

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 14th April, 2026

MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Cobain (Chairperson);
Councillors Abernethy, Black, Bower, Bradley,
R. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Collins, M. Donnelly,
R-M Donnelly, Doran, Flynn, Garrett, Magee,
Maghie, Murray, McKeown and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Open Spaces,
Resources, Fleet and Transport;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building
Control; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 4th March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st April, subject to the following amendments:

- that the minute under the heading 'Proposals for Dual Language Street Signage' was amended to include Onslow Gardens within the list of streets approved for the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish; and
- that the minute under the heading 'Compact Mechanical Sweeper' was amended to provide that a report regarding options in relation to the future operation of a mechanical sweeper within neighbourhoods would be presented to the Committee at its meeting in May, 2026.

Declarations of Interest

In respect of the item 'Summer Schemes – Children with Additional Needs', Councillor Doran declared an interest in that he was associated with an organisation in receipt of funding under the scheme. Regarding the item 'Integrated Advice Partnership and Community Support Fund', Councillors Black, Bradley, Canavan and M. Donnelly declared interests in that they were associated with organisations named within the various funding streams in the report.

All of the above-mentioned Members left the meeting whilst the specific items were under consideration.

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 14th April, 2026**

Notice of Motion

**Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities
at Major Events and Festivals**

At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee on 24th March, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Murray and seconded by Councillor Smyth, had been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“This Council supports harm-reduction approaches to drug use, particularly in the context of festivals and nightlife events; acknowledges the rising public concerns around drug related harm; and notes that traditional approaches focused solely on enforcement have not eliminated the presence or use of illicit substances at major events.

Accordingly, the Council will:

- support the introduction of pilot drug and pill testing facilities at major events and festivals held in Belfast;
- call upon relevant public bodies including, the Public Health Agency and the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, to explore the feasibility of piloting such a service, alongside those working in the community and voluntary sectors with a proven record of harm reduction; and
- request that an internal report be compiled on the role of the Council in supporting and facilitating such harm reduction services, to include legal and regulatory considerations.”

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed, at the request of both Councillor Flynn and Councillor Smyth, that it be amended with the addition of a further bullet point to reflect the following wording: *“That the Council would work with the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency, concert promoters and event organisers to ensure that the necessary licensing and support mechanisms would be in place so that the services would operate legally and safely at local events on Council sites.”*

Committee/Strategic Issues

**Attendance at Committee
by Irish Football Association**

The Committee agreed to receive, at its meeting on 6th October, a presentation from representatives of the Irish Football Association regarding its review of football grounds’ criteria.

Proposals for Dual Language Street Signage

The Committee agreed to the erection of second street nameplates in Irish at Trench Avenue, Moor Park Avenue, Moor Park Mews, Stewartstown Avenue, Ardmore Avenue,

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 14th April, 2026**

Osborne Drive and Harleston Street, in respect of which the 15 per cent required support threshold had been met.

**Dual Language Street Signs – streets
not meeting 15 per cent threshold**

The Committee considered a report regarding the introduction of a process for dealing with applications for dual language street signs in respect of which a fifteen per cent support threshold had not been reached. It was noted that the policy introduced in 2023 had not determined how further applications for a dual language street signs on the same street/road should be dealt with, that is, whether they should remain open or be closed, and, if closed, for what period of time. The report contained a recommendation that applications for the same second language be closed and that further applications would not be accepted for two years from the date of the closure of the original application.

The Director of Planning and Building Control advised the Committee that, since the introduction of the dual language street sign policy, 33 of the streets surveyed had not met with the 15% threshold for the erection of a dual language street sign. In addition, it was reported that 1523 applications for 922 streets were awaiting processing and that, on average, eight applications were being presented for approval to the Committee on a monthly basis.

Discussion ensued and it was suggested that, should the Committee agree to the closure of the further applications for the same language and impose a timeline on their acceptance, it would not take into account changing demographics and preclude new residents from exercising an opinion. However, it was pointed out that there existed no mechanism within the policy to enable residents to request that an application be closed permanently, nor permit residents to apply to have an existing dual language street sign removed in the event of demographics changing.

University Street

In considering a list of streets within the report which had not reached the 15 per cent support threshold, a Member referred specifically to University Street, which had received the support of 14.28 per cent of respondents.

