice, as landowners of the gates and interface barrier, was considering the responses. Further consultation and engagement with members and stakeholders would take place following the Department's determination.

She confirmed that the planning application process for CRT4: Access to the Hills was underway and that the assessment of the animation tender had progressed to the self-declaration stage.

The Partnership noted that a planning application for signage for the CRT5: Sanctuary Theatre site had been submitted and that the procurement documentation to appoint a construction contractor had been issued. Ms. Erskine anticipated that works would commence by September, 2026 and would take approximately 10 months to complete, possibly resulting in a one-month delay in the post construction animation.

A member thanked the officers for the significant amount of work being reported on, particularly when working under the additional pressure of the programme's current vacancies.

The Partnership noted the contents of the report and recommended that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report.

Any Other Business

Councillor McLaughlin informed the Partnership that this would be Mr. Gunn's final meeting of the Shared City Partnership before retiring from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive at the end of the month and thanked him for his attendance and invaluable input over the years.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Gunn for his contributions to the Partnership and wished him well in his retirement.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded the Partnership that the next meeting would be held at 1:30pm on Wednesday 3rd June.

Chairperson

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Refugee Support Northern Ireland

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Shared City Partnership
06 May 2026

- 
- **Context –overview Red Cross Refugee Support**
 - **Sector report – challenges and acknowledgement**

Refugee Support, Restoring Family Links Anti Trafficking (RSRFLAT UK Wide)

Find	Find missing loved ones
Reunite	Bring family to the UK and post arrival support
Protect	Get help to leave, respond or manage an urgent situation of safety, exploitation or abuse
Support	Get emergency short-term cash
Inform	Understand and navigate the asylum/immigration process
Connect	Get advice/help to access support (inc. statutory entitlements)-financial, health, accommodation
Empower	Voice/shift power and actions to people with lived experience

Northern Ireland

Refugee Support Services NI

Who we support?

- Page 192
- Asylum seekers
 - Refugees
 - Refugee Resettlement (phase 1)
 - Family Reunion
 - Destitute asylum seekers
 - Displaced people (Ukrainians)

How we support?

- Casework-Rights & Entitlements, practical support
- Advocacy
- Orientation & Integration



Refugee Support NI:

2024

2716 people supported including beneficiaries

Top countries:

Syria
Somalia
Eritrea
Sudan
Iran

Top Age Range 26-45 years

Actions/support delivered: 18,022

2025

2007 people supported including beneficiaries

Top countries:

Somalia
Eritrea
Sudan
Palestine
Syria

Top Age Range 26-45 years

Actions/support delivered: 16,406

2026 to 05.05.2026

853 people supported including beneficiaries

Top Countries:

Somalia
Eritrea
Kuwait
Ethiopia
Iran

Top Age Range 26-45 years

Actions/Support delivered: 5,892

Here for humanity

Red Cross Services in NI

- Page 194
- Orientation & Integration (asylum focused)
 - Complex Casework
 - Partnership with Law Centre NI
 - Family Reunion Travel Assistance and Integration Services
 - Destitution support
 - TEO Crisis Fund
 - Peace Plus (Collaborative Health & Social Care-Right Support, Right Time)
 - International Family Tracing (BRC)
 - Advocacy & Policy work

Sector General Overview

Challenges in the sector:

1. **Supporting structures-** TEO/SMP/SPG/SPPG/Cohesion Group etc...
2. **Resources** -Funding allocation issues- reliance of good will of sector to deliver and support GR and shared spaces
3. **Strategies-Frameworks-Legislation:**
 - a) TBUC and Race Relations Order -pending
 - b) Review of Racial Equality and proposed Race Relations Framework-delivery plan consultation
 - c) Hate Crime Provisions in the Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill- need to increase confidence in policing and reporting

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General Overview

Challenges in the sector:

5. **Asylum Changes** – impact on integration and long term settlement and opportunities for contribution

Core Protection – still unknown- no clear pathway to settlement

- a) Temporary protection –renewal after 30 months/return
- b) Earned settlement- work and study route English, Employment- income

Refugee Family Reunion

Paused- pending new policy

Changes to asylum support

- a) Impact on families – destitution

Challenges

6. Increase in anti-migrant sentiment -impact on good relations-cohesion and lasting negative impact and legacy on the city

a) need for more political and civic leadership is key

b) Support is reactive as it comes after hate crime occurs

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Acknowledgement

Belfast Council's Good Relations team have been a stalwart throughout this.

The Belfast Migrant Forum is a great example of good practice and connections

Contact

Page 198



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**Here for
humanity**

The background of the slide is a white surface covered with a dense, random pattern of small, bright red rectangular pieces, resembling confetti or streamers. These pieces are scattered across the entire area, creating a festive and celebratory atmosphere.

Any questions?

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Appendix 3 : Proposed list of groups to invite to make a submission for funding under the BCC6 Interfaces Programme, through a closed call

Act Initiative
Active Communities Network
Ardoyne Youth Enterprise
Ballymacarrett Community Centre
Belfast Interface Project
Belfast South Community Resources
Blackmountain Shared Space
CharterNI
Cliftonville Community Forum
Clonard Residents Association
Colin Neighbourhood Partnership
Donegal Pass Community Enterprises
Duncairn Community Partnership
Dunmurry Community Association
East Belfast Alternatives / RJ
EBCDA
Falls Community Council
Forthspring Inter Community Group
Greater Village Regeneration Trust
Limestone United Cross Community
Lower North Belfast Community Council
Lower Oldpark Community Association
Market Development Association
Marrowbone Community Association
New Beginnings
New Life City Church
Our Club, Our Community (TAMHI)
Shankill Women's Centre
Short Strand Community Forum
South Belfast Alternatives
Southcity Resource and Development Centre
SPARC
Springboard
Suffolk Community Forum
TAMHI (tackling awareness of MH issues)
Twadell Ardoyne Shankill Communities in Transition
Upper Springfield Development Trust
Whitewell Community Surgery
YEHA Youth Led Peace

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Appendix 3: Draft Council response to The Executive Office's Consultation on its Race Relations Framework

Framework for Race Relations Consultation: Development of a cross-departmental response from BCC

❖ The Framework's Vision

"A society, which is strengthened by its ethnic diversity, where we can live together free from racism, racial inequality and unlawful racial discrimination, where we share a common sense of belonging and where human rights and equality are enjoyed by all."

Do you agree or disagree with the draft Framework's Vision? (Required)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Prefer not to say

Please provide any comments you wish to make in relation to the draft Framework's vision in the space below

There is a limit of 1000 characters

Belfast City Council welcomes the high-level vision set out in the draft framework and supports the move towards an evidence-informed public health approach to race relations. This aligns with the Belfast Agenda ambition to create a more inclusive and welcoming city. While the vision is positive and ambitious, it remains largely aspirational, with limited clarity on implementation. To ensure this vision can be realised in a city as diverse as Belfast, we anticipate the delivery plan will be fully resourced, with ring-fenced funding. While the public health approach is innovative, it may not be embedded meaningfully across interventions within the draft. The framework provides a useful foundation but may require strengthening to deliver clear, measurable change. Greater clarity is also needed in the use of key concepts within the vision and across the framework; terms such as race and ethnicity, equality and equity are used interchangeably risking confusion and inconsistent application.

❖ Outcomes

Based on the engagement and research to date, four key outcomes have been identified which, if met, should achieve the overall vision. The outcomes serve as strategic pillars that guide both the implementation and evaluation of the Framework.

Outcome 1: Elimination of Racial Inequality

To eliminate racial inequalities and promote equality of opportunity in all aspects of economic, social, cultural, political and public life. This includes a focus on capacity building, community development and celebration of cultural identity.

Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 1 will help us to achieve the vision as detailed in the draft Framework document?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Prefer not to say

Please provide any comments you wish to make in relation to Outcome 1 in the space below.

Belfast City Council supports the inclusion of Outcome 1, the elimination of racial inequality, as a cornerstone of the framework. However, further elements are required to make this outcome achievable. Without appropriate resourcing, cross-departmental collaboration, and strong data-gathering mechanisms, this outcome risks remaining aspirational. Greater emphasis is also needed on systemic reform. Existing systems and structures can perpetuate inequality through cultural normativity. Awareness-raising alone is insufficient; anti-racist practice must be embedded across public services, including reviewing how public structures may inadvertently discriminate. Cultural awareness, while important, is insufficient, without accompanying structural and organisational change. Delivery of this outcome must be driven by clear responsibility and commitment from TEO.

Outcome 2: Combatting Racism and Race Hate Crime

To combat racism and race hate crime and to provide effective protection against all manifestations of racism and race hate crime. This includes providing redress and having a victim-centred approach.

Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 2 will help us to achieve the vision as detailed in the draft Framework document?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Prefer not to say

Please provide any comments you wish to make in relation to Outcome 2 in the space below.

Belfast City Council welcomes the inclusion of safety as a core outcome within the draft framework and agrees that eliminating racial abuse, harassment and violence is essential for a cohesive city. Closing the legislative gap through hate crime reform is a key step, alongside addressing the reporting gap by improving accessible reporting pathways and building trust between victims and authorities. However, the outcome places too strong an emphasis on reporting and redress, without sufficient focus on root causes. Increasing reporting alone will not address barriers such as fear of repercussions, lack of trust and poor institutional responses. A more holistic approach is required, including prevention, perpetrator-focused interventions and effective victim support. While the commitment to tackling racism and race hate crime is welcomed, there is no clearly aligned intervention in the delivery plan. The council encourages stronger links to ongoing work on tackling organised crime, engagement with perpetrators of hate or those at risk, and targeted, localised resources for high-tension areas.

Outcome 3: Equality of Service Provision

To ensure that individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds have equitable access to and can fully benefit from public services, including opportunities in education and enterprise, in a manner that promotes equality of opportunity and good relations.

Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 3 will help us to achieve the vision as detailed in the draft Framework document?

