

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 30th January, 2026

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brennan (Chairperson);
Councillors Beattie, Black, Bunting, Cobain,
de Faoite, R-M Donnelly, Ferguson, Garrett,
Long, Maghie, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin,
Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Ó Néill,
Smyth and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood
Services;
Ms. N. Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Ms. M. Higgins, Lead Officer – Community Support and
Neighbourhood Integration;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman McCoubrey.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Beattie, and I. McLaughlin declared an interest under item 2.a) Community Support Plan – Large Grant Funding Programme, in that they were associated with a group/organisation which had applied for or received funding and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

In relation to items 2.a) Community Support Plan – Large Grant Funding Programme and 2.b) Community Support Plan Funding – Financial Impact on groups which are currently funded through Community Capacity and Revenue Grant, Councillor R-M. Donnelly declared an interest in that she was the Chairperson of New Start Education, and Councillor Black, in that she was associated with a group/organisation which had applied for or received funding and left the meeting whilst the items were under consideration.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 30th January, 2026**

Councillor Maghie declared an interest under Pitches Strategy and the Strategic Use of Boucher Road Playing Fields, in that she was associated with a sports club, however, as the related interest did not become the subject of debate, she was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest under item 2.a) Community Support Plan – Large Grant Funding Programme, in that he was a Council appointee on the West Belfast Partnership Board.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

Community Support Plan - Large Grant Funding Programme

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services presented a report on the outcome of the assessment of the Community Support Plan Large Grant applications for 2026-2029 which sought the Committees agreement in relation to the allocation of financial resources.

Proposal 1

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Long and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that a report be submitted to a future committee to outline the options for minimum funding thresholds across all five areas of Assessment Criteria outlined in the Assessment Process, for future funding programmes.

During further discussion, the Committee considered a range of suggested proposals for the Community Support Plan Large Grant applications including the need for a time-limited pilot Community Capacity Building Support Programme and the areas which needed support, together with the associated budget, resources and equality screening that might be required.

Proposal 2

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the Committee agrees to:

1. Request that officers from the relevant department(s) bring forward a proposal for a time-limited pilot Community Capacity Building Support Programme, as a city wide programme but focused initially on under-resourced neighbourhoods within: Balmoral DEA, Ormiston DEA and Lisnasharragh DEA.
2. A budget of up to £500,000
3. Ask that the proposal include consideration of:
 - Dedicated capacity-building support for local community groups
 - Simplified, low-value “step-up” or micro-grant funding for early-stage groups
 - Support to improve access to shared community infrastructure
 - A clear pathway for supported groups to transition into mainstream Council and external funding Regeneration;
4. Request that officers outline:
 - Resource implications and potential funding sources
 - Governance and delivery options (including in-house or commissioned models)
 - Clear success measures and an evaluation framework
5. Request that an evaluation report be brought back to the appropriate Committee within 12 months of any pilot commencing, with recommendations on whether the approach should be expanded to other areas of the city.
6. Subject to equality screening.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Whyte,

That the Committee agrees to ring-fence £500,000 for a pilot Community Capacity Building Support Programme, with detailed criteria to be considered at the special meeting on 6th February, to allow further engagement with Members to take place.

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

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 30th January, 2026**

After lengthy discussion, it was suggested that the Committee consider the item further, at its meeting on 6th February.

Subsequently, the Committee:

- agreed that a report be submitted to a future committee to outline the options for minimum funding thresholds across all five areas of the Assessment Criteria outlined in the Assessment Process, for future funding programmes.; and
- agreed to defer consideration of the recommendations as outlined in the report until its special meeting on 6th February to afford the Members an opportunity to give due consideration to the proposals and issues which had been raised.

**Community Support Plan Funding - Financial
Impact on groups which are currently funded
through Community Capacity and Revenue
Grant**

Following the decision on 2.a) Community Support Plan – Large Grant Funding Programme, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of a report until its special meeting on 6th February.

Efficiency Proposals 2026/27

The Director of Finance provided an update on the proposals which had been put forward by Departments to deliver efficiency savings.

During discussion, several Members suggested that further information was required on each Departments overall budget and the improvement of services, together with flexibility of job roles and technology to use resources more effectively.

More information was also requested on: the Leisure Transformation Strategy (Phase 1); Administration buildings; and Commercial Waste – Churches and Charities. It was also suggested that Home Safety and Play Service information could be discussed further at the next Transformation and Efficiency Workshop.

After discussion, the Committee:

- agreed to remove the Complex Lives service from the Efficiency Proposals for the foreseeable future:
- noted that the further information requested by the Committee would be provided at its meeting in February; and
- noted that further Transformation and Efficiency Workshops would take place to discuss potential efficiencies to be included in the 2027/28 rate setting process.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 30th January, 2026**

Play Service Update

The Committee noted the contents of the report in relation to City and Neighbourhood Services, Play Service, which outlined staffing, locations, outputs and finance.

Home Safety Update

The Committee noted the contents of the report in relation to the non-statutory home safety function which the Council delivered.

**Pitches Strategy and Strategic use
of Boucher Playing Fields**

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services provided an update Committee on the progress of the Pitches Strategy and presented some options to address under provision through investment in a number of pitch sites across the city.

Proposal 1

Moved by Councillor Ferguson,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that Suffolk and Hammer Pitches be the proposed projects for submission under the DCMS/IFA Fund.

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services also presented options to Members regarding the future use of the Boucher Road Playing Fields.

Proposal 2

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

That the Committee:

- approve option 1 as outlined in the report, namely: To return to full playing pitch provision - a high-level concept plan shows that the site could accommodate two full sized GAA pitches, an intermediate standard football pitch and small sided games areas and has the potential to become a sporting hub; and
- agrees that report be submitted to a future committee to outline alternative event spaces in the city.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Maghie,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth,

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 30th January, 2026**

That the Committee approve option 3, as outlined in the report to retain use in the current format, and that report be submitted to a future committee to outline alternative event spaces in the city.

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

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Beattie and seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin was put to the meeting when fourteen Members voted for it and four against and it was declared carried.

During discussion, Members requested information on: Dixon Park; what objectives had been delivered in the previous strategy; demand for pitches across all sports; the UPSURGE Project; and consultation with GAA clubs,

Accordingly. The Committee:

- i. Noted the progress of the Pitches Strategy and that the full strategy would be brought to Committee in March for consideration;
- ii. Noted the proposed projects as outlined in the report and that further information would be presented in Party Group Briefings;
- iii. In relation to Boucher Road Playing Fields:
 - approved option 1 as outlined in the report, namely: *To return to full playing pitch provision - a high-level concept plan shows that the site could accommodate two full sized GAA pitches, an intermediate standard football pitch and small sided games areas and has the potential to become a sporting hub;*
 - agreed that report be submitted to a future committee to outline alternative event spaces in the city;
- iv. Agreed that Suffolk and Hammer be the proposed projects for submission under the DCMS/IFA Fund and that the Committee would be kept informed of the progress.

**Revenue Estimates 2026/27 and
Medium-Term Financial Planning**

The Committee deferred consideration of the report to allow further information to be provided at its special meeting on Friday, 6th February.

Chairperson