

# Public Document Pack

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

23rd September, 2021

## **MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

In addition to those matters previously notified to you, the following items will also be considered at the hybrid meeting to be held at 9.30 a.m. on Friday, 24th September, 2021.

Yours faithfully,

SUZANNE WYLIE

Chief Executive

### **AGENDA:**

2. Restricted Items
  - (g) Assets Management (Pages 1 - 18)
  - (h) King George V Playing Fields (report to be tabled)
5. Physical Programme and Asset Management
  - (c) Update on Physical Programme (Pages 19 - 24)
6. Finance, Procurement and Performance
  - (d) Stall Fees for St George's Market - Request for Further Rent-Free Period (Pages 25 - 28)
7. Equality and Good Relations
  - (b) Language Strategy - Update on Dual Language Street Sign Policy (Pages 29 - 32)
8. Operational Issues
  - (e) Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel (Pages 33 - 56)
  - (f) Minutes of the Meeting of the Working Group on the Climate Crisis (Pages 57 - 62)
  - (g) Requests for Use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality (Pages 63 - 66)



By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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| <b>Subject:</b>           | <b>Update on Physical Programme</b>            |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 24th September 2021                            |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Sinead Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Shauna Murtagh, Programme Manager              |

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| <b>Restricted Reports</b>                                |   |
| <b>Is this report restricted?</b>                        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b> |   |
| After Committee Decision                                 | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| After Council Decision                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| Sometime in the future                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| Never  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |

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

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>  |
| 1.1        | The Council's Physical Programme currently includes 170 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. This report requests agreement on implementation of procurement processes in relation to the Capital Programme (Fleet Programme) and non-recurrent programme. |

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| 2.0 | <b>Recommendations</b>   |
| 2.1 | <p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. agree that the necessary procurement processes are initiated for the agreed Fleet Programme for 2021/22 and 2022/23 (see Appendix 1), with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver;</li> <li>ii. agree that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated for any non-recurrent projects for 2021/22 and non-recurrent projects under re-allocated reserves as required, with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver; and</li> <li>iii. note that the Leisure Transformation Programme has been shortlisted for an international award for 'Social project of the year' by the Association of Project Management with the winner to be announced in November.</li> </ul>                  |
| 3.0 | <b>Main Report</b>   |
| 3.1 | <p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p><b><i>Capital Programme - Fleet Programme 2021/22 and 2022/23</i></b></p> <p>Members will know that the Council needs to run and maintain a substantial fleet in order to deliver its services. There is a rolling allocation of £2.2m towards the Fleet Programme for 2021/22 and £2.2m for 2022/23 under the Capital Programme at Stage 3. Members are asked to note that the Fleet Programme has been developed in conjunction with Council departments and reflects the service needs of the organisation. Members are asked to note that there are ongoing issues caused by the high age profile and condition of the fleet operating well beyond its recommended operational life cycle. <b>Members are asked to note the agreed Fleet Programme for 2021/22 and 2022/23 (see Appendix) and agree that the necessary procurement processes are initiated, with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</b></p> |
| 3.2 | <p><b><i>Non-recurrent projects 2021/22 and non-recurrent re-allocation funding</i></b></p> <p>Members will be aware that the incremental nature of the capital programme allows the Council the opportunity to allocate an element of the 2021/22 capital financing budget to finance a number of one-off (non-recurrent) projects within year. It is recommended that this is focused on progressing projects which the Council is required to take forward either from a health and</p>   |



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|     | <p>safety perspective and/or a legislative perspective. Members will also recall their decision in June 2021 to re-allocate the year-end surplus for 2020/21 to progress emerging projects and essential projects which did not have a recurring budget. These projects are now being developed. This included additional funding towards fleet. <b>Members are asked to agree that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated for any non-recurrent projects for 2021/22 and non-recurrent projects under re-allocated reserves as required, with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</b></p> |
| 3.3 | <p><b>Leisure Transformation Programme – Finalist, APM Project Management Awards 2021</b></p> <p>The Leisure Transformation Programme has been shortlisted in the international APM (Association of Project Management) Awards 2021 in the category: ‘Social project of the year’. The category recognises teams whose project demonstrates the most effective use of project management and the greatest benefits and outcomes to end users and communities in projects seeking to address the concerns of 21st century society globally. The winner will be announced on 15 November 2021 at an awards ceremony in London.</p>  |
| 3.4 | <p>Members are asked to note that the Physical Programmes Department is happy to arrange site visits for Members/ Party Groups to any capital project, with appropriate arrangements in place as required under latest Covid-19 guidance.</p>   |
| 3.5 | <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p><i>Financial</i> – Fleet Replacement Programme– as above<br/> <i>Resources</i> – Officer time to deliver as required</p>  |
| 3.6 | <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process.</p>  |
| 4.0 | <p><b>Document Attached</b></p>   |
|     | <p>Fleet Programme 2021/22 and 2022/23</p>  |

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## Appendix 1 - Capital Programme Update – Fleet Programme 2021/22 and 2022/23

The proposed vehicle replacement of fleet assets for 2021/22 is made up as follows:

| Item   | No.               |
|--|-------------------|
| Lease/Hire of official corporate cars annually on 4yr contract | 3                 |
| Crew-cab loose waste collection 6.5ton + side and tail lift    | 4                 |
| RCVs 4x2 18ton 4xtrade, 1xopen, 1xbin-lifts.                   | 6                 |
| Compact cleaning sweepers 2ton                                 | 4                 |
| Waste roller packer machines                                   | 4                 |
| Compact cleaning sweepers 5ton                                 | 4                 |
| Agri 4x4 tractors with front loaders                           | 2                 |
| Agri grass mowers  | 2                 |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>£2,187,951</b> |

The proposed vehicle replacement of fleet assets for 2022/23 is made up as follows:

| Item   | No.                |
|--|--------------------|
| Lease/Hire of official corporate cars annually on 4yr contract   | 3                  |
| Plant - replacement of vehicle 4 poster hoist 10ton  | 1                  |
| Crew-cab loose waste collection 6.5ton + side and tail-lift  | 6                  |
| RCV 6x2 26ton n/track 2,250mm, rear steer, low level electric bin lifts. Powertrain 320bhp EU6. Payload 10,100kgs.                         | 2                  |
| RCV 4x2 18ton n/track 2250mm, Powertrain 280bhp EU6. Payload 4,873kg. 1 x rear low-level electric bin lift. 2 x commercial rear bin lifts. | 3                  |
| Compact cleaning sweeper 5ton GVW, Payload 2100kgs, Wheelbase 1820mm, Powertrain (84HP/270Nm).   | 6                  |
| Agri tractors 4x4 with front loader. Engine 90bhp, EU6. Front end hitch brush sweeper/Rear end hitch for trailers.                         | 2                  |
| Agri Grass Mower with 4WD on demand transmission. Engine 38hp / Stage 4. 1.5m out-front flail mower. Roll Over Protection System (ROPS)    | 1                  |
| Agri Grass mowers (sit on)   | 6                  |
| Small crew panel vans electric   | 6                  |
| Mule quad waste collect (FIDO)   | 4                  |
| RCV 26ton n/track rear electric bin lifts  | 2                  |
| RCV 18ton n/track rear commercial bin lift   | 1                  |
| HGV Box-van + tail lift 7.5ton   | 3                  |
| Crew-cab loose waste collection 6.5ton + side and tail lift  | 5                  |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>£3,171,380*</b> |

- Includes additional non-recurrent funding as agreed in June 2021

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| <b>Subject:</b>           | <b>Stall Fees for St George’s Market - Request for Further Rent-Free Period</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 24th September, 2021  |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | John Greer, Director of Economic Development                                    |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Clodagh Cassin, Markets Development Manager                                     |

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| <b>Restricted Reports</b>                         |   |
| Is this report restricted?                        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 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"/>  |

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

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues</b>  |
| 1.1        | <p>The purpose of this report is to update members on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a request from traders at St George’s Market for a four-week rent free period due to continuing COVID-19 restrictions; and</li> <li>the financial implications of any decision to waive the stall fees for a further four-week period.</li> </ul> |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Recommendations</b>  |
| 2.1        | The Committee is asked to consider this request from St. George’s Market traders to waive stall fees at St George’s Market for a further four weeks from 1st October 2021, with an associated loss of income of £31,000, based on current rent figures for the market.  |