- Strongly agree
- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Prefer not to say

Please provide any comments you wish to make in relation to Outcome 3 in the space below

Belfast City Council welcomes equality of service provision as a central component of the framework and supports the ambition to ensure that a person's background does not impact the quality of service received. However, this must be supported by stronger interventions to review and address inherent barriers within services. The 2024 review highlighted inconsistent access to high-quality interpretation and translation services as a major barrier, and this must be addressed. We would welcome clearer detail on how increased ESOL provision will be delivered and funded (including support for conversational, accredited, job-related ESOL and requirements such as the Occupational English Test), alongside further clarification on how the proposed intervention to improve equality of opportunity in employment and leadership will operate in practice and align with existing employment legislation. As with Outcome 1, delivery of Outcome 2 requires a review of access barriers arising from cultural normativity within services. Robust and consistent data-gathering mechanisms across departments are also essential to track patterns of access and outcomes. The outcome should clearly prioritise equity, recognising that equal access or opportunity alone does not necessarily result in equal outcomes.

Outcome 4: Community Cohesion

To strengthen social relations and promote integration between all communities. This includes increasing the participation, representation and sense of belonging of people from minority ethnic communities.

Do you agree or disagree that Outcome 4 will help us to achieve the vision as detailed in the draft Framework document?

- Strongly agree
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Prefer not to say

Please provide any comments you wish to make in relation to Outcome 4 in the space below.

Belfast City Council supports the inclusion of Community Cohesion as a core outcome within the framework. We encourage the recognition of cohesion as a shared responsibility and the proposed actions for host communities that promote two-way integration and look forward to further clarity on how this will be delivered in practice. For this outcome to succeed, sustainable and longer-term funding is required, particularly for grassroots organisations, to ensure social capital is maintained and progress is not disrupted. The council also encourages explicit recognition of economic inequality as a key driver of racial disparities. Economic justice is central to social justice and cohesion, as access to employment, fair wages and progression opportunities shape participation and representation, key elements of this outcome. Without addressing these economic dimensions, progress across other outcomes is likely to be limited.

❖ Primary Interventions

The Framework adopts a public health model to address racial disparities through identifying and implementing interventions in line with the four strategic outcomes. To support the achievement of each outcome, the two-year Delivery Plan sets out the initial nine primary, secondary and tertiary actions that will be progressed as priorities. It is designed so that it will remain agile, allowing response to emerging needs and issues.

Primary Interventions: Activities that reduce risks or those that address the cause

- Launch a refreshed Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF) that is effective in delivering the outcomes of the Framework
- Enhance linkages and improve communication between the Racial Equality Subgroup and wider minority ethnic communities using workshops to increase reach and opportunities for sharing knowledge and best practice
- Develop and deliver a communications strategy focused on community cohesion

How much do you agree or disagree that each of the proposed Primary interventions should be progressed as priorities within the Two-Year Delivery Plan?

Launch a refreshed MEDF that is effective in delivering the outcomes of the Framework	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Enhance linkages and improve communication between the Racial Equality Subgroup and wider minority ethnic communities using workshops to increase reach and opportunities for sharing knowledge and best practice	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Develop and deliver a communications strategy focused on community cohesion	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say

Please use the space below to provide any comments on the proposal to prioritise these Primary interventions within the Two-Year Delivery Plan.

Belfast City Council welcomes the proposed primary interventions, including the launch of a refreshed Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF) as a commitment within the framework. Future iterations of MEDF must be accessible, with an increased budget to meet need in 2026. Refreshed MEDF should consider other funding streams and ongoing work at a local and regional level. While the value of the proposed interventions is acknowledged, we would welcome more ambitious primary interventions to achieve listed outcomes – interventions which are strategic and interdepartmental, with clearer ownership and responsibility. Stronger focus is needed on addressing root causes, including structural inequalities, institutional practices and the skills of departments to tackle racism and inequality, with due consideration of intersectionality. Race equality subgroups must be rooted in lived experience, with meaningful representation. Finally, whilst the development of a communications strategy is key, this should involve public bodies

taking a visible stance against racism and tackling misinformation, underpinned by strong political leadership to ensure credibility and impact.

❖ **Secondary interventions**

Secondary Interventions: Activities which focus on early detection to support early intervention and reduce the level of harm

- Embed cultural awareness and anti-racism training across public services
- Enhance links between race relations work and the outworkings of the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy review, to aid in incorporating race relations more effectively
- Develop interventions for the groups with the poorest outcomes, informed by the results of the research investigating outcomes of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland using the 2021 Census

How much do you agree or disagree that each of the proposed Secondary interventions should be progressed as priorities within the Two-Year Delivery Plan?

Embed cultural awareness and anti-racism training across public services	Strongly agree	Agree	<u>Neither agree nor disagree</u>	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Enhance links between race relations work and the outworkings of the T:BUC strategy review to aid in incorporating race relations more effectively	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Develop interventions for the groups with the poorest outcomes, informed by the results of the research investigating outcomes of minority ethnic groups in Northern Ireland using the 2021 Census	Strongly agree	Agree	<u>Neither agree nor disagree</u>	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say

Please use the space below to provide any comments on the proposal to prioritise these Secondary interventions within the Two-Year Delivery Plan.

Belfast City Council supports interventions focused on early detection, early intervention and harm reduction. However, for the first two years of the delivery plan, more strategic, cross-departmental interventions are needed to address urgent issues. The council supports targeting structural and systemic barriers affecting groups with the poorest outcomes. While Census 2021 data is a useful

starting point, it does not capture newer communities or changed migration patterns and may misrepresent Belfast's diverse landscape. Minority ethnic groups are not homogeneous, with different communities facing different barriers. The council welcomes efforts to strengthen links between race relations and the T:BUC strategy, embedding this work in the mainstream. We also welcome anti-racism training but encourage a shift from cultural awareness to cultural competency and trauma-informed practice. Overall, while these interventions are important, they remain underdeveloped, with limited clarity on implementation, including how early intervention will identify at-risk groups, allocate resources and ensure timely support.

❖ **Tertiary interventions**

Tertiary Interventions: Activities that minimise and/or address the consequences and provide support

- Develop scalable programmes on community cohesion and start roll-out
- Complete an initial round of community-led reviews to develop plans on key topics
- Expand community-based hubs led by the Refugee Integration Strategy to support all communities

How much do you agree or disagree that each of the proposed Tertiary interventions should be progressed as priorities within the Two-Year Delivery Plan?

Develop scalable programmes on community cohesion and start roll-out	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Complete an initial round of community-led reviews to develop plans on key topics	Strongly agree	Agree	<u>Neither agree nor disagree</u>	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Expand community-based hubs led by the Refugee Integration Strategy to support all communities	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say

Please use the space below to provide any comments on the proposal to prioritise these Tertiary interventions within the Two-Year Delivery Plan.

Belfast City Council supports interventions designed to support and expand opportunities for community cohesion. While these steps are important, for the first two years of the delivery plan we would expect more strategic, cross-departmental interventions that address urgent issues. The listed interventions are generic and would benefit from greater clarity on operational delivery, particularly in relation to Outcomes 7 and 8. BCC welcomes the focus on practical, scalable and community-led actions, which must be appropriately resourced. We welcome community-led reviews but note the importance of transparency at all stages and the need for tangible outcomes, given the 2024 independent review highlighted “consultation fatigue”. We agree in principle with expanding community-based accessible support; however, consideration should be given to existing resources. The council recommends assessing current provision that is open to all

communities, building capacity and confidence of organisations to support minority ethnic communities, rather than creating bespoke or siloed hubs.

❖ **Monitoring and Evaluation**

To ensure the Framework remains agile and adaptable, governance structures are built around principles of collaboration, accountability, and strategic alignment. These mechanisms enable timely responses to emerging priorities, promote cross-departmental learning, and ensure coordinated delivery.

Key governance mechanisms include:

- Oversight by the cross departmental Strategic Planning Group (SPG) and Tactical Delivery Group (TDG) including an SPG Performance Report
- Quarterly updates to the Racial Equality Subgroup & Thematic Groups
- Annual reporting to Ministers
- Five-year temperature check providing update on longer term progress
- Linking with other strategies
- Regular engagement with Racial Equality Subgroup and Thematic Groups
- Further research

How much do you agree or disagree that these key governance mechanisms are helpful for monitoring progress?

Oversight by the cross departmental SPG and TDG including an SPG Performance Report	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Quarterly updates to the Racial Equality Subgroup & Thematic Groups	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Annual reporting to Ministers	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Five-year temperature check providing update on longer term progress	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	<u>Disagree</u>	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Linking with other strategies	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
Regular engagement with Racial Equality Subgroup and Thematic Groups	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say

Further research	Strongly agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Prefer not to say
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Please provide any comments you wish to make in relation to the key governance mechanisms in the space below.

Belfast City Council agrees the framework should remain agile and adaptable, supported by strong governance structures that ensure responsiveness to need, cross-departmental learning and coordination. We encourage that oversight should sit at a senior level, with members oversight groups being decision-makers who have the skills, expertise, authority and capacity to drive outcomes. Informed and impactful representation is critical, as the 2024 review highlighted that departmental champions did not always have the seniority required to make key decisions. In relation to monitoring, outcome-based accountability is essential. TEO should establish baseline data and robust data-gathering mechanisms to track themes and trends that demonstrate impact. Periodic reviews should also be strengthened through more frequent and independent evaluation. A regular “temperature check” & ministerial reporting are key, but should more frequently, to ensure the framework remains relevant and effective.

❖ **Further comments**

Please provide any additional comments you wish to make in relation to the draft Framework for Race Relations and Delivery Plan 2026-2028 in the space below.

1. Addressing structural inequalities and providing strong leadership and strategic coordination

Belfast City Council welcomes the adoption of a public health approach within the Framework, however, to be effective, the Framework must explicitly recognise that racial inequality is also a structural issue that shapes outcomes across the entire life course for many people from minority ethnic communities. From early years and education, through labour market entry and progression, to housing, health and later life, racial inequality compounds disadvantage and undermines wellbeing and inclusion.

Belfast City Council recommends that the Framework and proposed interventions are more strategic, ambitious, cross departmental and explicitly aimed at addressing structural inequalities that inadvertently give rise to racial inequality.