The Committee was reminded that, in March, The Queen's University of Belfast had conducted a poll of students on the introduction of bilingual Irish-English signage policy across the campus, in respect of which 91 per cent of those voting had supported the introduction of the policy. Within the context of the poll, the Member suggested that the Committee should exercise its discretion and vote upon the introduction of dual language street signage in University Street or resurvey the properties. It was noted that 126 surveys had been issued within University Street – 90 to domestic properties and 36 to commercial properties – and that 18 responses had been received in support of the proposal. Other Members pointed out that the policy was clear in the threshold required for the erection of a dual language street sign and that to make an exception for University Street would set an unnecessary precedent.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report to enable the submission of two further reports, one which would clarify a range of issues and queries raised and one specifically in relation to University Street.

Dundonald Cemetery
Somme Commemoration Ceremony

The Committee granted approval to the Dundonald Apprentice Boys of Derry to conduct a Somme Commemoration Ceremony in Dundonald Cemetery on the evening of Thursday 25th June.

In accordance with its decision of 4th June, 2019, the Committee noted that the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services, or his nominee, had been granted delegated authority to approve the request, subject to the applicant addressing all operational matters to the Council's satisfaction.

DfC Consultation - Amendments to Landlord
Registration Scheme Regulations (NI) 2014

The Committee endorsed a [draft corporate response](#) in respect of the above-mentioned consultation exercise.

DAERA Consultation
'Rethinking our Resources'

(Ms. J. Stephens, Waste Officer, Resources and Fleet, attended in connection with this item).

The Committee considered a [draft corporate response](#) in respect of the above-mentioned consultation exercise.

After discussion, the Committee endorsed the response, subject to it being strengthened to emphasise the importance of the 'reuse and repair' economy and requesting clarity on where the resources would be provided to support councils in delivering any changes identified and recommended.

It was noted that the covering letter to accompany the Council's response would emphasise the previous points and highlight also concern that the on-line consultation platform limited responders to 500 words per answer, which was not sufficient for such exercises that required a more detailed and comprehensive response.

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL)

Community Engagement and
Underrepresented Target Groups

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided details in respect of the above-mentioned matter.

Service Report 2025

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided details in respect of the above-mentioned matter.

Pride of Place Awards 2026

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that the Pride of Place Awards sought to recognise the excellent work undertaken by communities across the island of Ireland. The competition highlighted and recognised best practice in delivering community activities, particularly those which demonstrated partnership working with local councils. He recommended that Committee endorse the nomination of five groups from Belfast for the 2026 awards ceremony, which would take place in Dublin on 24th October, that being:

- Glencairn Community Project – Urban Neighbourhoods;
- Connswater Community Greenway – Climate Action and Biodiversity;
- Community Wellbeing Initiative – Community Youth Initiative;
- Sandy Row Digital Hub – Creative Communities; and
- Care Zone – Community Wellbeing Initiative.

The Committee endorsed the nomination of the groups as set out and approved also the expenditure associated with their nomination, the visit to Belfast of the judging panels and the attendance at the ceremony by representatives of the groups, the cost of which was estimated to be in the sum of £10,000, provision for which had been included within existing budgets.

Integrated Advice Partnership and Community Support Funding 2026/27

(Ms. N. Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager, attended in connection with this item).

The Committee considered a report which provided an update in relation to several funding streams under the Integrated Advice Partnership and Community Safety Funding for 2026/27. A copy of the report is set out hereunder:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- **advise members that Council has received confirmation from The Department for Communities of an allocation for the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund 2026/27 and seek agreement from members on allocation of this award.**
- **update members on the CSP Funding which is received on an annual basis from DfC**
- **advise members of the correspondence received from the Department in respect of the Welfare Reform Mitigations (face to face) funding and seek their views on how to proceed.**
- **request that members approve release of a further 25% Social Supermarket funding based on the recent DfC correspondence.**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 14th April, 2026**

- note the contents of the report,
- consider the allocation options presented for the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund, agree their preferred option and approve payment of 25% following submission of eligible proposals,
- consider DfC's response in relation to Welfare Reform Mitigations (face to face) funding and provide a recommendation on how to proceed.
- approve release of a further 25% Social Supermarket funding based on the recent DfC correspondence.

3.0 Main Report

Background information

3.1 Integrated Advice Partnership Fund

Members will recall that in November 2024 Council received funding from DfC of £248,253.48 through the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund for activity in 24/26. The objective of the fund is to 'Improve the uptake of free, independent regulated debt advice through a collaborative partnership approach.'