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| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Main Report</b>  |
| 3.1        | Members will be aware that St George’s Market was closed to the public due to COVID-19 on a number of occasions over the last eighteen months; most recently between December 2020 and April 2021.  |
| 3.2        | Taking account of the difficulties faced by the traders during the previous periods of lockdown and subsequent limited re-opening, the Council agreed a rent-free period for St George’s Market traders from July 2020 to December 2020. This resulted in a loss of income of £233k to the Council. Members also agreed a further 12-week rent-free period from the end of December 2020. As the market went into lockdown following this decision, this rent-free period commenced when the market re-opened on 19 April 2021. This meant that the traders at St George’s Market did not pay daily rent for their pitches until 9 July 2021. This 12-week rent-free period has meant a further loss of income to the Council of £143k.   |
| 3.3        | Following the July 2021 re-opening, the capacity in the market was limited in order to comply with the Northern Ireland Executive’s social distancing requirements for retail premises. This meant that no more than 350 visitors at a time could access the market. Staff had to manage the capacity by putting in place queuing arrangements and actively managing the social distancing requirements within the market. As a result, visitor numbers were around 40% of pre-COVID-19 figures. Given the reduction in capacity, the traders at St George’s Market expressed a concern about their ability to generate income. As a result, they made a request for the Council to consider a further rent-free period of four weeks. In the interim, traders have been paying rent on their stalls in line with the existing fee rates. |
| 3.4        | Since the initial request was made by the traders, Government guidance on social distancing has changed. This means that the current capacity in the market building at any one time has increased from 350 to 550 visitors. Since this expanded capacity has been in operation, footfall numbers in the market have increased. However, like all retail outlets, some restrictions remain both in market capacity and also in our ability to offer the full “market experience” in terms of live music performances and other animation. As further announcements are made by the Northern Ireland Executive, we will keep these arrangements under review, and will continue to take advice from the Council’s Corporate Health and Safety Unit in terms of implementation and management.  |
| 3.5        | Members will be aware that, prior to lockdown, work had been undertaken on a development and investment plan for St George’s Market. One of the driving factors behind this plan was  |

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|            | <p>the need to ensure that the market retained its status as a unique asset in the city centre. In light of the challenges currently facing the city centre, attractions such as St George’s Market will be more critical than ever in supporting city recovery. However buildings of this nature require ongoing investment and have significant operational overheads, and it is critical that there is an underpinning investment programme to ensure that they continue to offer a quality experience. As the work on the implementation of the development plan moves forward, it is important that consideration is given to managing the costs associated with running the market, including the level of council investment available to support this work.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> |
| 3.6        | A four weeks stall freeze would result in a cost to council of a further £31,000 based on current stall figures of 140 for each market day over the three-day weekend with the current restrictions continuing.  |
| 3.7        | There is currently no provision in any departmental budget to cover these increased costs  |
|            | <b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b>   |
| 3.8        | No specific equality/good relations implications. No negative impact on rural areas.   |
| <b>4.0</b> | <b>Documents Attached</b>  |
|            | None   |

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| <b>Subject:</b>           | <b>Language Strategy - Update on Dual Language Street Sign Policy</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 24th September, 2021  |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | John Walsh, City Solicitor / Director of Legal & Civic Services       |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Sarah Williams, Governance and Compliance Manager                     |

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| <b>Restricted Reports</b>                                |   |
| <b>Is this report restricted?</b>                        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| <b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b> |   |
| After Committee Decision                                 | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| After Council Decision                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| Sometime in the future                                   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| Never  | <input type="checkbox"/>  |

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

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>   |
| 1.1        | The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the Dual Language Street Sign Policy.  |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Recommendation</b>   |
| 2.1        | The Committee is requested to note the report   |
| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Main Report</b>  |
| 3.1        | <b><u>Background</u></b><br>By way of brief background and as reported previously to the Committee, the Council on 7th January ratified a decision taken by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 23rd October, 2020 to adopt a new policy position in respect of the Dual Language Street Sign Policy. |

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| 3.2 | <p>(Whilst the initial decision of 23rd October had been called-in, counsel opinion subsequently found that the grounds for call-in had not been satisfied).</p> <p>Following this decision, an officer working group was formed, comprising officers from Governance and Compliance Services, Equality and Diversity Unit, Building Control, Good Relations, Legal Services and Place and Economy Policy who developed a new proposed revised policy incorporating the changes agreed.</p>   |
| 3.3 | <p>In April 2021, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved this proposed revised policy which incorporated the following key changes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The trigger for a consultation of the occupiers of a street will be an application to the Council by a resident / residents of the street or an Elected Member representing that District Electoral Area, as opposed to an application from anyone, supported by a petition of 1/3 of occupiers. In order for further consideration as to the erection of a second language street sign to take place, the threshold for the percentage of residents responding positively is 15% instead of 2/3;</li> <li>• People not returning a reply are no longer deemed not to be in favour of the application;</li> <li>• Each application will be equality, good relations and rural needs screened;</li> <li>• Members may want to consider whether they will exercise their residual discretion at the point when an application is received and decide as to whether to progress that application to the stage of surveying the street in question or not.</li> </ul> |
| 3.4 | <p>The following key principles agreed previously were also incorporated into the new policy:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the policy will be used for the promotion of language rights and for the benefit of linguistic communities.</li> <li>2. That the principles of equality, promoting good relations and respect will underpin the application of the policy in addition to the rights promoted by the policy itself: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on legal advice, each application will be subject to an equality, good relations and rural needs screening;</li> </ul> </li> </ol>   |

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|     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council retains an overriding residual discretion to take the particular circumstances of each application into account in deciding whether or not a second language street name plate should be erected. In summary, there may be circumstances when notwithstanding the consultation response it may be appropriate to depart from the policy when there are clear reasons for doing so. Guidance will be provided to Members on the factors which should be considered when using this discretion; and</li> <li>• And, as is the case at present, the Council will consider the best approach for any applications relating to long streets.</li> </ul> <p>3. That, as with any statutory consultation which the Council is required to undertake, the City Solicitor may intervene if any complaint is made and a basis for that complaint established.</p> <p>4. That any decision relating to the erection of a second nameplate in the City centre (business core) will, in addition to the current policy considerations, be subject to a wider public consultation to reflect the community of users.</p> <p>5. That the policy will cover the corporately designated Gaeltacht Quarter, until such time as a policy which may contain specific proposals in respect of a bilingual strategy have been adopted.</p> |
| 3.5 | <p><b><u>Update</u></b></p> <p>This revised policy has been screened in for an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and during the summer months, a quotation was developed and issued to procure specialist equality support for both the EQIA and the public consultation process. An equality consultant has now been appointed and an initial briefing meeting has taken place. The consultant is currently developing a detailed plan of action on the process required for carrying out the EQIA and aligning this with the public consultation process as well as helping to devise the process for equality-screening each individual application as per legal advice.</p>   |
| 3.6 | <p>It is envisaged by the equality consultant that the public consultation will be issued in the next 4-6 weeks i.e. by the end of October. It has been recommended by the equality consultant that the consultation is issued for a 14/16-week period due to an overlap with the Christmas holiday period. The equality consultant is also providing advice on what further pre-consultation engagement is required in order to explain the proposed operation of this</p>   |

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|            | policy in practice. Advice will be also sought from Marketing & Communications for communications support due to the high level of interest when this decision was made at Committee.   |
| 3.7        | Members will be aware that the Council is in the process of establishing an Elected Member Working Group as well as two external stakeholder engagement fora, for the Irish and Ulster Scots language communities. In preparation for this, an internal officer working group has also been convened. The officer working group is developing an approach to take forward the Language Strategy which can be discussed and agreed by Members. Depending on timings, it is hoped that the results of the public consultation on Dual Language Street Signs can be used to inform the development of these emerging structures.   |
| 3.8        | <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>As agreed previously, given the potential for increased numbers of applications, the Council will deal with no more than 5 in any given month, Processing time could increase however, due to the potential changes to the procedure. If numbers are excessive they will be held in a queue and dealt with in the order in which they have been received. This will also be managed in the context of the existing staffing resource and the established annual budget for street signage. As requested by Members, a report will be submitted to a future meeting outlining the potential for increasing the number of applications which could be processed on a monthly basis, taking into account the new procedure emanating from the revised policy.</p> |
| 3.9        | <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations are key principles within which the Language Strategy is delivered. The Language Strategy was subject to the Council's usual screening process.</p>   |
| <b>4.0</b> | <b>Documents Attached</b>   |
|            | None  |