Belfast City council recommends:

- *Clearly defining and acknowledging the impact of structural inequalities as embedded in institutions, policies, practices and social norms*
- *Commits the Executive to tackling structural inequalities across public institutions, even where overt discrimination is not present*
- *Commits the Executive to providing consistent political leadership, sustained commitment and adequate resourcing*
- *Provides alignment with existing strategies and commitments, to avoid duplication and ensure racial equality is embedded across all policy agendas including:*
 - *Tackling paramilitarism*
 - *Ending violence against women and girls*
 - *The review of Together: Building a United Community (TBUC)*
 - *Anti-poverty and health inequalities strategies*
- *Places a clear commitment on departments to review and act on the structural factors driving racial inequality, such as*

- *Educational attainment gaps, including language support and exclusion from opportunities*
- *Occupational segregation, insecure and low paid work, and barriers to progression*
- *Poverty and low income*
- *Poor housing conditions*
- *Poor physical and mental health outcomes*
- *Unequal access to transport, green space and essential services*
- *Hate crime, discrimination and exclusion*

Without tackling the underlying structures that produce unequal outcomes, progress will remain limited and uneven.

2. Improving Data, Evidence and Understanding

A persistent challenge in Northern Ireland is the lack of robust and comparable ethnicity data.

Belfast City Council recommends:

- *The Executive Office (TEO) takes a lead role in issuing guidance and setting standards for data collection across public bodies*

Without improved data, inequalities remain hidden and unaddressed.

3. Building Capacity Across Public Sector Organisations

While the Framework's focus on anti-racism and cultural awareness training is welcomed, this must go further.

Belfast City Council recommends:

- *Interventions that move beyond cultural awareness to develop:*
 - *An understanding of structural inequalities*
 - *An understanding of Intersectionality, including the interaction with class, gender, faith, disability and migration status*
- *Interventions that develop the competence of public bodies / departments so they have the skills, confidence and structures needed to implement racial equality consistently and effectively.*

4. Strengthening the Minority Ethnic / Voluntary and Community Sector

The minority ethnic / voluntary and community sector plays a critical role in advocacy, service delivery and building trust.

Belfast City Council recommends:

- *Long term investment, rather than short term or project-based funding*
- *Meaningful partnerships between the sector and the Executive*

5. Access to Justice and Accountability

Minority ethnic people must have improved access to justice systems that are accessible, trusted and trauma informed.

Belfast City Council recommends a stronger focus on interventions by the Department of Justice (DOJ)

- *Interventions that are also focused on potential perpetrators.*
- *Interventions to address the fear and isolation that is persistent among many within minority ethnic communities, particularly following on from the recent hate riots.*

6. Role of Councils

Belfast City Council welcomes the commitment in the framework to working with Councils but would welcome further guidance in relation to this.

7. Commitment to Measurement and Continuous Improvement

Finally, addressing racial inequality must be a whole Executive commitment, supported by people that have lived experience who are involved in the co design and oversight of interventions.

Belfast City Council recommends that the Executive commit to:

- *Reviewing current thematic working groups, the Race Equality Subgroup and other tactical and strategic delivery structures in relation to this framework, to ensure they are reflective of those with lived experience and that the membership has the skills and expertise to input into the delivery of this framework.*

Belfast PEACEPLUS

Priority 1.1 Local Community
Peace Action Plan

Performance Dashboard

As of

14/04/2026 15:44:24

Please select a report below...

KPI Tracker

All
Participants

Achieved
Participants

Equality
Monitoring

Attitudinal
Survey

Programme
Board
Report (all
Participants)

Programme
Board
Report
(Achieved
Participants)

Monthly
Report



PEACEPLUS
Northern Ireland - Ireland

Co-funded by the
European Union UK Government



**Belfast
City Council**

The Belfast Local Community Action Plan is supported by PEACEPLUS, a programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

Achieved Participants

1,876
Total Achieved

🎯 **Participant Target: 17,454**
Total Left: 15,578 10.7%
Total Registered: 3,020
% Achieved to Total Participants 62%

50%
Achieved Participants (Woman or Girl)

Total Female Achieved: 947
Total Achieved: 1,876
 🎯 **Woman or Girl Target: 40%**

20%
Achieved Participants (Ethnic Minority)

Total Ethnic Minority Achieved: 370
Total Achieved: 1,876
 🎯 **Ethnic Minority Target: 40%**

Equality & Attitudinal Survey Respondents

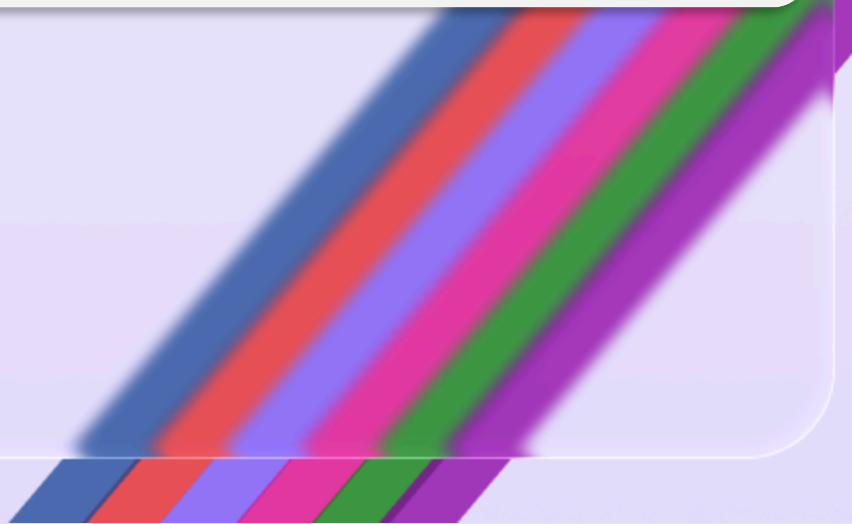
1272
Total Respondents to Date

Respondents to Achieved: 68%
 👍 **% Positive Responses: 75%** (Positive = Strongly Agree, Agree or Yes)

47%
Woman or Girl Respondents

Total Woman or Girl Respondents: 595

18%
Ethnic Minority Respondents




Achieved Participants




1K
Total Achieved

🎯 **Participant Target: 7,638**
Total Left: 6,190 19.0%
Total Registered: 2,229
% Achieved to Total Participants 65%



48%
Achieved Participants (Woman or Girl)


Total Female Achieved: 700
Total Achieved: 1K
🎯 **Woman or Girl Target: 40%**



20%
Achieved Participants (Ethnic Minority)


Total Ethnic Minority Achieved: 285
Total Achieved: 1K
🎯 **Ethnic Minority Target: 40%**

Equality & Attitudinal Survey Respondents




966
Total Respondents to Date

Respondents to Achieved: 67%
👍 **% Positive Responses: 74%** (Positive = Strongly Agree, Agree or Yes)

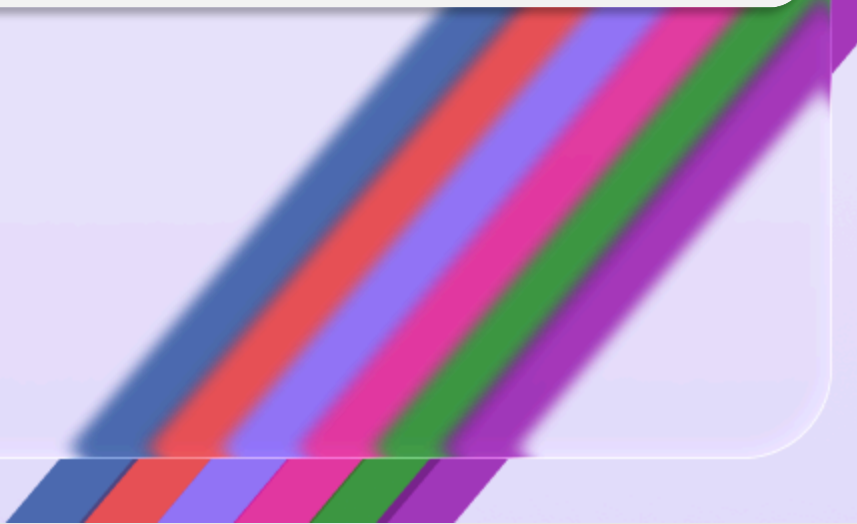


44%
Woman or Girl Respondents

Total Woman or Girl Respondents: 425



18%
Ethnic Minority Respondents




Achieved Participants




428
Total Achieved

🎯 **Participant Target: 5,536**
Total Left: 5,108 7.7%
Total Registered: 791
% Achieved to Total Participants 54%



58%
Achieved Participants (Woman or Girl)


Total Female Achieved: 247
Total Achieved: 428
 🎯 **Woman or Girl Target: 40%**



20%
Achieved Participants (Ethnic Minority)


Total Ethnic Minority Achieved: 85
Total Achieved: 428
 🎯 **Ethnic Minority Target: 40%**

Equality & Attitudinal Survey Respondents




306
Total Respondents to Date

Respondents to Achieved: 71%
 👍 **% Positive Responses: 77%** (Positive = Strongly Agree, Agree or Yes)