- 3.2** Members agreed that council would invite applications from all BCC funded advice organisations. Based on all proposals received covering the duration of the funds, the following funding allocations were agreed which are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Area	Organisation	Allocation
City Centre and East Belfast	Advice Space	£94,022.80
South Belfast	Southcity Resource and Development Centre (SRDC)	£36,389.43
North Belfast	The Vine Centre	£60,392.32
West Belfast	Upper Springfield Development Trust (USDT)	£57,448.94
Total		£248,253.49

- 3.3** In September 2025, Council received an additional in-year allocation of £79,784.78 for the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund. Members agreed the option to allocate the funding equally between the four providers. Thus, in addition to the figures presented in Table 1 above, each provider received an additional £19,946.20.

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 14th April, 2026**

3.4 We have recently received notification from DfC that the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund 2026/27 is £84,363.13. In addition to this allocation providers can carry underspends for 2025/26 into the 2026/27 financial year.

3.5 Members are asked to consider the following options for the 2026/27 and agree their preferred option. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the allocation per option.

- Option 1 Allocation based on % of the previous funding to each group.
- Option 2 Allocation based on an equal split between the four organisations

3.6

Table 2

Organisations	Previous Allocation	Allocation % Of Total	Option 1 Uplift based on %	Option 2 Uplift Equal Split
Advice Space	£113,969.00	34.7%	£29,309.95	£21,090.79
Southcity RDC	£56,335.63	17.2%	£14,488.10	£21,090.79
Vine Centre	£80,338.52	24.5%	£20,661.04	£21,090.79
Upper Springfield Development Trust	£77,395.14	23.6%	£19,904.07	£21,090.79
Total	£328,038.29		£84,363.16	£84,363.16

3.7 **CSP Letter of Offer**

Currently Council has yet to receive the Community Support Programme (CSP), Letter of Offer 26/27 from DfC. However, on 26th March, the Department issued the correspondence attached in Appendix 1. There was an accompanying email which clarified that council would receive a 25% allocation to cover all CSP activity until 30 June 2026 and that an additional Letter of Offer for the IAPF would follow. On this basis members are asked to approve that officers will seek proposals from funded groups for 26/27 and following review approve allocations and issue 25% funding.

3.8 Welfare Reform Mitigations (face to face)

Members may recall that another element of activity that is 100% funded through the CSP LoO is Welfare Reform Mitigations (face to face). Officers had previously sought approval to combine this element of funding with generalist advice funding as both support similar activities and it provides continuity of funding for delivery organisations. Members had deferred a decision and instructed officers to contact DfC to ask that they administer this support. DfC have responded as outlined below;

The Department provides funding for local advice services to all Councils through the Community Support Programme (CSP), which is match funded by Councils. Councils play an important role as co funders and commissioners of community-based generalist advice, including the additional provision funded under Welfare Mitigations, to meet local needs in their respective areas. At present, the Department has no plans to move away from this approach.

As with all funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector, we recognise the challenges posed by the absence of a multi-year budget settlement. Whilst we cannot confirm exact annual budget levels at this stage, the Executive approved the extension of the additional Welfare Mitigations allocations in December 2024 through to March 2028. This decision reflects the continued demand for advice services and the need to preserve existing sector capacity to support vulnerable individuals navigating the social security system.

For clarity and budgetary purposes, we are unable to combine these funding streams into a single line within the CSP Letter of Offer at this time. However, we would encourage Councils to commission these services together, as the majority of other Councils already do. While multi year budgets have not been possible in recent years, other Councils continue to commission advice services on a multi year basis, including a clause stating that continuation beyond year one is subject to DfC funding being confirmed.

3.9 Members are asked to consider this response and advise how they wish to proceed in relation to Welfare Reform Mitigations (face to face) funding.

3.10 Members may recall that this funding is allocated to specific advice organisations in each area. These were the organisations that were receiving funding from DfC when the fund was initially introduced and administered by the Department of Communities. When council agreed to administer this funding in 2020/21, we also agreed to continue this allocation method. In 25/26, members

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 14th April, 2026**

agreed that if the named organisation did not submit a proposal in a timely way, proposals would be sought from the consortia through the consortia lead. Table 3 below provides more detail;

Table 3

Consortia – Funded Organisation	% Of Total Allocation	25/26 Allocation
Central - Advice Space	46.74%	£125,585.24
East – EBIAC	13.32%	£35,779.89
West – Neighbourhood Development Association	13.32%	£35,779.89
South - Ballynafeigh Community Development Association	13.32%	£35,779.89
North – Ligoniel Improvement Association	13.32%	£35,779.89

3.11 Social Supermarket funding

Members are also asked to note that this communication relates to Social Supermarket funding and provides 25% funding for 26/27. SP&R agreed at March committee that they would issue 25% funding in the absence of a DfC LoO. Members are asked to approve release of a further 25% based on the recent DfC correspondence. This would provide continuity of service in the absence of a DfC LoO which is unlikely to be received before June committee.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 The administration of this fund will be carried out by existing staff, there is no financial impact for council as 100% funding is being provided by DfC.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised the Committee that, since the publication of the papers, correspondence had been received from the Department for Communities confirming that 100 per cent funding would be provided for in 2026/27.