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| <b>Subject:</b>           | <b>Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel</b>                  |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 24th September 2021  |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources and Deputy Chief Executive |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)          |

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| <b>Restricted Reports</b>                         |   |
| Is this report restricted?                        | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? |   |
| <i>After Committee Decision</i>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| <i>After Council Decision</i>                     | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| <i>Sometime in the future</i>                     | <input type="checkbox"/>  |
| <i>Never</i>                                      | <input type="checkbox"/>  |

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

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>   |
| 1.1        | The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the key issues which were considered/discussed by the Audit and Risk Panel on 14th September and to present the minutes of that meeting for approval.  |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Recommendations</b>  |
| 2.1        | The Committee is requested to note the key issues arising at the meeting on 14th September and approve the attached minutes of that meeting.  |
| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Main Report</b>  |
|            | <b>Key Issues</b>   |
|            | <u>Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)</u>   |
| 3.1        | The Panel considered the <b>Statement of Accounts</b> of the Council for the year-end 31st March, 2021. These accounts are a fundamental part of the councils overall corporate governance framework and provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position. |

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| 3.2 | <p>The NIAO Director informed the Panel that their audit of the accounts is almost complete and on the basis of the work completed to date, the Local Government Auditor (LGA) will report on the 2020/21 financial statements with an <b>unqualified audit opinion</b>. The Panel expressed their thanks to the Finance team and the NIAO particularly as the previous audit was only completed in December 2020 due to the pandemic.</p>   |
| 3.3 | <p>The Panel considered the <b>draft Report to those Charged with Governance for 2020/21</b>, which outlines the system / control issues arising from the NIAO audit. The draft report contained only <b>1 recommendation for management action, which is priority three (i.e. issue of a minor nature which represents best practice)</b>, relating to a cut off issue with invoices. The Panel considered the update provided by the Local Government Auditor, including the uncorrected misstatements identified by the NIAO. After considering materiality, impact on the net position and the amount of work required to update the accounts at this stage, the Panel decided not to correct these misstatements.</p> <p><b><u>Audit and Risk Panel</u></b></p> |
| 3.4 | <p>In line with recommended practice the work of the Audit &amp; Risk Panel has been supported by the attendance and input of an external member, Geraldine Fahy. Ms Fahy is a source of expertise on audit and finance related matters, augmenting the skills / experience provided by Members. The Panel <b>agreed to extend the contract with the external member</b> for an additional two years, in line with the relevant legal agreement.</p> <p><b><u>Key reports</u></b></p>  |
| 3.5 | <p>The Panel noted the <b>progress being made against the annual audit plan</b>, with four audits finalised in the period July - August 2021 and how there have been a number of requests to defer audits to later in the year. The Panel stressed the need for no further hold ups and asked the Head of AGRS to ensure that delivery of the audit plan stayed on track. Regarding a recent internal audit of compliance with policies on <b>gifts and hospitality and conflict of interest</b>, the Panel received an update from management on the progress being made to implement the recommendations arising. The Panel also received an update on the work being done to investigate matches arising from the <b>National Fraud Initiative</b>.</p>           |

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| 3.6  | <p>The Panel considered the <b>corporate risk dashboard</b> which provided an analysis and update on the progress being made to manage the 24 risks that are considered by management to present the greatest threat to the delivery corporate priorities and / or compliance with key statutory requirements. The Panel agreed the new focus and wording for the corporate risks on the Local Development Plan and Climate Change. The Panel noted the <b>quarterly assurances provided by members of the corporate management team</b> regarding compliance with risk management and internal control processes. The Panel was also provided with a progress update on the review of the <b>business continuity plans</b> for the critical services.</p> |
| 3.7  | <p>The Panel received an analysis of the <b>high priority audit recommendations</b> that had not been implemented within the dates initially agreed with management. This analysis examined the reasons for delay and the new timeframes for implementation. The Panel noted that AGRS would review all open audit actions again in January / February 2022.</p>   |
| 3.8  | <p>In line with best practice, the Panel agreed for AGRS to take forward the development of an <b>assurance map for the corporate risks and key financial systems</b>.</p>   |
| 3.9  | <p>The Panel was also provided with a <b>progress update</b> on the agreed actions to be taken in relation to the recommendations contained within the report from Peter Coll QC of his independent investigation relating to events at Roselawn Cemetery on 30th June 2020, and confirmed that regular updates on this report will be a standing agenda item for the Panel.</p>   |
| 3.10 | <p>The Panel also received <b>quarter 1 reports on corporate health and safety, absence management and performance improvement</b>. The Head of Human Resources indicated that she would undertake a deeper examination of the reasons for the increase in our absence rate.</p>   |
| 3.11 | <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>None</p>   |
| 3.12 | <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>None known at this time.</p>  |
| 4.0  | <p><b>Document Attached</b></p>  |
|      | <p>Minutes of Audit and Risk Panel meeting of 14th September</p>   |

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# Audit and Risk Panel

Tuesday, 14th September, 2021

## REMOTE MEETING OF AUDIT AND RISK PANEL

Members present: Alderman Rodgers;  
Councillors, Hanvey,  
Hutchinson, O'Hara; and Ms. G. Fahy.

In attendance: Mr. R. Cregan, Strategic Director of Finance and Resources;  
Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;  
Ms. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services (AGRS);  
Ms. C. Sheridan, Head of Human Resources;  
Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services Manager;  
Mr. L. Mulholland, Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services Manager;  
Mr. T. Wallace, Head of Finance;  
Ms. H. Lyons, Corporate Finance Manager;  
Mrs. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager;  
Ms. C. Kane, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office;  
Ms S. Williams, Governance and Compliance Manager  
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer; and  
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

### **Apologies**

An apology for inability to attend was reported for Councillor Carson.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 8th June were taken as read and signed as correct.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Absence Rates - Quarter 1 2021/22**

The Panel considered a report providing information on the absence figures for quarter one of the financial year 2021/22. The Head of Human Resources reported that sickness absence for that period had been 3.32 days, which was an increase of 1.31 days compared to absence for the same period last year (2.01). She explained that there had

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been a decrease in the number of staff with no recorded absences and a significant increase in absence classified as long term (20+days) this period in comparison with the same period last year.

The Panel was advised that, when COVID-19 related absences had been deducted from the quarter one figure of 3.32 days, the figure further reduced to 2.93 days against the agreed corporate target for a reduction of 9.7% or 2.77 days per full time employee.

She explained that depression, stress and anxiety equated to 36 % of all days lost due to sickness absence, however, 64% of these absences related to personal stress and that, musculo-skeletal related absence accounted for 19% of all days lost due to sickness absence.

The Head of Human Resources explained that, in quarter one of the 2021/22 financial year, 439 employees were off due to sickness absence, which equated to 6684.35 days and that discretion had been applied to 29 of these employees. The Members were advised that the range of reasons for discretion were as follows:

- Underlying medical condition / Disability (137.72 days or 24.60%);
- Bereavement (116.54 days or 20.81%);
- Unresolved ER issues (70.59 days or 12.61%);
- Personal Stressors;
- Industrial Injury;
- Surgery and recovery; and
- Broken bone(s).

The Panel was advised that there were fortnightly compliance meetings with each department to discuss and address issues such as, delayed scheduling or failure to organise absence review meetings, delayed referral to Occupational Health or Employee Counselling and failure to update actions taken on the corporate absence management system.

The Members were advised that 42.09% of absence had been recorded as disability related, 70.26% of which was managed as long term and the use of discretion had been considered in such cases. She pointed out, however, that long COVID was a new type of absence and was being recorded as potentially disability related, and accounted for 8% of disability related absences in quarter one. In respect of COVID related absence, she advised that 35 employees had been recorded as absent due to COVID-19 and accounted for 11.77% of the total absence figure for quarter one.

With regards to the review of the Council's attendance policy, she explained that the review, which had commenced in 2018, had recommenced following a pause due to the pandemic. She added that Trade Unions had objected to any review of attendance policy during the public health crisis, however, the Corporate Management Team had agreed that the consultation should continue.