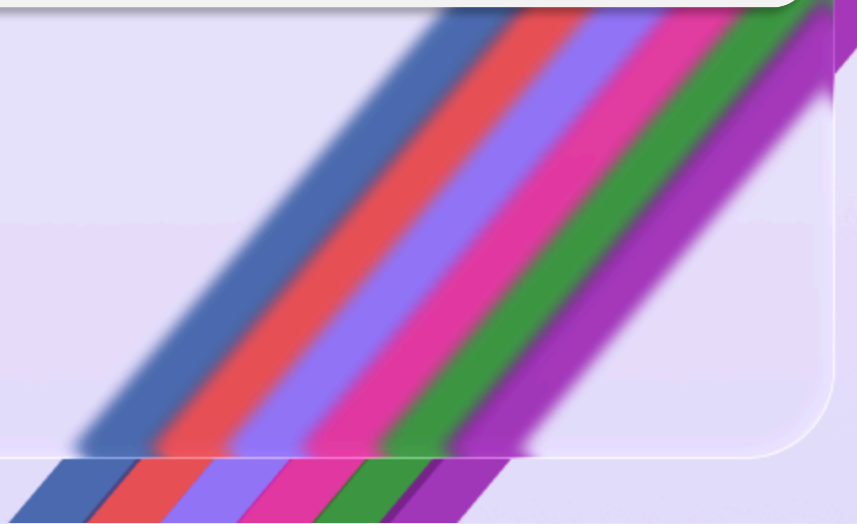


56%
Woman or Girl Respondents

Total Woman or Girl Respondents: 170



17%
Ethnic Minority Respondents



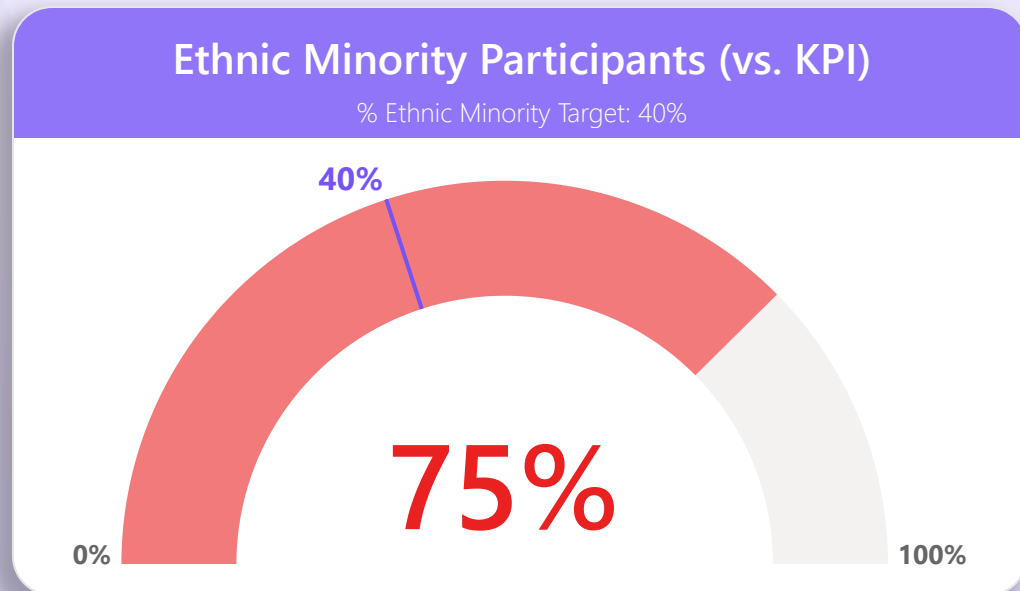
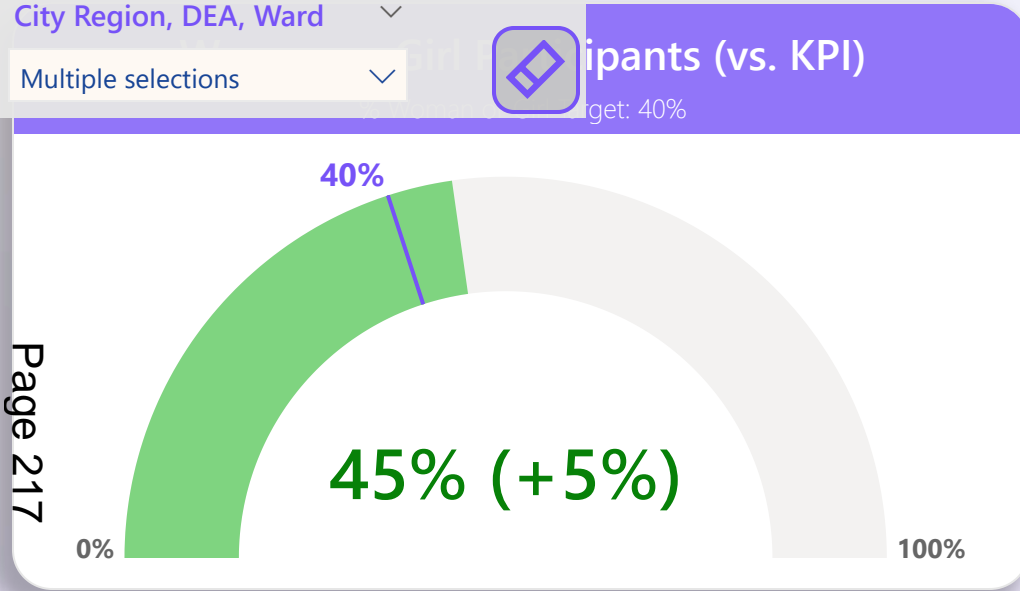
Filters [X]

- Theme, Project, Cohort [v]
- All [v]
- Project Manager [v]
- Multiple selections [v]
- City Region, DEA, Ward [v]
- Multiple selections [v]

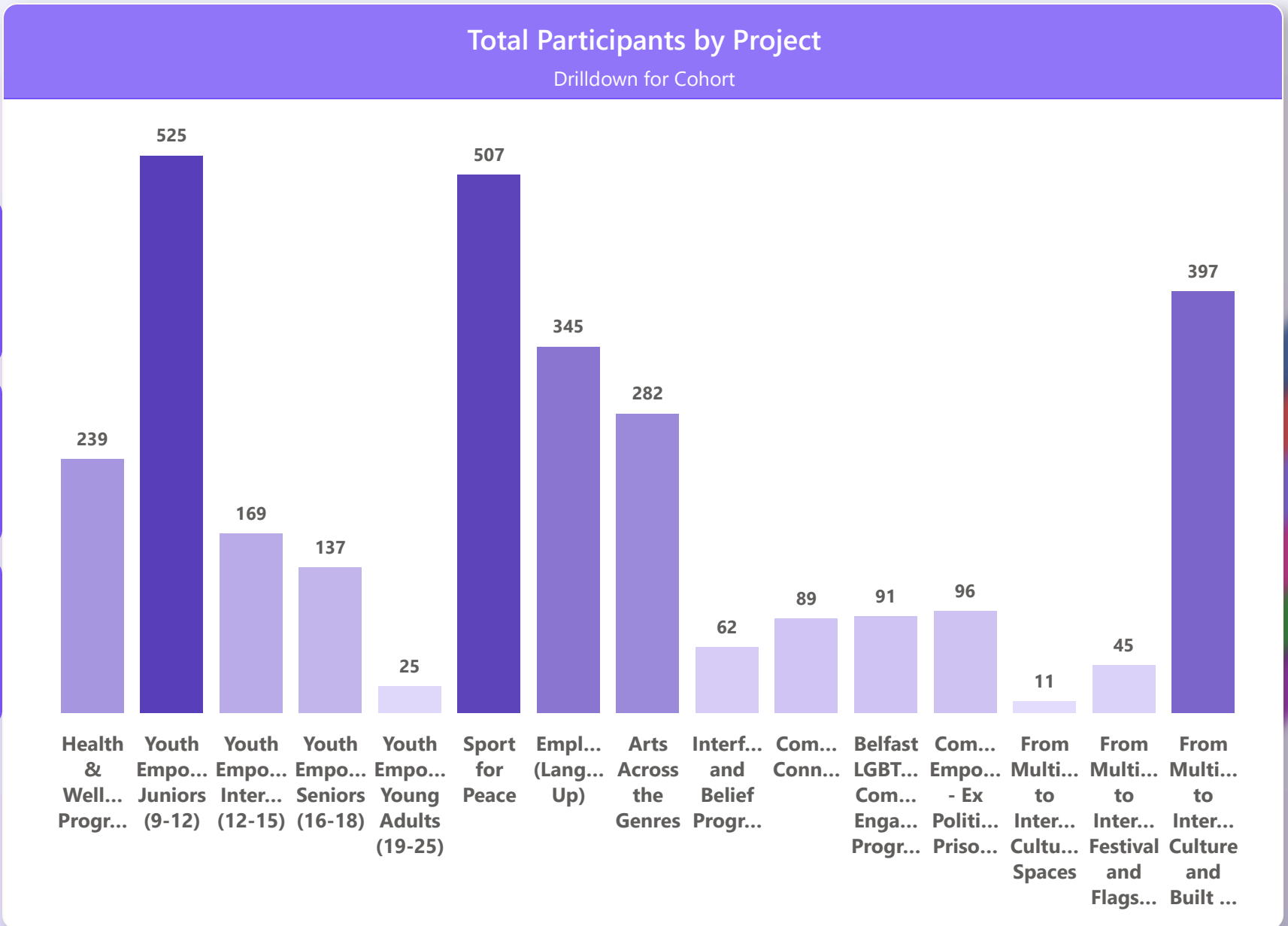
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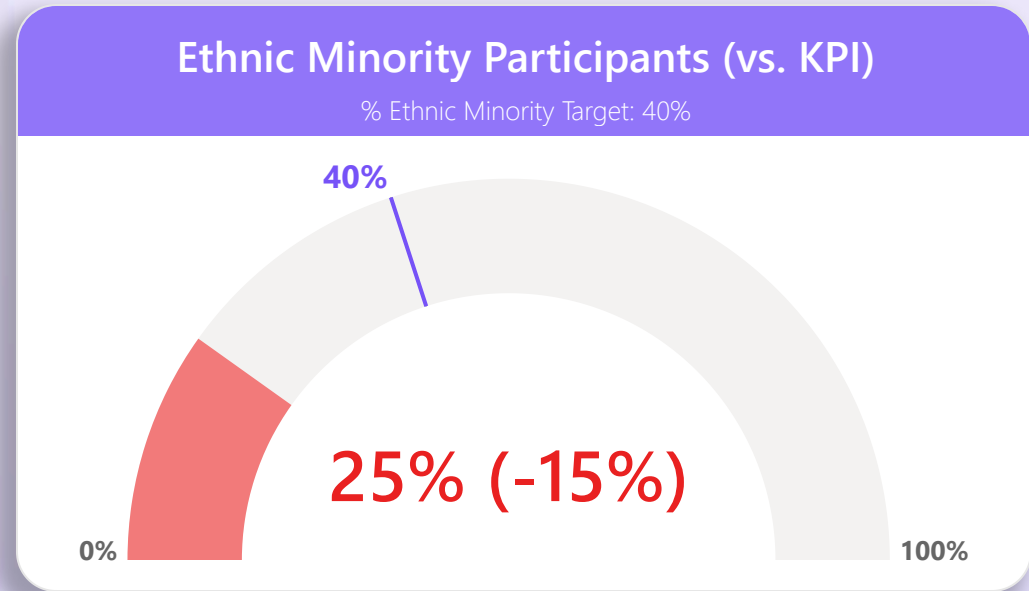
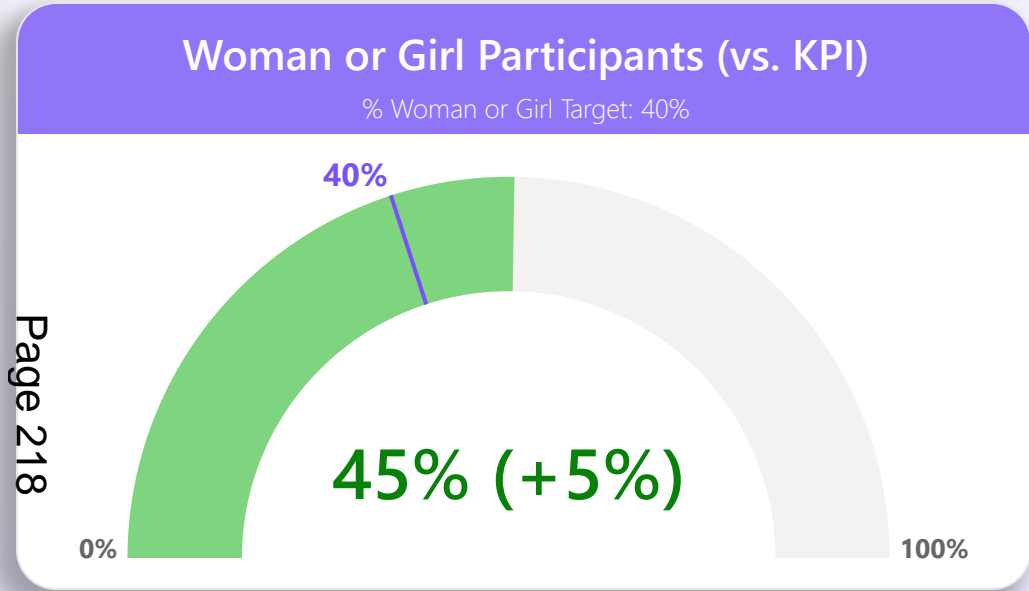
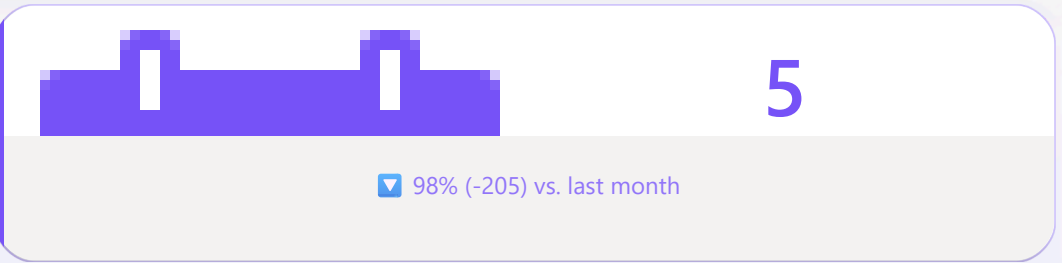
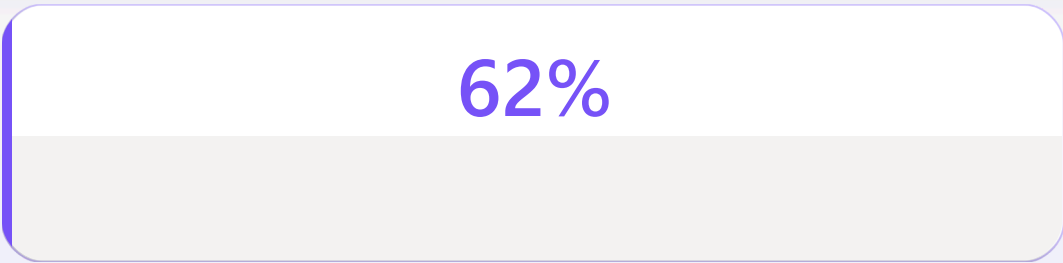
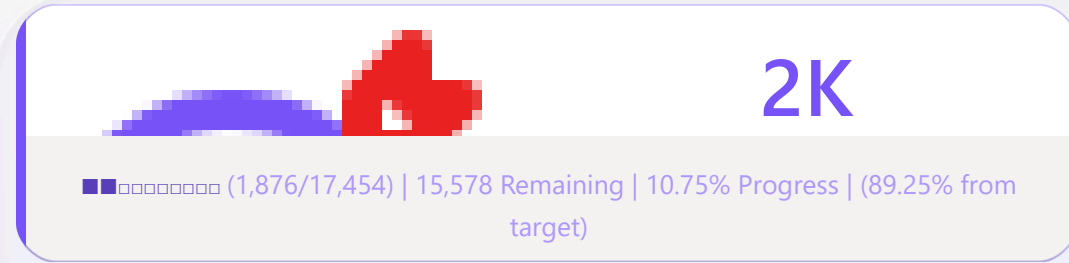
16