Proposal

In considering the suggested allocation of the 'uplift funding' as set out under 3.6 of the foregoing report, it was:

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor Doran,

That the Committee agrees to adopt Option 1 as set out in the table and that the funding be distributed on the basis outlined amongst the four organisations.

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 14th April, 2026**

On a vote, five Members voted in favour of the proposal and eleven against and it was declared lost. Accordingly, the Committee agreed to adopt Option 2 and to distribute the funding on the percentage basis set out.

After further discussion, the following course of action was agreed:

- that the Chief Executive sign the letter of acceptance;
- that 100% payments be made to eligible applicants for the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund;
- that uplift payments in respect of the aforementioned fund be distributed on the basis outlined (Option 2) across the City;
- that funding for Welfare Reform Mitigations (face-to-face) be allocated in 2026/27 on the same basis as agreed in 2025/26; and
- that 100% payments be issued to eligible applicants in respect of Department for Communities' allocation of Social Supermarket funding.

Summer Schemes - Children with Additional Needs

The Committee noted the contents of a report in relation to the above-mentioned matter which gave an overview of the outcome of the open call for funding for the above-mentioned scheme.

Arising from discussion, a Member reminded the Committee that, at its meeting in June, 2025, it was agreed that a report be submitted examining the costs incurred by groups in building inclusivity within summer schemes, particularly the costs relating to staff training and embedding such practices. In response, the Director of Neighbourhood Services indicated that a report in that regard would be considered at the Committee's meeting in June.

Request for the Use of Parks

The Committee granted authority for the hosting of the following events, subject to the applicants meeting with and adhering to all of the stipulations set out within the report:

- Kibosh Theatrical Tours - Clifton Street Cemetery, 1st to 16th May;
- All Nations Church 'March for Jesus' - Ormeau Park, 16th May;
- Twelfth Demonstration, Barnett Demesne, 13th July;
- EastSide Arts Festival - C.S. Lewis Square, 24th and 25th July;
- Bullhouse Brew Co. - C.S. Lewis Square, 31st July and 1st August; and
- Alzheimer's Society Memory Walk – Ormeau Park, 26th September.

The Committee granted approval to the All Nations Church to host the 'March for Jesus' in 2027 and 2028. In addition, permission was granted to County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast to host its annual Twelfth of July demonstration at Barnett Demesne up to and including

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 14th April, 2026**

2030. The aforesaid extensions would be subject to the organisers resolving all operational matters to the Council's satisfaction

Biodiversity Programme of Work

The Committee considered the contents of a report and its associated appendices which provided an update in respect of the above-mentioned matter.

Arising from discussion, a Member proposed that officers would specifically scope out potential locations along the River Lagan downstream from the Stranmillis Weir to identify locations which might be used for the enhancement of biodiversity, rewilding and/or the creation of wildflower meadows. In addition, officers would consider options for the future use of the compound within the Ormeau Park, which had previously been used by Northern Ireland Water, with a view to formulating plans for its future use. Such a plan would examine, for example, the establishment of a wetland habitat, potentially in conjunction with Northern Ireland Water and/or the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and endorsed the Member's comments as outlined.

Issues Raised in Advance

Stoma-friendly Toilets

In accordance with notice on the agenda, the Committee agreed, at the request of Councillor Abernethy, that a report be submitted to a future meeting that would outline the current and future provision for stoma-friendly toilets across Council's estate.

Pollution Incidents at Cregagh Glen

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor Smyth addressed the Committee in respect of the above-mentioned matter. He informed the Members that a series of pollution incidents had occurred within Cregagh Glen which had caused damage to the site, its paths and to the Loop River. He suggested that, whilst the site was owned and managed by the National Trust, the Council should seek to protect the wider environment by identifying those who had been responsible for the pollution incidents and explore the possibility of undertaking legal or enforcement action.

The Committee agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting that would include details on any reported pollution incidents dating back to January, 2024; and which would outline the responses of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA). It was noted that the report would examine also the environmental damage caused to the site and to the Loop River and its aquatic life, any clean-up measures undertaken, an overview of the potential legal options in relation to those causing the pollution and whether the statutory responses had met with legal requirements.

Chairperson