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She reported that a number of Stage 4 and Final Absence Hearings had taken place during quarter one, and summarised that:

- 11 employees met the trigger for a Stage4/FAH in quarter one;
- One employee resigned prior to a Stage4/FAH being scheduled;
- Discretion was used not progress five of the cases to Stage4/FAH due to:
  - significant personal stressors (1);
  - complex long term COVID cases (2); and
  - the requirement for additional medical information (2);
- Five employees attended a Stage 4 / FAH;
- Three employees were dismissed; and
- Two employees were re-issued with stage three warnings.

She further advised that, in addition to the above eleven cases, there had been a further two final absence hearings conducted in relation to employees who had met the trigger prior to April 2021.

The Head of Human Resources stated that Corporate HR would continue to monitor departmental compliance with the attendance policy and that non-compliance issues, in relation to the final stages of the attendance policy, would be raised with departmental senior management when necessary.

She further added that she had undertaken a benchmarking exercise with other Councils in Northern Ireland, and she reported that, of the other Councils who had responded, they had all seen a similar trends in absence rates during quarter one.

The Members of the Panel raised some queries regarding the root cause for the increased level of absence and the Head of Human Resources indicated that she would undertake a deeper analysis of the statistics and bring this to a future meeting of the Panel. The Members of the Panel agreed to note the content of the report.

**Update on Corporate Health and Safety  
Performance Report**

The Corporate Health and Safety Manager provided the Panel with an update in relation to the Council's Health and Safety Performance during quarter one of the 2021/22 financial year. She reviewed the progress which had been achieved in relation to the key performance indicators by each department.

She pointed out to the Panel that the Council had fully implemented 12% of its health and safety actions and 28% of its fire safety actions which had been due at the end of quarter one, however, she added that it had been expected as this was the normal

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position in the first quarter of a financial year due to few new actions and a number of more challenging actions which would carry over from the previous year.

She reported that employee accidents were 22, an increase of one from the previous quarter. She pointed out that the accidents were mostly attributed to injuries from manual handling and slips trips or falls. She further reported that there had been eight non-employee accidents, a decrease of one from the previous quarter, six of which were injuries as a result of a slip, trip or fall and that whilst RIDDOR accidents had increased by since the previous quarter, work related violence incidents had decreased by three. In relation to the work-related violence and the two incidents involving threatening behaviour, the Panel queried whether the PSNI had been involved. The Corporate H&S Manager indicated that she would report back to the Panel on this matter.

With regards to COVID-19, she reported that the Corporate Health and Safety Unit would continue to support the Council's Recovery Co-ordination Group and individual service managers to comply with evolving government guidance and to ensure the health and safety of Council staff and members of the public.

The Panel agreed to note the content of the report.

**Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) –  
Financial Statement of Accounts**

The Members of the Panel considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**The purpose of this report is to present to the Audit and Risk Panel, the Statement of Accounts of the Council, including the Annual Governance Statement, for the period ending 31 March 2021.**

**The Statement of Accounts are an important element of the council's overall corporate governance framework as they provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position.**

**The Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021, as attached, have been prepared in line with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2020/21 based on International Financial Reporting Standards and the Department for the Communities Accounts Direction, Circular LG 08/21 dated 11 March 2021 and 24 June 2021.**

**I can confirm that the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2021 has been prepared in the form directed by the Department for the Communities and in my opinion the**

Statement of Accounts give a true and fair view of the income and expenditure and cash flows for the financial year and the financial position as at the end of the financial year.

## 2.0 Recommendations

The Panel is asked to recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve the Council's Statement of Accounts and incorporated Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2021.

## 3.0 Main report

### Key Issues

#### Audit Opinion

It is the Local government Auditors' opinion that:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with relevant legal and statutory requirements and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2020-21, of the financial position of Belfast City Council as at 31 March 2021 and its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
- the statement of accounts have been properly prepared in accordance with the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Department for Communities directions issued thereunder; and
- the part of the Remuneration Report to be audited has been properly prepared in accordance with the Department for Communities directions made under the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015; and
- the information given in the Narrative Report for the financial year ended 31 March 2021 is consistent with the financial statements.

### Reserves

#### General Fund

The credit balance on the General Fund has increased to £54,924,106 (of which £40,929,092 relates to specified reserves). The movement on the reserves balance is summarised in Table 1 below:

*Table 1: Summary of Reserves Position*

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|                                       |               |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Opening Balance</b>                | <b>£28.7m</b> |
| <b>In year movement in reserves</b>   | <b>£26.2m</b> |
| <b>Closing Balance</b>                | <b>£54.9m</b> |
| <b>Specified Reserves at year end</b> | <b>£40.9m</b> |
| <b>Balance Available</b>              | <b>£14 m</b>  |

**Capital Fund            £19,296,139**

The Capital Fund is made up of the Belfast Investment Fund (£1,908,136). The fund has been created to support key partnership projects to regenerate Belfast and help lever substantial funds from other sources, the Local Investment Fund (£1,056,624) to fund smaller local regeneration projects, the City Centre Investment Fund (£13,408,897) to support the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Plans, the Social Outcomes Fund (£2,922,482) to support City Centre projects which might not generate a direct financial return but would enhance the overall City Centre offer and support and attraction of investment.

**Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund £8,000,000**

This fund was created from the Belfast Investment Fund, to support neighbourhood regeneration and tourism projects in local neighbourhoods.

**Leisure Mobilisation Fund    £630,245**

This fund is to support the Leisure Transformation Programme and will cover programme level costs including communications, engagement and procurement costs.

**Capital Receipts Reserve    £7,962,458 and Deferred Capital Receipts £342,300**

These are capital receipts which have originated primarily from the sale of assets and which have not yet been used to finance capital expenditure.

**Other Fund Balances and Reserves    £1,091,532**

This relates to the Election Reserve (£379,435) which has been set up to smooth the cost of running council elections, the BWUH Subvention Fund (£436,402) to support national and international organisations in bringing their conferences to Belfast and the BWUH Sinking Fund (£275,695) to support planned maintenance and future capital works at the new exhibition centre.

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**Debt**

The overall level of trade debtors had been decreasing over the last ten years. Whilst, the COVID 19 pandemic had an impact on overall debt levels which now stand at £5.2m at 31 March 2021 compared to £4m at 31 March 2020, the increase is mainly due to an increase in public authority debt at year end. An analysis of trade debtors, inclusive of VAT, for the last two years is shown below:

|                        | <b>31 March 2021</b> | <b>31 March 2020</b> |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Less than three months | £3,963,319           | £3,239,834           |
| Three to one year      | £481,307             | £614,739             |
| More than one year     | £772,373             | £218,298             |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>£5,216,999</b>    | <b>£4,072,871</b>    |

**Creditors**

The Department for Communities has set councils a target of paying invoices within 30 days. During the year the council paid 51,593 invoices totalling £154,605,481.

The average time taken to pay creditor invoices was 17 days for the year ended 31 March 2021. The Council paid 39,959 invoices within 10 days, 48,218 invoices within 30 days, and 3,375 invoices outside of 30 days. The council endeavours to process invoices as quickly as possible and has an improvement plan to support this process.

**Annual Governance Statement (AGS)**

The Statement of Accounts include the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year 2020/21, which has been prepared in line with the Accounts Directive provided by the Department for Communities, NIAO guidance and is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. Specifically the AGS sets out:

- scope of responsibility of the Council in relation to governance
- the purpose of the governance framework
- the governance framework in place
- review of effectiveness of the governance framework
- update on the significant governance issues from prior year

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- **significant governance issues to be disclosed for current year**

**The AGS is approved by the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources, the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources. It is subject to review by the LGA (NIAO) as part of their annual audit.**

**Financial & Resource Implications**

**None**

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

**None**

The Panel commended the Finance team and the NIAO on the production of the financial accounts and the results of the audit and agreed to recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve the Council's Statement of Accounts and incorporated Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31st March 2021.

**Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) –  
Draft report to those charged with governance**

The Members of the Panel reviewed the contents of the NIAO Draft Report to those charged with Governance, which summarised the system and control issues which had arisen during its 2020/21 audit which included recommendations for management action.

Ms. Kane, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office, pointed out that management had not had the opportunity to provide comments and/or actions to address the issues raised in the Local Government Auditor's report for 2020/21, and that they would be presented to the Panel at its meeting in December.