72% (-41) vs. last month



- Total Participants by Project
- Project Registrations over Time
- Participant Registrations over Time

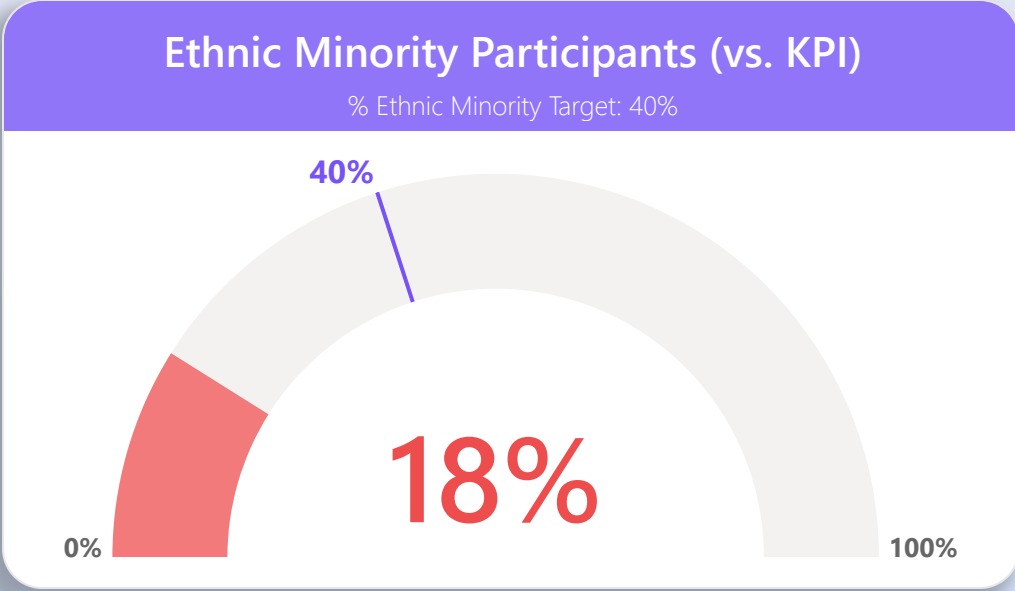
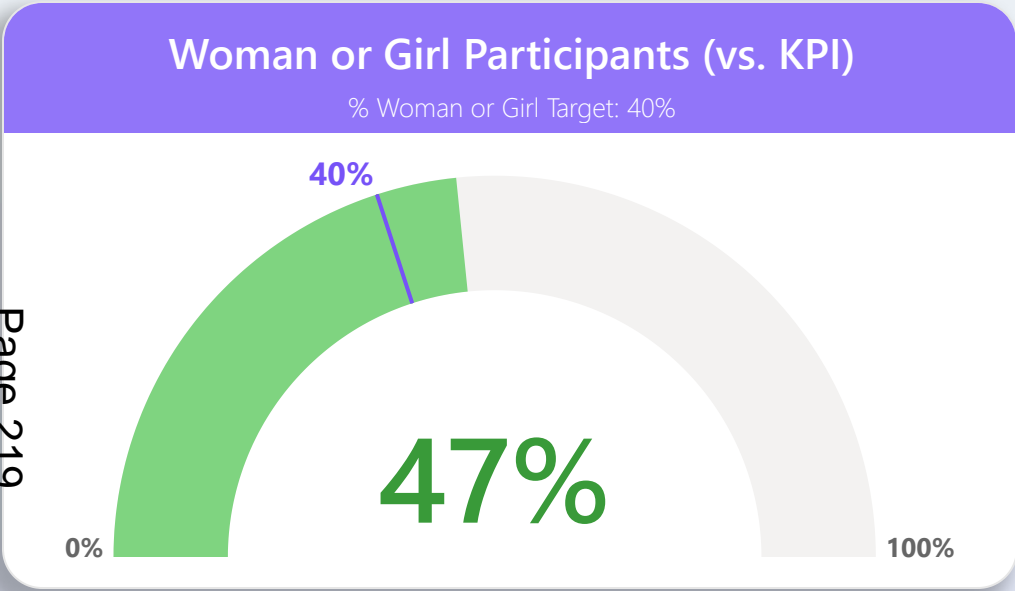