She reported that the audit was ongoing and was due to be completed after the NIAO received the final signed Statement of Accounts and it was anticipated that the Local Government Auditor would certify the 2020/21 statements with an unqualified opinion. She stated that it was an incredible achievement to both prepare the accounts and complete the audit by the end of September 2021, considering the public health crisis.

She highlighted the comments in the report regarding her correspondence with the Chief Executive in respect of the Summer Community Diversionary Festival Programme 2021, to receive assurances around how the programme was to be administered.

She pointed out to the Members that the audit had identified one priority three recommendation, that being a cut off issue where she had recommended a review of all



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significant invoices at year end to ensure that they were correctly captured in the statement of accounts. She added that a detailed response to the draft management letter, identifying timescales and responsible officers, would be brought to a future meeting of the Panel.

In response to a question by a Member regarding usable resources, Mr Wallace informed the Panel that the usable reserves have increased significantly, due to the additional COVID-19 response monies which had been received and the impact of some services not being operational for a portion of the previous financial year.

After further discussion, it was  
Moved by Councillor Hutchinson,  
Seconded by Councillor Hanvey,

That the Members of the Panel agree to note the content of the report and accept the uncorrected misstatements as set out in the draft Report to those charged with Governance.

The Members of the Panel agreed to accept the proposal and it was declared carried.

**AGRS - Progress Report June 2021 –  
August 2021**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services gave the Panel an overview of the work that had been completed in the period and summarised the main findings from the following assurance audits finalised in the period:

- Corporate Risk Review – City Centre Regeneration; Follow-up review of the Zoo action plans;
- Corporate Risk Review – Waste Management and; Belfast Waterfront & Ulster Hall (BWUH) Ltd.

Regarding the two audits of the management of the corporate risks on City Regeneration and Development and Waste Management, the Head of AGRS highlighted that more detailed internal audit of these areas are included in the agreed audit plan for 2021/22.

She provided the Panel with an update on the review of the project management arrangements in place for the Planning Portal, pointing out that the progress being made by the Council's project team was directly reliant on the progress being made by the regional project team.

She also summarised the work that AGRS had undertaken to facilitate a workshop, with the key internal stakeholders, on the Intelligent Client Function (ICF) and how this helped inform the recent decision of the Council to take on responsibility for the ICF.

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The Head of AGRS outlined the following audits that were in progress or the reports that were currently being agreed with management:

- Police and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) (draft report prepared);
- Externally funded projects – compliance with letters of offer (draft report prepared);
- Payroll (draft report prepared);
- Grants (draft report prepared);
- Local Full Fibre Networks (draft report prepared);
- Off Street Car Parking (draft report prepared);
- Procurement and contract management (fieldwork); and
- Fleet management (fieldwork)

She updated the Panel on a number of instances where management had asked for AGRS to delay commencement of audits due to ongoing pressures on their resources as a result of the pandemic, organisational recovery work, business as usual work and approaching deadlines for important programmes and projects, and how AGRS would continue to monitor progress against plan.

She provided the Panel with a high-level summary of whistleblowing/fraud investigations along with the range of work that had been done to increase Fraud Risk Awareness. With regard to the National Fraud Initiative (NFI), the Head of AGRS provided the Panel with a summary of the outcome of the investigation of the matches to date.

Following a number of questions by the Members, the Panel agreed to note the AGRS Progress Report for the period June to August, 2021 and stressed the need for no further delays to delivery of the internal audit plan for the year.

**High Priority Recommendations Monitor –  
Update Report**

The AGRS Manager provided the Members of the Panel with an update on the implementation of high priority audit actions and the analysis of the underlying reasons for delays in implementation, following the recent Recommendations Monitoring exercise.

He explained that, at the start of this exercise, there were 68 outstanding (overdue) high priority actions and that 5 of these actions had been closed (either because they were fully implemented or are now no longer applicable). Of the 63 high priority actions that remained outstanding, 38 (or 60%) of these had been partially implemented.

He summarised and provided examples of the five main reasons for delays in implementation as being:

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- ongoing pressures on resources in services and departments, combined with prioritisation of other work;
- actions where implementation of the outstanding actions was dependent on the implementation of a new IT system;
- delays associated with the pandemic (including furlough, absence etc) and ongoing operational recovery;
- actions where implementation was dependent on the development, approval and implementation of a strategy or business plan
- actions where implementation is dependent on the outcome of ongoing departmental or service reviews

In terms of ongoing risk exposure, he noted that these actions were assigned a high priority rating at the time of the audit report, some of which date back some years. While management have accepted the continuing importance of implementing these actions, the level of risk associated with the actions may not necessarily be the same as it was at the time of the audit, either through the passage of time, or because management have in many cases implemented interim measures to help manage the risk until the actions are fully implemented.

He went on to explain as part of this review, AGRS clarified management's expectation for progress towards implementation. This indicated that management expect more than half of the outstanding high priority actions to be implemented within the current financial year, with a further 30% expected to be implemented in the next financial year.

He indicated that AGRS would undertake the next exercise in January/February, and would report to the Assurance Board/ Audit & Risk Panel in March 2022.

The Members of the Panel agreed to note the update on the progress made by management to implement high priority audit recommendations and the analysis of the underlying reasons for delays in implementation.

**Corporate Risk Management Update for  
quarter-end June 2021**

The Head of AGRS presented the Members of the Panel with a summary of the key updates from the risk review for the quarter-end June 2021 and updated the Panel on compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for quarter-end June 2021, completed by senior management. She provided the Audit and Risk Panel also with an update on business continuity management arrangements.

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She directed the Panel to the Corporate Risk Management Dashboard for the quarter-end June 2021 which sets out:

- Corporate risk analytics – risks reviewed, risks by category, risks within risk appetite, risk actions implemented / not yet due / overdue, movement in risk assessment;
- Key corporate risk updates for the quarter; and
- For each corporate risk, a summary of progress made to manage the risk and actions implemented in the quarter

The Head of AGRS provided the Panel with an update on the following corporate risk updates:

- Local Development Plan;
- Climate Change;
- Resilience Strategy; and
- Developing a Data Driven Approach to delivering the Belfast Agenda.

She informed the Members that risks had been assessed except the risks on Climate Change, City Risks / Resilience Strategy and Asset Management and that, the risk on Climate Change had not been assessed due to the Climate Commissioner's proposal that this risk was refocused and, subject to agreement, a new risk action plan would need to be developed and the new risk assessed.

She added that the risk on Resilience Strategy had not been assessed as it required review to reflect the next phase. Regarding Asset Management, due to other higher priorities, the Director of Physical Programmes had been unable to take forward the piece of work that was required to prepare a report for CMT, with an outline plan for improving the management of BCC assets. She further added that a working group would be convened to fully scope what was required, in advance of a formal Asset Management Board being established.

Regarding the Quarterly Assurance Statements on compliance with the risk management strategy, the Head of AGRS explained that these statements, from members of CMT, provided assurance to the Panel on the management of corporate risks, Covid-19 service recovery risk assessments and maintenance of internal controls systems, including temporary expenditure control measures.

She went on to explain that some issues had been raised in these statements along with the action that management intended to take to manage these issues.

In terms of the Business Continuity Management (BCM) update, the Head of AGRS reported that, as at 17th August 2021, all of the 15 critical services, except for Bereavement Services, had reviewed and updated their BCM plans.

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She went on to explain that, in December 2020, the Panel agreed for an additional two services to be added to the list of critical services in the Business Continuity Management Policy, the Customer Hub and Property Maintenance. She explained that AGRS was supporting these services in the development of their business continuity plans and had provided feedback on the draft BCM Plan for the Customer Hub and had offered to provide advice to Property Maintenance.

She also stated that AGRS was supporting Digital Services in running an Incident Response exercise in October, designed around a cyber-attack, which would provide some valuable learning from an emergency response/ business continuity perspective.

The Members of the Panel agreed to note the:

1. Corporate risk management dashboard and update for quarter-end June 2021 including the reframing of the corporate risks regarding the Local Development Plan and Climate Change;
2. Assurances from senior management regarding compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for quarter-end June 2021; and
3. The current position regarding review and update of the business continuity plans for the critical services to take account of learning from the pandemic.

**Assurance Map**

The Audit Governance and Risk Services Manager pointed out to the Members that the Council had an Assurance Framework which was underpinned by the three lines model which divided each type of assurance into either management control, corporate oversight or independent assurance. He added that Audit, Governance and Risk Services, as the Council's internal audit function, was responsible for providing independent assurance that the Council's risk management, governance and control processes operate effectively, but that this was only one of multiple sources of assurance.

He advised the Panel that an assurance map was a useful tool that could help the organisation to understand the various assurances that were in place as well as helping the organisation to identify any gaps that might exist, in particular, with regard to key corporate risks and financial systems.

He reported that an assurance map would:

- I. Allow senior management to review and assess the assurances they have in place over the management of corporate risks / operation of key financial processes and to identify any gaps or areas of duplication;
- II. Provide clarity to members and senior management on the range of assurances available and whether they are in line with their assurance requirements / expectations for these corporate risks and key financial processes;

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- III. Enable the Audit & Risk Panel to fulfil their role “to provide independent assurance to those charged with governance (Members and senior management) on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the internal control environment.”;
- IV. Enable the Audit Assurance Board to deliver their main purpose “to oversee the effective operation of the Council’s assurance framework. In doing so, the Board will play a key role in ensuring that the Council’s governance arrangements are fit for purpose and enable the Council to meet its statutory obligations and achieve its objectives.”;
- V. Support the Board / Panel in their consideration of the annual review of the effectiveness of the council’s system of internal control, which is reported in the Annual Governance Statement, and which the Board / Panel recommend to SPAR for approval; and
- VI. Help AGRS to better understand assurance activities across the council and use this information when developing the audit plan thereby allowing AGRS to demonstrate compliance with the International Professional Practices Framework (IPPF) Standard 2050 which requires that the Head of AGRS should “share information, coordinate activities, and consider relying upon the work of other internal and external assurance and consulting service providers to ensure proper coverage and minimise duplication of efforts”. AGRS are due to be assessed by external review against professional audit standards during 2022/23.

He outlined the proposed approach to developing an assurance map and sought agreement for initiating the development of an assurance map, with an initial focus on corporate risks and key financial processes. He added that AGRS would then map out the various sources of assurance for each of the corporate risks and key financial processes and discuss this with management. As part of this work, AGRS would agree a process for ongoing review and update of the assurance map.

The Panel agreed to note the benefits of developing an assurance map for the Council’s corporate risks and key financial systems and agreed that AGRS to take forward this piece of work.

**Update on Conflict of Interest, Gifts  
and Hospitality Policy**

The Governance and Compliance Manager advised the Members that a recent internal audit report had indicated that improvements were required to ensure that there was a satisfactory level of compliance with respect to both policies and the procedures required to be followed when registering a conflict of interest or recording acceptance or provision of gifts and/or hospitality. The audit also highlighted the need for all staff to be

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made aware of the policies and to ensure that declarations were made in a consistent manner.

She reported that it was proposed that a single, simplified policy would make it easier for staff to make declarations with respect to both potential conflicts of interest and in the acceptance or provision of gifts and hospitality and that the new policy would not fundamentally change any of the obligations upon staff which would remain derived from existing documentation (including the Code of Conduct for Belfast City Council Officers and the Accounting Manual).

She proposed that the new policy would:

- allow for the policies to be combined and simplified;
- allow for outdated terminology to be replaced and updated;
- provide clearer guidance to staff;
- make it easier for staff to access and complete the various forms attached to the policy;
- make it easier for nominated officers to record and maintain a record of all declarations made; and
- improve overall compliance with the policy.

She advised the Members that a new policy had been drafted and was being consulted upon by JNCC, however, the departmental nominated officers had been instructed to remind all staff of their obligations under the existing policy and complete any outstanding compliance exercises and update the registers accordingly.

She added that following consultation with JNCC, the new policy and timeline for implementation would be brought to the Corporate Management Team for approval.

The Panel agreed to note the content of the report.

**Action Plan in Response to Peter Coll QC Report:  
Progress Update**

The City Solicitor reminded the Panel that in February, 2021, Mr. Peter Coll QC provided his report to the Council on the events surrounding the arrangements for the cremation of Mr. Robert Storey at Roselawn Crematorium on 30th June, 2020.

He outlined to the Members, the proposed action plan in response to Mr. Coll's recommendations, which included:

- Member/Officer communications and decision making;
- Workforce, structures and culture;
- Crisis Management; and
- Improvements to Roselawn Crematorium.

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He advised the Panel that the Members would be provided with further updates over the coming months, as proposed actions were undertaken in response to the recommendations contained within Mr. Coll QC's report.

The Panel noted the progress made to date and that, regular updates on this report would be a standing agenda item for both the Audit Assurance Board and the Audit and Risk Panel.

**Performance Improvement – 2019-20 Year End Assessment and Arrangements for 2020-21**

The Strategic Director of Finance and Resources asked the Members of the Panel to consider the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

**The purpose of this paper is to:**

- **Update the Panel on progress to comply with the performance improvement duty as laid in in Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014 in relation the 2019-20 Audit;**
- **Update the Panel on the arrangements for 2020-21 and 2021-22**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**The Panel is asked to:**

- **Note the update on the 2019-20 Audit in the context of the Covid-19 emergency;**
- **Note the update on the arrangements for 2020-21 and 2021-22**

**3.0 Main report**

**Year End Corporate Performance Assessment**

**NIAO audit and assessment 2020**

**As previously reported the Performance Unit within the Finance and Resources Directorate produced a Year End Operational Update for 2019-20 which was considered by the Panel. Subsequently as required the report was published online by the 30 September 2020.**

**The NIAO audit and assessment of BCC's Improvement activity was completed in February 2021, in the context of the Covid-19 emergency the timeline was shifted. NIAO had previously advised that the proposed deadline for final reports would be March 2021, however final audit reports have still to**



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be issued by NIAO. The Panel will be updated once the final report has been received.

**BCC Improvement Plan 2021 / 22**

SP&R Committee in June agreed, via delegated authority to the Chief Executive to approve the Improvement Plan for 2021/22. The Improvement plan does not include everything that council plans to do that year, but instead focuses on a smaller set of key improvement priorities, as informed by resident priorities and evidenced by need. The Plan for 2021/22 includes six improvement objectives, aligned to the Belfast: Our Recovery plan, these are

|  |
|--|
| <b>Our city</b>  |
| We will support our city to recover by helping to restore the social and cultural vibrancy of our city spaces and places in a safe and sustainable way |
| <b>Our services</b>  |
| We will take steps to ensure our services adapt and improve in the short and longer term   |
| <b>Our communities</b>   |
| We will work with and support our communities, helping them to become stronger, healthier and more resilient   |
| <b>Our economy</b>   |
| We will work in collaboration with others to protect and create jobs and support people into employment  |
| <b>Our environment</b>   |
| We will take action to protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast   |
| <b>Digital innovation</b>  |
| We will improve digital inclusion and enhance our digital infrastructure to support jobs, our economy, sustainability and wellbeing                    |

The 2021/22 Improvement Plan was subsequently published on the council website by 30th June in order to meet the statutory deadline.

A mid-year report on progress made against activities contributing to the Improvement Objectives contained within our 2021-22 Improvement Plan will be brought to the next Panel meeting in December in line with our agreed processes.

**Arrangements for Performance Improvement 2020-21 and 2021-22**

Guidance in relation to the format and requirements for the 2020/21 audit is still to be formally agreed and issued. There was no requirement for a Performance Improvement Plan for 2020-21, and guidance on what areas the audit will focus on for that reporting period has still to be issued. In the absence

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**of any guidance, the performance unit will compile a short summary update, to include the year end statutory indicators or 2020-21 rather than a full year end update and publish the figures by the 30th September deadline.**

**The Performance Improvement Working Group, made up of representatives from each of the 11 Councils and chaired by the Chief Executive of M&EA, on behalf of SOLACE NI, continue to have discussions with the Department for Communities and NIAO with regards to performance improvement. The Performance Unit will continue to engage in discussions via the Working Group on moving forward with performance improvement for 2021/22 and the format and requirements for the 2020/21 audits.**

**Financial & Resource Implications**

**Audit fees will be calculated on the basis of the time spent by the NIAO on Belfast's audit and as previously advised should be reduced this year to 25%-30% of the previous cost.**

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

**None associated with this report.**

The Panel agreed to note the update on the 2019-20 Audit in the context of the Covid-19 emergency and the update on the arrangements for 2020-21 and 2021-22.