Achieved Participants over Time | Achieved by Project | **Achieved by Activity**

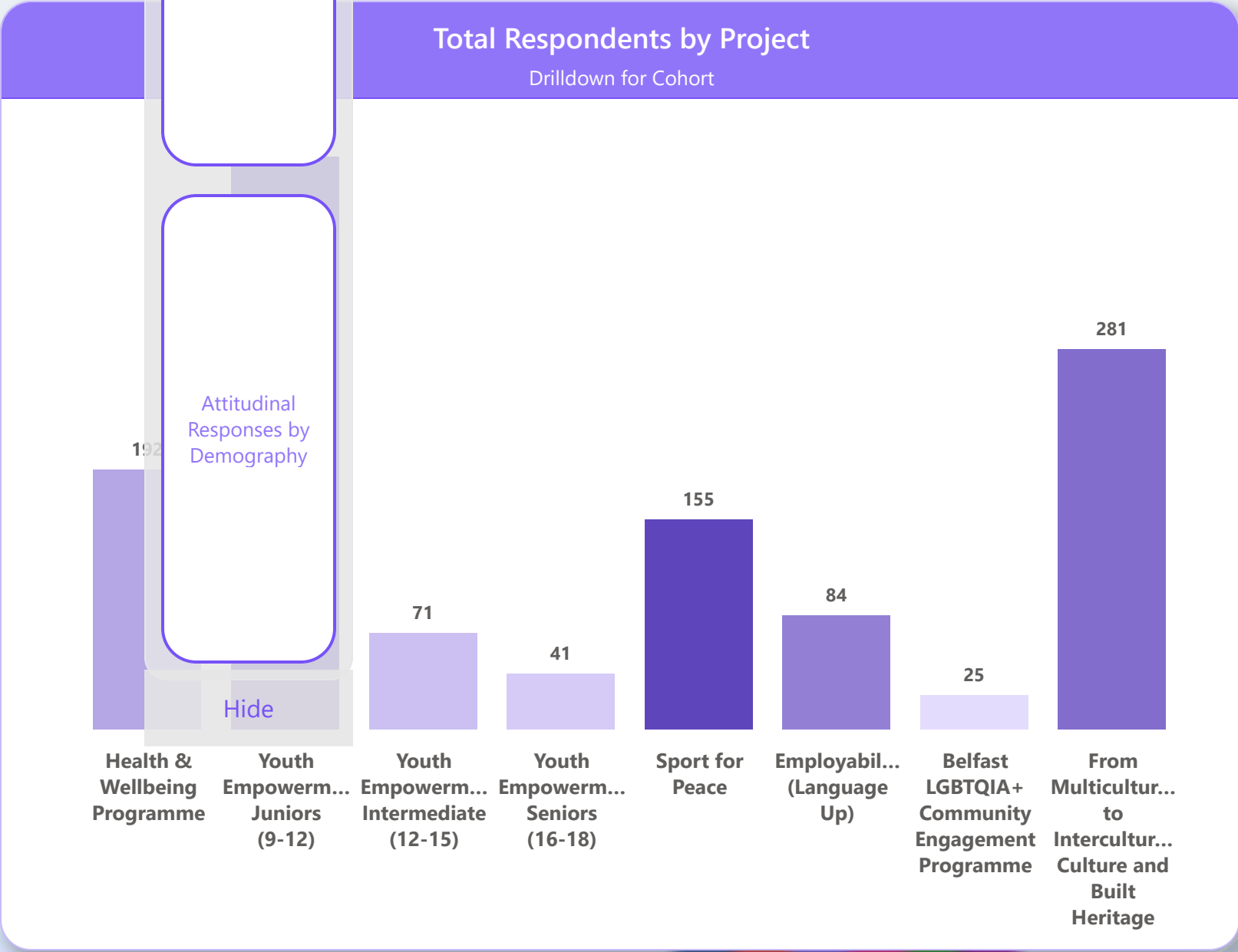
Total Achieved Participants by Project & Activity

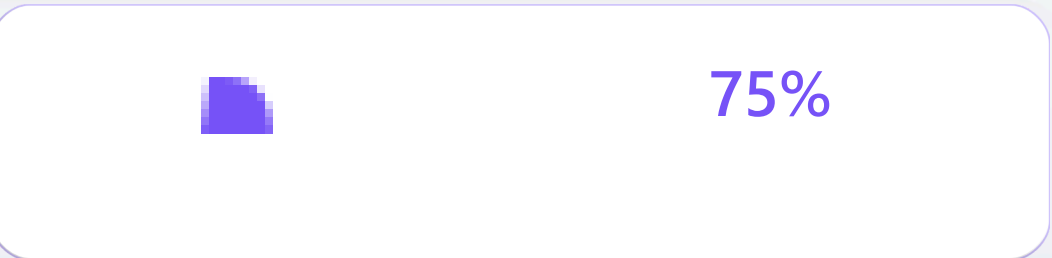
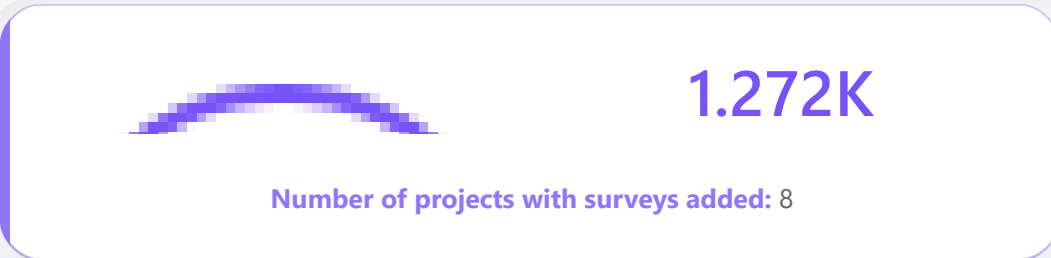
Project & Activity	Total Achieved
TPC	1,448
Health & Wellbeing Programme	250
Peacebuilding Cross Community Session	231
Take 5 Session	19
Youth Empowerment: Juniors (9-12)	411
Junior (9-12 year old) Activity	411
Youth Empowerment: Intermediate (12-15)	124
Intermediate (12-15 year old) Activity	123
Intermediate (12-15 year old) Social Action Learning Activity	1
Youth Empowerment: Seniors (16-18)	41
Seniors (16-18 year old) Activity (Non-Residential)	41
Youth Empowerment: Young Adults (19-25)	26
Young Adults (19-25 year old) Activity (Residential)	26
Sport for Peace	341
Pillar 1: Qualification/Coach Education	30
Pillar 2: Participation	311
Employability (Language Up)	89
Strand 1: Community Provision of Flexible Language Courses	53
Strand 2: Community Programme of Activities (including co-design process)	36
Arts Across the Genres	166
Cross community shared sessions - cross-genre work	111
Cross community shared sessions - same genre work	41
Group establishment/ capacity building sessions	5
Local Showcase	5
Project 5 creation and documentary making, social media management	4
Total	1,876



Responses over Time

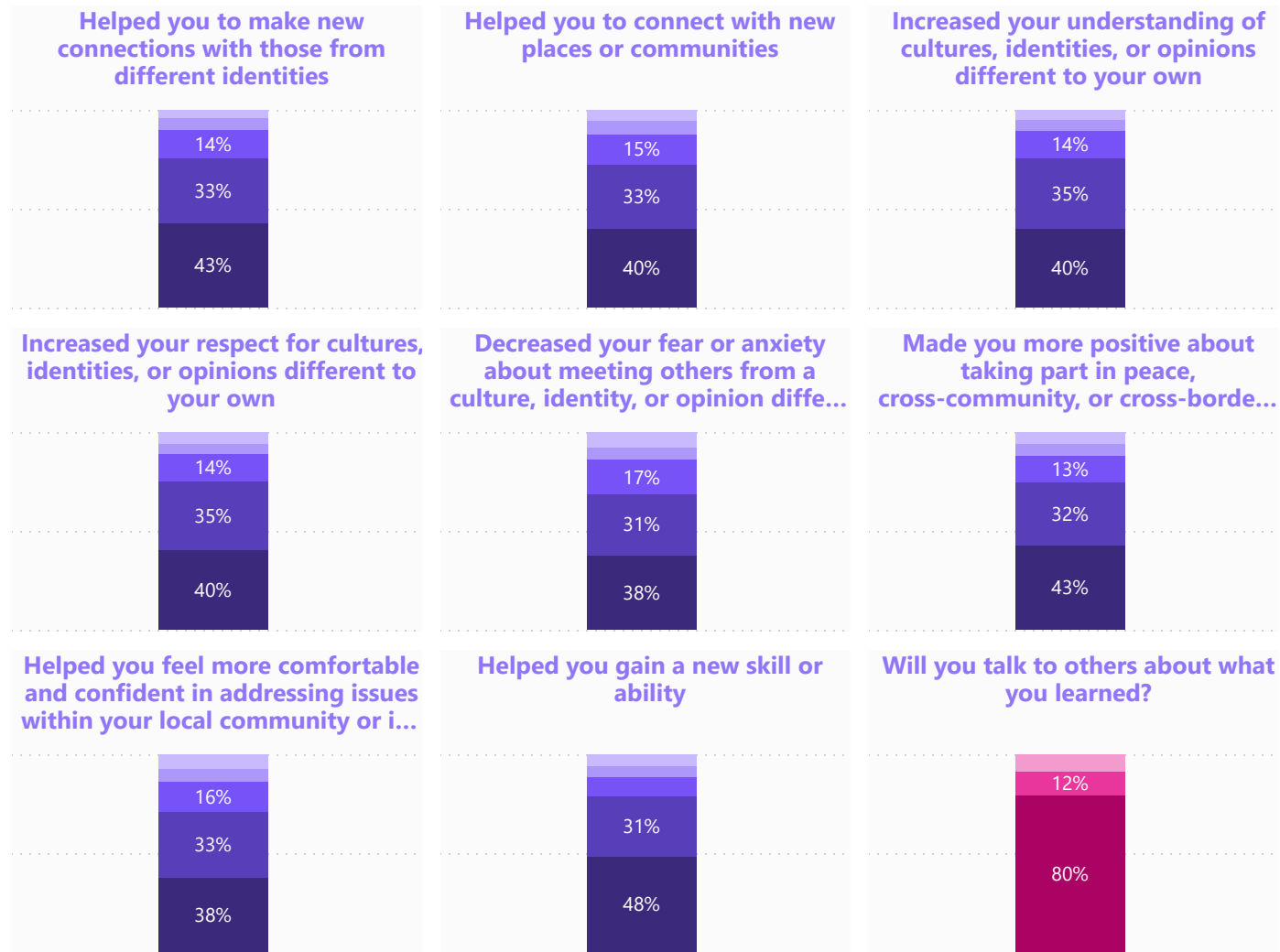
Respondents by Project





Question Response Gauge

● Strongly Agree ● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree ● Strongly Disagree ● Yes ● No ● Prefer not to answer



Positive Responses per Question

Positive Responses = Agree, Strongly Agree or Yes

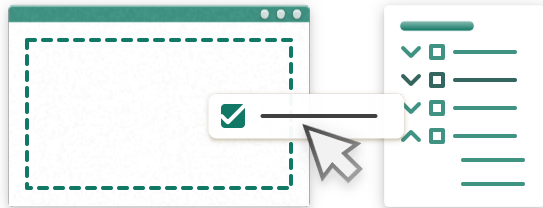


At 80 %, Will you talk to others about what you learned? had the highest % Positive Responses and was 16 % higher than Decreased your fear or anxiety about meeting others from a culture, identity, or opinion different to your own, which had the lowest % Positive Responses at 69 %.