**Non-Executive Member of the Audit and Risk Panel**

The Chairperson asked the Non-Executive Member of the Panel, Ms. G. Fahy, to retire from the meeting for the discussion of the report, and she left the meeting while the item was being considered.

The Panel was reminded that, in line with recommended practice, the work of the Audit and Risk Panel had, for a number of years, been supported by the attendance and input of an external Member as a source of expertise on audit and finance related matters, augmenting the skills / experience provided by the Elected Members.

The Chairperson pointed out that the current external Member, Ms Geraldine Fahy, had provided the Elected Members of the Panel with an objective perspective and that her contract commenced in November 2020, initially for one year with possible extension for a further two years and asked the Panel to consider extending the existing agreement to provide the Council with the appropriate continuity of service

The Panel agreed to extend Ms. Fahy's contract for an additional two years.

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**Reporting Protocol for Sharing Best Practice**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk reminded the Panel that, at a workshop in April 2021, the Panel had recognised that it was important for Members and officers to be aware of, and to comply with best practice guidance issued by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), CIPFA and other organisations and asked for assurances on the processes around this.

With regard to the reporting protocol process, she advised the Panel that AGRS had an established process in place to help ensure that management were aware of best practice guidance by, reviewing relevant guidance documents, identifying relevant documents and summarising the key points, reviewing any relevant reports received by external organisations and forwarding this information on to relevant management.

She reported that AGRS had provided management with summaries of the following best practice documents and key reports:

Northern Ireland Audit Office

- Capacity and Capability in the Northern Ireland Civil Service
- Addiction services in Northern Ireland
- Governance Issues in Sport Northern Ireland
- Annual report and accounts for The Executive Office, Land & Property Services
- Annual Report and Trust Statement Accounts, Department for Infrastructure and
- Department of Health Annual Report and Accounts

National Audit Office

- Improving broadband
- Achieving net zero
- Lessons learned from Major Programme

Department of Finance

- Programme and project management guidance

Independent inquiry

- Renewable Heating Incentive – Inquiry Report (Summary and recommendations)
- Best Value Report
- Liverpool City Council

She advised the Members that it was proposed that updates on the reporting protocol process would be provided to the Assurance Board and the Audit and Risk Panel via the AGRS quarterly progress report.

The Members of the Panel agreed to note:

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- the process to help ensure management would be aware of best practice guidance issued by the NIAO, CIPFA and other organisations; and
- that future updates on the reporting protocol will be included in our standard AGRS progress reports to the Assurance Board and Audit & Risk Panel.

Chairperson

## Working Group on the Climate Crisis

Tuesday, 21st September, 2021

### MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

- Members present: Councillor Smyth (Chairperson);  
Alderman Copeland;  
Councillors Baker, Bunting, de Faoite, and  
Hutchinson.
- In attendance: Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;  
Mr. R. McLernon, Resilience Co-ordinator;  
Mr. J. McKearney, Project Support Officer; and  
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.
- Also attended: Professor J. Barry, Queens University Belfast; and  
Ms. J. Berman, Climate Northern Ireland Manager.

#### **Apologies**

No apologies were reported

#### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 23rd June, 2021 were taken as read and signed as correct.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

#### **Introductions and Overview of the All Party Working Group**

The Chairperson provided the Members with an overview of the work and issues pertinent to the Working Group and welcomed both officers and the external participants to the meeting. He reminded the Members that the Council had declared a climate emergency in October, 2019 followed by the publication of a Resilience Strategy and Climate Plan in 2020.

He thanked the officers for their work in securing efforts to deal with the climate emergency and, in particular, Councillor de-Faoite for his efforts in making the case for the formulation of a Working Group to raise awareness in regard to Climate Change.

The Chairperson outlined the three strands of the Resilience Strategy, culminating in a delivery plan for the city and highlighted the areas of work which would be required to be addressed, if the Council were to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. He referred to the threats facing the city if climate change was permitted to continue unabated and of the need to collaborate with other stakeholders, including the local community, to ensure support for the initiatives necessary to achieve the required reduction in carbon emissions.

## **Introduction to the Belfast Climate Commission**

Professor Barry provided the Working Group with an overview of the background, remit and membership of the Belfast Climate Commission. He stated that the Commission formed part of the Place Based Climate Action Network (P.C.A.N.) and was part of a network of Climate Commissions, throughout the U.K, focussed on action to achieve its climate change objectives. The Professor stated that P.C.A.N's mission was to secure public/private/civil society organisations to mobilise finance in order to provide public support and funding for its climate change objectives.

The Members were advised that P.C.A.N. had developed the Belfast Net Zero Road Map and provided an overview of that organisation's structure. He stated that the Climate Commission comprised fourteen core Commissioners, from a range of backgrounds, supported by a number of Working Groups. He referred to the fact finding and statistical formulation work, undertaken by the Commission, to help inform evidence based policy and of the need for leadership to make difficult but informed decisions, if the extreme effects of Climate change were to be avoided.

The Professor stated that while many U.K, authorities had declared climate emergencies, few had followed up with appropriate climate action to mitigate against the potential impact of climate change. The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, asked how the Council might engage with the local community to ensure that ownership of the climate emergency was galvanised. The Professor suggested that academic institutions might play a positive role in that regard and, in so doing, suggested that the relevant issues be broken down into District Electoral Areas (D.E.A's.). He suggested that, by focussing on Local geographical areas, local communities could identify more closely with the climate issues pertinent to their local environment. He suggested that public bodies could make better use of their land by planting more trees including the creation of community gardens, for example, to engage with the public and encourage local communities to embrace climate adaptation measures.

The Members were informed of the physical and psychological benefits of promoting green and blue spaces, including the economic benefits in terms of the creation of green jobs associated with the development of a green economy and a sustainable future. He highlighted the benefits of retro fitting public housing stock which could make a considerable contribution towards the elimination of fuel poverty.

The Working Group noted the information provided by Professor Barry and thanked him for his detailed and informative presentation.

## **Belfast Net Zero Road-Map**

The Climate Commissioner provided the Working Group with a presentation outlining a range of scenarios should global temperatures rise above 1.5 degrees centigrade and the cuts required, in respect of global emissions, to achieve that target. She highlighted the importance of cities in terms of the emissions produced, and why urban authorities had such an important role in delivering policies to tackle climate change. The Commissioner stated that, in terms of our carbon budget allocation, Northern Ireland would exceed its carbon target by 2030.

The Members were informed that the carbon road map had identified the key areas where carbon reduction could make a significant difference and could assist in helping the province reach its 84% reduction target by 2050. The areas identified within the road map

included buildings, industry and transport. The Commissioner stated that the road map highlighted the investments required to achieve the necessary reduction in emissions, including the benefits and financial returns made on those investments. The Working Group was informed that investing in home insulation provided the greatest economic and carbon reduction benefit in terms of its financial and environmental returns.

The Commissioner reported that, the next steps set out in the carbon road map were to develop a comprehensive Climate Action Plan for the City incorporating science-based targets to widen the scope, to include scope three emissions and to report back on a regular basis and progress in achieving carbon reductions against its specified targets. She stated that the Council was endeavouring to secure a budget to support the development of a Carbon Action Plan for the City, in tandem with the Resilience and Sustainability Board and the Climate Commission.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to the retro-fitting by the Housing Executive of its current housing stock, the Commissioner stated that a number of retrofit pilot projects were being undertaken by that organisation and that additional funds had been made available by the Department for the Economy to support vulnerable households to retrofit their homes.

The Working Group noted the information provided by the Climate Commissioner and thanked her for her detailed presentation.

### **PCAN work on Local Climate Action**

Professor Barry provided the Working Group with an overview of the work which had been undertaken, on behalf of the U.K 100 organisation, to assess developments which had taken place, on a U.K basis, to deal with the current climate emergency. He referred specifically to a report which attempted to analyse trends on local climate action initiatives throughout the U.K. and which sought to determine what specific actions had been implemented, successfully, to halt the pending climate emergency,

The Working Group was informed that the research undertaken had revealed that, while three in every four councils across the U.K. had declared a climate emergency, only 62% of those surveyed had initiated climate action plans to deal with that emergency. He stated that, of those councils which had taken action, an emphasis had been placed on climate mitigation, with relatively little resources targeted at climate adaptation measures. He reminded the Working Group that advice on climate mitigation and adaptation measures could be provided by both P.C.A.N. and the Climate Commission to assist with that process. He reinforced the importance of shared learning, on climate change measures, using the experience of other U.K. authorities and climate commissions.