Across all 9 Question, % Positive Responses ranged from 69 % to 80 %.

Build visuals with your data

Select or drag fields from the **Data** pane onto the report canvas.



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From: John Walsh Date: 8 April 2026
To: SEUPB Director of Programmes
Subject: Performance Targets 2026 Acceptance
Project Name: Belfast Local Action Plan
Project Ref: PP00353

As the Lead Partner and signature to the Letter of Offer for the above-named Project, I confirm acceptance of the Performance Targets as outlined and understand that failure to meet targets places project funding at risk.

I further confirm this will be shared with the Partnership and that collectively we will endeavour to ensure the project meets all targets.

John Walsh
Chief Executive

SIGNATURE:

KEY ASSUMPTIONS

The spend targets for the Belfast Local Action plan are based on a range of key assumptions, as outlined below:

1. Delivery & Implementation Assumptions

- Planned timelines remain unchanged and there are no unforeseen delays in mobilisation, procurement, or contract initiation of projects.
- Delivery partners perform as expected and there are no changes to their capacity or capability.
- Target groups engage as anticipated without barriers.
- Achievement of key milestones, targets and results by delivery partners are as scheduled enabling payment release within the agree timeframes.
- Administration and payment process is as planned, and there are no delays in Delivery Partners and Financial Controller invoicing.
- Recruitment and staffing proceeds on schedule with vacancies filled and staffing levels remaining as outlined.

2. Financial & Cost Assumptions

Béal Feirste
Muineachán
An Ómaigh
7ú hUirlár
Foirgneamh Clarence Thiar
2 Sráid Clarence Thiar
Béal Feirste
Tuaisceart Éireann
BT2 7GP

Tel: +44 (0) 28 9026 6660

Belfast
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Omagh
7th Floor
The Clarence West Building
2 Clarence Street West
Belfast
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Fax: +44 (0) 28 9026 6661

Bilfawst
Munachan
Omey
7th Flure
The Clarence West Biggin
2 Clarence Street West
Bilfawst
Norlin Airlan
BT2 7GP

Email: info@seupb.eu

Web: www.seupb.eu



- Procurement costs, including infrastructure and works costs, align with the cost estimates and enable delivery within budgets.
- There is no increase of delivery costs, which is pertinent specifically due to the current worldwide economic climate
- No significant unplanned costs emerge affecting implementation.
- Exchange rates fluctuations between €1.15 planning / forecasting rate and the SEUPB reimbursement rate

These assumptions provide a reasonable and evidence based foundation that underpin our spend forecasts. Any variances that require flexibility and reasonable adjustments will be reported to SEUPB at the earliest stage possible.

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum Thursday 14th May 2026

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Michael Long

Councillor Sarah Bunting

Councillor Brian Smyth

Councillor Séamas de Faoite

Councillor Natasha Brennan

Apologies: Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officer:

John Walsh, Chief Executive

Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services

Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance

Nora Largery, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services

Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place & Economy

Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects

Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty

Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Ulster Orchestra

The Chief Executive welcomed Auveen Sands, Chief Executive and colleagues from the Ulster Orchestra. Members were presented with an overview of the transformative journey the Ulster Orchestra has taken in recent years which included the acquisition of Townsend Street Church as its new home. The deputation outlined the extensive restoration and redevelopment work undertaken to date and the future development proposals for the site on a longer term basis. Members noted the Orchestra's vision, strategic objectives, outreach work and the significant community and engagement programme of work with key stakeholders in the city to embed music in local communities. Alignment with the Belfast Agenda and other key strategies was highlighted and potential links to the Bolder Vision for Belfast was noted. Members thanked Auveen and colleagues for attending and for the excellent outreach work being undertaken by the Orchestra in local communities. It was agreed that a copy of the presentation would be shared with PGL's following the meeting.

2. Finance Update

The Director of Finance updated on the current financial position of the Council, Members noted the update provided and that a detailed year end finance report would be brought to June SP&R Committee.

The Director also provided an update on the discretionary funding reserve and arising from the discussion it was agreed that a review of the fund going forward was required, with the Director to engage with individual parties in order to ascertain the desired criteria and approach for the fund. Members also raised some queries in relation to specified reserves set aside in previous years and it was noted that the detail of these would be included in the year end finance report along with an update on how these could potentially be progressed within agreed timeframes.

The Director also outlined a high-level overview of requests emerging from P&C and CG&R Committees that had been referred to SP&R Committee, the detail of which will be brought to May SP&R Committee for Members consideration. Members asked that the long term funding options for these requests is taken into consideration going forward. A Member requested that a summary economic impact/benefits report for the events discussed was brought to a future meeting.

It was noted a further Transformation and Efficiency Workshop will be held in June date to follow.

3. Events Space

The Director of Property and Projects referred to the ongoing work to identify and assess suitable event sites as previously discussed by the Forum following decision to restore playing pitch provision at the Boucher Road Playing Fields site. It was noted that engagement is still underway with key stakeholders and therefore Members agreed that the Director continues with these discussions to further explore. The relevant stakeholders to then be invited to the next Party Group Leaders meeting on 28 May to discuss emerging concept plans. A report will then be brought to June SP&R Committee for consideration.

The Director also provided a briefing on access arrangements for the events scheduled for this year at the Boucher Road Playing Fields site which was noted by Members.

4. City Hall Stained Glass Window – Health Service

The Director of Property and Projects provided an update on the design, manufacture and timeline for the installation of the new stained glass window in City Hall in recognition of the Health Service in Belfast. Members noted the draft design presented which had been considered by the City Hall/City Hall Grounds Working Group this month. Following discussion

the Director to consider the feedback provided and subsequently Members agreed on the design in principle, subject to minor amends should they arise following the further engagement taking place as outlined. It was noted that the final design will then be considered by SP&R Committee in June.

5. Governance Review

The City Solicitor outlined the programme of work that has been undertaken in relation to the Governance Review. Members noted the proposals and next steps as outlined which will be included in a report to May SP&R Committee. Members will be asked to further consider and review the proposals with a detailed report to then be brought back to June SP&R Committee. The City Solicitor to consider Party Group Briefings in tandem where parties require. A Member raised a query in relation to the Standards and Business Committee and the City Solicitor to further consider in the context of the review. Arising from the discussion it was noted that an update on the terms and conditions for the booking of rooms in community centres would be brought to the next Party Group Leaders meeting.

6. Funding - Area Based Community Planning

The Chief Executive outlined the details of a potential funding opportunity for the area based community planning programme of work. It was noted that Members were in consensus that Officers further explore with the Department of Foreign Affairs and an update brought back to Party Group Leaders as discussions progress.

The Director of Property & Projects and the Head of Inclusive Growth & Anti-Poverty also outlined the timelines and next steps for the Local Community Ownership Fund and the area-based community planning programme funding allocation agreed by Council.

7. Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy presented a summary update in relation to the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann work programme and outlined the work underway across a number of core workstreams including an update on the highlights from the main programme and fringe programme. The Director also provided an update in relation to the engagement programme to ensure participation and communication with key stakeholders across the city. The Director noted the points raised by Members and to follow up accordingly. A report on the detail discussed will be brought to May SP&R Committee.

8. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on a number of planning matters which were currently live. In relation to a specific query raised by a Member the City Solicitor to follow up with the Member in due course.

9. Illuminate Requests

The City Solicitor outlined for Members an illuminate request received. Members noted the following request would be agreed under the City Solicitors delegated authority.

- **International Overdose Awareness Day – 31 August 2026**

10. AOB

Sporting Event Opportunity

The Chief Executive provided a briefing on a request he had received to explore the potential to host a sporting event in Belfast. The Chief Executive outlined the detail of the event, the opportunity that had arisen and the outcome following initial discussions. Members discussed the potential financial implications involved and the benefits arising from hosting the event in the city. It was noted that further due diligence and exploration would be undertaken by Officers with an update to be brought back to the Forum in due course.

Members also noted a potential further co-hosting sporting event opportunity in 2031 and again there was consensus for Officers to further explore.

A Member raised a query in relation to a previous proposal that was presented to Party Group Leaders for which the Chief Executive provided clarity.

Proposal to host Large Scale Event

The Strategic Director of Place & Economy provided an update on a request previously discussed at the Forum to be a host city and partner in a large scale event in Belfast in 2028 and potentially 2030. The Director referred to the previous discussion held with Members and provided an update following Officers consideration in relation to budgetary constraints, strategic alignment, resource requirements and market considerations given existing

obligations. Following discussion, it was noted a report will be brought to a future SP&R Committee.

Meeting Request

The Chief Executive sought the view of Members in relation to a request from Cathedral Quarter BID to present to Party Group Leaders. It was agreed that representatives be invited to a special meeting of Party Group Leaders to which key statutory stakeholders would also be invited.

Chief Executive Appraisal

Members were asked to note that correspondence will be issued seeking nominations for the Chief Executive appraisal panel.

Issues Raised by Members

It was noted that:

- A meeting with the organisers of an upcoming event in the city would be arranged in relation to the issue raised.
- Officers to follow up on the matters raised by Members in relation to Ormeau Park and Belsonic.
- Officers to provide an update on Christmas Market 2026.

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Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Requests for use of the City Hall
Date:	22 May 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Christopher Burns, Interim Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	This paper, together with the attached appendix, contains the recommended approach in

	respect of each of the requests by external organisations for access to the City Hall function rooms received up to 8 May 2026.
1.2	The report also seeks to address recent queries raised recently by Elected Members around the use of crockery, cutlery, glassware and linen.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background Information</u>
3.1	The current criteria for use of the function rooms used to review external applications is set out below.
3.2	Functions are invited for a range of purposes, including those: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which support other events in the city; are of demonstrable economic benefit to Belfast, • celebrate or commemorate a notable achievement or significant anniversary by an organisation or body with close links to the city or Northern Ireland or those, • organised by recognised local community or voluntary sector groups for non-profit and non-political purposes.
3.3	Functions that may not be allowed; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are those which have as their primary purpose the advancement of any political or religious cause or campaign or are otherwise potentially contentious or involve significant reputation risks for the council, • or private events or functions which have no compelling links to the council or the city specifically and which could instead use local private sector facilities.
3.4	<u>Key Issues</u> Committee will recall that at its meeting on 23 rd January 2026 it considered an update on the City Hall Income Generation Project and subsequently agreed the revision of criteria for the use of Belfast City Hall and the provision of room hire fees and additional charges / recharges for event services. The events listed in the schedule of Appendix 1 have been reviewed against this new criteria and room hire prices applied on this basis.
3.5	Elected Members also recently queried if the new charges implemented to recover costs for services at City Hall included the use of crockery, cutlery, glassware and linen. The new charges do not change how these items have always been provided. Crockery, cutlery,

	<p>glassware and table linens have always been provided by the external catering company selected by the event organiser. All caterers include the provision of these items as a separate charge.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>
3.6	None.
	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.7	None.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Schedule of function requests received up to 8 May 2026.

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MAY 2026 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGES
Shankill Baptist Church	21 August 2026	<p>130th Anniversary Commemoration and Celebration for local congregation who work in the community assisting in local nursing homes, running summer football camps, children's events, providing a safe space for young people of the Shankill</p> <p>Numbers attending - 70</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NO ROOM HIRE • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></p>
British Council	5 November 2026	<p>British Council Schools Connect - COP31 - The debate engages students (aged 16-18) from approx. 30 schools in Northern Ireland to debate live and topical COP31 issues through a climate negotiation simulation.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 150</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room Hire of £1250 • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></p>
MDSG (Mineral Deposits Studies Group)	5 January 2027	<p>MDSG Winter Conference Dinner - Conference showcases the latest scientific research in economic geology, attended by academic staff, PhD students and personnel from government and industry.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 160</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room Hire of £1250 • Any applicable additional charges
The Open University	8 March 2027	<p>Open University Council Dinner – Tours, reception, dinner and entertainment to mark a quarterly meeting of the University's executive governing body in Belfast</p> <p>Numbers attending - 70</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room Hire of £450 • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></p>
QUB School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering	24 March 2027	<p>Emerald Isle Conference Dinner 2027 – Reception, dinner and entertainment as highlight of social activities for conference exploring sustainable chemistry and engineering.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 200</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room Hire of £1250 • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity</i></p>

MAY 2026 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

				<i>deduction applied to final total</i>
British Poultry Council Ltd	13 April 2027	President's Gala dinner - Reception, dinner and entertainment to close 3 day international poultry industry conference being held at the Europa Numbers attending; 225	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Room Hire of £1250• Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>

Language Strategy Working Group

Monday, 27th April, 2026

MEETING OF THE LANGUAGE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

- Members present: Councillor Walsh (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillor R. Brooks.
- Also attended: Councillor Bower (representing Councillor Long).
- In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of External Affairs,
Communications and Marketing;
Mr. R. Connolly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Mr. C. McGuigan, Irish Language Officer; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Groogan and Long.

It was noted that Councillor Bower was attending the meeting in place of Councillor Long.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 30th January, 2025, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Presentation - Commissioner for the Ulster Scots and the Ulster British Tradition, Mr. Lee Reynolds

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. L. Reynolds to the meeting.

He explained that the New Decade New Approach agreement in 2020 had proposed the official recognition of the Ulster Scots language and the appointment of an Ulster Scots/Ulster British Commissioner. He had subsequently been appointed as the Commissioner of the Ulster Scots and Ulster British tradition, from November 2025, for a period of five years.

He advised the Working Group that his principal aims were to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with Ulster Scots and to give advice in relation to the Ulster British tradition. He added that there would also be a complaints element to his role, the terms of which were yet to be established.

The Working Group was advised of the various pieces of legislation from which he would primarily be working and highlighted that Ulster Scots had been recognised as a minority language through the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

In regards to the promotion of the language, he stated that a legal duty had been placed on the Department of Education, in February 2025, and that he wanted to look at a three year implementation plan and related curriculum reform. He outlined that education was a key priority for him and that he would be seeking to engage with schools and colleges as part of that work.

In response to a Member's question, he outlined that his approach to the promotion of Ulster Scots was not going to be the same as the Commissioner for the Irish Language, and that the two languages should not be seen as "competitive" with each other.

The City Solicitor explained that she was keen that the Council would be kept informed regarding their schools' engagement programme and the legal opinion in respect of the level of protection afforded to the language.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Reynolds for his time and he retired from the meeting.

Update on the draft Ulster Scots Policy

The City Solicitor explained that she intended to bring the final draft of the Ulster Scots Policy to the next meeting of the Working Group.

She added that work had been carried out on Ulster Scots street names and that those would be brought forward imminently.

Noted.

Update on the Sign Language Bill

The City Solicitor provided the Working Group with an update on the upcoming Sign Language Bill (Northern Ireland) 2025. She outlined that the legislation would require public bodies in NI to take reasonable steps to ensure that the information and services provided by it were accessible to individuals in the deaf community. It would also give official and equal recognition of British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) as languages of Northern Ireland and promote the use and understanding of both.

In response to a Member's query, the City Solicitor confirmed that officers would be conducting a language audit of all staff to ascertain what languages staff spoke and to what level. The Member requested that the staff audit of how many Council staff had knowledge of British or Irish Sign Language be expedited.

The Language Officer advised the Members that the Council offered Level 1 BSL to a number of front-line staff but that there was currently a shortage of sign language teachers in NI. He pointed out that the Bill would require more Sign Language translators

and interpreters and, while they were awaiting guidance from the Department for Communities on the full impact of the Bill, it had provided assurance of more tutors.

The Working Group thanked officers and noted the update.

Irish Language Policy - verbal update

The City Solicitor updated the Working Group on the recent court case in relation to the Council's operation of the Call-in procedure and how there had been some confusion in the media's reporting of it.

She clarified that the Council's Irish Language Policy had been called-in and that it was currently under consideration by a Barrister. The Members would be updated once the Counsel's Opinion had been received.

Noted.

Irish Language Programming during Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026

The City Solicitor and the Director of Communications presented the following report to the Working Group:

“1.0 Purpose of report or summary of main issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the working group on the ongoing work by officers in relation to the use of during Irish language during the Fleadh and to seek approval for the setting up of an Irish Language Sub-Committee for the Fleadh.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Working Group is asked to note the contents of this report, provide feedback as necessary.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 will be held in Belfast between 2nd and 9th August 2026. The Fleadh will also be held in Belfast in 2027. There is a strong emphasis in the Fleadh on the promotion, use and visibility of the Irish language. The use and promotion of the Irish language has been raised by stakeholders with Council officers during previous engagement around the issue.

3.2 The MAC has been identified as an Irish language hub during the Fleadh week and a programme will be developed of Irish language activity in the MAC during that week. Input will be sought from local Irish language organisations and musicians, as well as Irish language groups from outside Belfast through an expression of interest process. An external producer has

been appointed and will help with programming these activities.

The MAC programme will be subject to ongoing discussion through the sub-committee of the Forum which will be the dedicated Irish Language Committee for the purposes of the Fleadh.

- 3.3 The Fleadh will be an authentic typical Fleadh experience in terms of the visibility of Irish. By way of example, a business toolkit will be available proactively in Irish. We will continue to explore ways to promote the visibility of Irish in accordance with our commitments in the Language Strategy Action Plan around tourism.

Irish will be visible in the communications and marketing output during the Fleadh. This will include the use of Irish on temporary signage in the city, and in the Council's media and social media output where resources and timing allow.

3.4 **Next steps**

Members are asked to note the contents of this report, provide feedback as necessary.

4.0 **Monitoring and Reporting**

- 4.1 The working group will be provided with a further update on progress at its next meeting.

5.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

6.0 **Equality, good relations or rural needs implications**

None associated with this report.”

The Working Group noted the update provided.

Chairperson



Subject:	Request for use of City Hall grounds for Summer Cinema 2026
Date:	22 May 2025
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Christopher Burns, Interim Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports													
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>												
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After Council Decision		<input type="checkbox"/>											
Sometime in the future		<input type="checkbox"/>											
Never		<input type="checkbox"/>											

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
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1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider requests from Belfast One to hold two 'Summer Cinema' events on City Hall lawns

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sunday 19th July 2026 • Sunday 26th July 2026
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authorise the use of City Hall grounds on dates noted above. 2. Authorise 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.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background Information</u></p> <p>Members will be aware that requests for the use of City Hall are normally dealt with under the authority delegated by the Committee to the Director of Legal and Civic Services using criteria agreed for this purpose. Occasionally however, it is necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the requests set out below falls into this category.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Belfast One has made a request to hold two ‘summer cinema’ events in the City Hall grounds during July 2026 and this report seeks to update members on this request. Due to the larger scale of activity involved it is deemed necessary to seek Committee approval.</p>
3.3	<p><u>The Proposed events</u></p> <p>The proposed events would take place on the front lawns only and areas such as the Titanic Garden and Cenotaph will remain open to the public. Access to the City Hall building will not be affected.</p>
3.4	<p>The organisers would be providing all stewarding/marshalling staff & first aiders and would of course have to comply with the usual conditions including indemnities for damage and submission of a formal event-management plan.</p>
3.5	<p><u>19 and 26 July 2026 Belfast One Cinema Screenings</u></p> <p>These events aim to encourage people to experience the city centre shops and hospitality while they are in town. Organisers will be offering attendees information about potential offers provided our business members. Belfast One plan to show 4 films per day. Films early in the day will be aimed at young children and families and later films at a slightly older audience. All films will be rated appropriately. The event will be ticketed and access managed. There will be a big screen and audio equipment and additional entertainment by way of face painting and film props. Previous events in 2022 and 2023 were very popular and delivered without incident. 2024 event was affected by impromptu rallies on the</p>

	<p>cobbled area and so in 2025 the screenings were delivered on Sundays which proved just as popular and avoided disruption. Sundays have again been selected for 2026.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.6 There would be no costs for the council as the various organisers would bear any/all stewarding and equipment costs etc themselves. The utilities costs on the day are of a very minor nature and the normal event support in the form of electrical and water provision in the grounds will be provided.</p> <p>There are no concerns from an asset management point of view, although the organisers would be required to provide the usual insurances, indemnities, and obligations.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>3.7 There are no direct good relations, equality or rural needs implications arising from this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None

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