The Professor referred to some of the barriers which research had indicated prevented concerted action to tackle climate change including, amongst other things, resources and a lack of coordination between central, regional and local government. The Members were informed of some potential actions which could be undertaken to finance climate adaptation and mitigation measures, including the raising of financial bonds which could be converted into green bonds, providing a financial return for potential investors.

The Working Group was informed that the task of dealing with climate change required a combined effort, at all levels, and referred to the model of community wealth generation, whereby large public bodies could pool their resources together to achieve significant climate gains. The professor referred specifically to central procurement by organisations citing, by way of example, health and social care trusts, local authorities and academic institutions such as Queen's University. The professor referred to a further piece of research commissioned

by Dr Becky Willis and funded by P.C.A.N. which identified a range of personality traits and leadership skills required to deliver climate action. The research indicated that, in a number of local authorities, including Belfast, there appeared to be a functional gap between stated intent and functional policies to achieve the required climate goals. The research recognised also that local authorities in Northern Ireland did not have the same statutory powers as authorities in Great Britain and, therefore, there existed barriers in regard to the impact that local authorities could have on Climate mitigation and adaptation measures.

The Professor stressed the importance of Northern Ireland developing alternative forms of green energy, given its over reliance on fossil fuels for domestic heating and for the generation of traditional energy, namely electricity. He cited also the high proportion of the population engaged in agriculture and, in particular, beef and dairy production with the associated high levels of methane gas produced from that industry

A Member raised the issue that the majority of statutory powers, involving climate mitigation and adaptation measures, resided with the Northern Ireland Assembly. He referred also to the problem of communicating effectively with the local community to reinforce the fact that the climate emergency impacts directly on citizens everyday lives. The professor, in response, acknowledged the statutory limitation in respect of local government powers, he pointed out however to the electoral mandate of communication, with the local community, in terms of the green economy and future job opportunities associated with developing green industries and initiatives. The Working Group was informed of the planning opportunities available to the Council, in terms of promoting green growth and highlighted specifically the potential to link spatial planning with energy planning.

The Climate Commissioner suggested that, in her opinion, a significant way to make progress in the reduction of emissions could involve data capture, whereby organisations were compelled to publish data on their carbon emissions. She suggested that scope 3 data analysis would assist with that process and referred to the investment opportunities to provide the necessary financial resources to develop a green economy, estimated at £9.6 billion. The Professor informed the Working Group of a number of additional measures which could be developed to encourage the green economy, including pension scheme investments and the creation of a dedicated team within local government, adequately resourced, to place the climate change at the top of the Council's corporate agenda.

The Chairperson requested that a climate training course for Members might prove beneficial. In response, the Climate Commissioner stated that, if there was sufficient support for such a training initiative, she would endeavour to deliver an appropriate training course via the Climate NI initiative.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, thanked Professor Barry for his detailed and informative presentation and he departed from the meeting.

### **Just Transition Committee**

The Chairperson requested that, as part of a wider review of future Council Committees and given the importance attached to the declaration of a climate emergency, in consultation with party Group Leaders and Chief officers and subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, that a Just Transition Committee be constituted to deal with the emerging climate emergency.

After consideration, the Working Group agreed unanimously that, subject to the necessary approval, that the Council give consideration to the establishment of a Just Transition Committee to deal effectively with the critical issues associated with climate change.



**Date of Next Meeting**

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting be held on Wednesday, 6th October at 5:15 pm.

Chairperson

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|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Subject:</b>           | <b>Requests for Use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 24th September, 2021  |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | John Walsh, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services       |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Aisling Milliken, Functions and Exhibition Manager                        |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Restricted Reports</b>                         |   |
| <b>Is this report restricted?</b>                 | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| 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"/>  |

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

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| <b>1.0</b> | <b>Purpose of Report</b>  |
| 1.1        | This report, 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 10th September, which appear to the Function Management Unit to comply with the criteria previously established by the Committee and are recommended for approval. |
| <b>2.0</b> | <b>Recommendations</b>  |
| 2.1        | The Committee is asked to approve the recommendations made in respect of applications received up to 10th September 2021, as set out in the attached appendix.  |

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| <b>3.0</b> | <b>Main Report</b>  |
|            | <u>Background Information</u>   |
| 3.1        | Members will be aware that the Committee, at its meeting of 6th January 2017, agreed to modify the criteria governing access to the City Hall function rooms for external organisations.  |
| 3.2        | The Committee also agreed to the implementation of room-hire charges for some categories of function and also revised the approach to the provision of civic hospitality for functions on foot of the agreed efficiency programme. Some further modifications to this approach were agreed by the Committee on 24 <sup>th</sup> March 2017, 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2017, 23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2019 and 25 <sup>th</sup> October 2019. |
|            | <u>Key Issues</u>   |
| 3.3        | The existing revised criteria and scale of charges have been applied to the various requests received and the recommendations herein are offered to the Committee on this basis for approval.   |
| 3.4        | The schedule attached covers four applications for functions, scheduled for 2021 and 2022 however approval is linked to City Hall recovery and functions will be planned in due course in line with NI Executive guidance.  |
|            | <u>COVID implications</u>   |
| 3.5        | In managing and delivering future functions, liaison with and guidance for organisers will be provided by officers to ensure compliance with any relevant social distancing guidelines at the time of their function. Committee approval for their function to take place in City Hall is recommended on the basis of their compliance to this caveat and what is permissible and feasible in City Hall function rooms.               |
|            | <u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>  |
| 3.6        | The implementation of charging for external functions has commenced, in line with the Committee's decisions in the matter.  |
|            | <u>Equality and Good Relations / Rural Needs Implications</u>   |
| 3.7        | There are no direct good relations, equality or rural needs implications arising from this report.  |
| <b>4.0</b> | <b>Document Attached</b>  |
|            | Schedule of Function requests received up to 10th September, 2021.  |

## SEPTEMBER 2021 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

| NAME OF ORGANISATION                               | FUNCTION DATE     | FUNCTION DESCRIPTION  | CRITERIA MET | ROOM CHARGE  | HOSPITALITY OFFERED | CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND                     |
|--|-------------------|---|--------------|--|---------------------|--|
| <b>2021 EVENTS</b>                                 |                   |   |              |  |                     |  |
| Aisling Events                                     | 4 November 2021   | <p><b>Belfast International Homecoming Dinner and Award Presentation</b> as part of COP26 themed events in Belfast</p> <p>Numbers attending – 300</p> <p><i>* Numbers and room layout will be reviewed and revised in line with COVID19 social distancing guidelines at the time of this event.</i></p> | A & B        | Charge £825  | No hospitality      | Approve<br>Charge<br>No hospitality    |
| <b>2022 EVENTS</b>                                 |                   |   |              |  |                     |  |
| Society for Cardiothoracic Surgery in GB & Ireland | 14 March 2022     | <p><b>SCTS Annual Meeting 2022 Gala dinner</b><br/>As part of their Congress in ICC, Belfast</p> <p>Numbers attending – 150</p> <p>-</p> <p><i>* Numbers and room layout will be reviewed and revised in line with COVID19 social distancing guidelines at the time of this event.</i></p>              | A & B        | No (charity)   | No hospitality      | Approve<br>No Charge<br>No hospitality |
| Microbiology Society                               | 5 April 2022      | <p><b>Microbiology Society Drinks Reception</b><br/>as part of a celebration programme to celebrate 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the journal and engagement events for microbiologists</p> <p>Numbers attending – 100</p>   | A & B        | No<br><br><i>£825 waived due to links with Visit Belfast</i> | No hospitality      | Approve<br>No Charge<br>No hospitality |
| QUB & Solar Orbiter Workshop                       | 11 September 2022 | <p><b>Conference Welcome Reception</b> for four-day conference taking place at Assembly Building</p> <p>Numbers attending – 250</p>   | A & B        | No<br><br><i>£825 waived due to links with Visit Belfast</i> | No hospitality      | Approve<br>No Charge<br>No hospitality |

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