

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



**Belfast
City Council**

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room, City Hall on Friday, 22nd March, 2024 at 9.30 am, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

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

2. Restricted Items

- (a) Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund Update (Pages 1 - 4)
- (b) Belfast Stories Update (Pages 5 - 16)
- (c) Notification of the appointment to Operational Director of CNS (2 posts)
(Verbal Report)
- (d) Belfast 2024 Update March 2024 (Pages 17 - 24)

3. Matters referred back from Council/Motions

- (a) Motion - Housing Crisis (Pages 25 - 28)

- (b) Motion - Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting (Pages 29 - 32)

4. **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (a) Smart Belfast City Innovation programme (Pages 33 - 38)
- (b) Apprenticeship Programme Funding (Pages 39 - 40)
- (c) Performance Improvement Plan 2023/24 Updated KPIs (Pages 41 - 60)
- (d) Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-25 (Pages 61 - 66)
- (e) Customer Focus Programme Update (Pages 67 - 72)

5. **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

- (a) Physical Programme Update (Pages 73 - 82)
- (b) Assets Management (Pages 83 - 90)
- (c) Area Working Groups Update (Pages 91 - 140)

6. **Finance, Procurement and Performance**

- (a) Medium Term Financial Plan Update 2024/25 – 2027/28 (Pages 141 - 156)
- (b) CIPFA Prudential Code Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Indicators 2024-25 (Pages 157 - 176)
- (c) Contracts Update (Pages 177 - 184)
- (d) People and Communities - Funding requests (Pages 185 - 196)
- (e) Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes of Meeting of 5 March 2024 (Pages 197 - 228)
- (f) World Athletics Road Race (Pages 229 - 230)

7. **Equality and Good Relations**

- (a) Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting on 11th March 2024 (Pages 231 - 272)

8. **Operational Issues**

- (a) Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum (Pages 273 - 276)
- (b) Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality (Pages 277 - 282)
- (c) Minutes of the All-Party Working Group on the City Centre (Pages 283 - 286)
- (d) Minutes of the Disability Working Group (Pages 287 - 294)

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

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Belfast
City Council

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES
COMMITTEE

Subject:	Motion – Housing Crisis
Date:	22nd March, 2024
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
	To bring to Members' attention a motion in relation to Housing Crisis, which the Standards and Business Committee considered at its meeting on 22nd February.
2.0	Recommendation
	<p>Members are asked to note that in accordance with Standing Order 13(i) that Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.</p> <p>At this time Members are only asked to note that the Notice of Motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought to Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Notice of Motion and the potential costs implications.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 22nd February, considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 4th March:</p> <p><u>Housing Crisis</u></p> <p>“This Council recognises the need to bring forward significant quantities of high standard, affordable housing to meet the increasing demand and alleviate the current housing crisis facing people in Belfast.</p> <p>This Council commits to supporting Cohousing Schemes as an innovative solution to meet the needs of people who are unable to buy within the current system or for whom traditional housing does not meet their needs. Cohousing schemes can create diverse and sustainable communities, providing high quality, affordable housing.</p> <p>The Council will actively seek to identify suitable sites within its own land that could be used for Cohousing and include provision for Cohousing within any development site it brings forward that is appropriate for housing.”</p> <p>Proposer: Councillor Áine Groogan</p> <p>Seconder: Councillor Brian Smyth</p>
3.2	<p>The motion calls upon the Council to identify suitable sites within its own land that could be used for co-housing - the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for the corporate land bank and city assets and the motion has been referred to this Committee.</p>

3.3	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>This motion, if agreed, may have potential equality, good relations and rural needs implications and should be subject to our normal screening process as appropriate.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None

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Subject:	Motion – Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting
Date:	22nd March, 2024
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance Manager

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
	To bring to Members' attention a motion in relation to Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting, which the Standards and Business Committee considered at its meeting on 22nd February.
2.0	Recommendation
	<p>Members are asked to note that in accordance with Standing Order 13(i) that Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.</p> <p>At this time Members are only asked to note that the Notice of Motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought to Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Notice of Motion and the potential costs implications.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 22nd February, considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 4th March:</p> <p><u>Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting</u></p> <p>"That this Council will lead the way in Northern Ireland, adopting robust, transparent and accountable processes for gender pay gap recording and reporting.</p> <p>The TUC calculated that in 2023 in the UK, the day when the average woman stops working for free compared to the average man is the 23rd of February. The average woman in paid employment effectively works for free for nearly two months of the year compared to the average man in paid employment. Average figures disguise wider disparities, for instance the gap tends to widen if a woman is a mum, or works in education, finance or insurance.</p> <p>There is no legal obligation to record and report gender pay gap data in Northern Ireland. However, if we don't transparently measure pay by gender, how can we understand and address structural inequalities in our organisation?</p> <p>Therefore, this Council will record and report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its mean gender pay gap in hourly pay • Its median gender pay gap in hourly pay • The proportion of males and females in each pay quartile • A statistical overview of progression/promotion rates for male and female staff <p>And will use guidance such as the UK Government Equalities Office - What Works guidance to address the gap.</p>

	<p>After the first gender pay gap report, the Council will move to include Disability and ethnicity pay reporting.”</p> <p>Proposer: Councillor Tara Brooks</p> <p>Seconder: Councillor Fiona McAteer</p>
3.2	<p>The motion calls upon the Council to adopt a Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting - the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for Human Resources, Finance and Performance issues and the motion has been referred to this Committee.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion.</p> <p>Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>This motion, if agreed, may have potential equality, good relations and rural needs implications and should be subject to our normal screening process as appropriate.</p>
4.0	Documents Attached
	None

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Subject:	Smart Belfast programme update
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer:	Mark McCann, City Innovation manager (Acting) Deirdre Ferguson, Innovation Broker

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
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Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To update Members on a number of City Innovation projects and opportunities including details of the draft Belfast/Sejong 'Innovation Twins' roadmap and the associated visit by the Lord Mayor to South Korea in April.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the outline itinerary for the Lord Mayor's Innovation Twins mission to South Korea in April which is fully funded by DSIT. 2. Approve the signing of an 'Innovation Twins' roadmap as a basis for further direct and bi-lateral development work with the city of Sejong on a number of initiatives. 3. Approve the signing of a specific MoU with Sejong City Council to explore opportunities for net zero collaboration with the Belfast Climate Commissioner. 4. Approve a letter of support to Ulster University for its bid to establish £2.5 million Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator in Belfast including potential in-kind contribution. 5. Note that officers will work with Queen's University on a £5 million Systems Approaches to the Transition to Net Zero bid. 6. Approve Belfast City Council officer participation in the annual programme of the All Island Smart Cities Forum. 7. Note progress on the development of the City Hall immersive experience and that details on the proposed experience will be presented to Committee in the coming months.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>The Smart Belfast urban innovation programme encourages collaborative innovation between government (both local and regional), industry, SMEs, academia and our communities. Evidence indicates that cities with strong collaborative innovation partnerships are more adept at attracting research funding and investment; and are much better equipped to develop solutions to complex urban policy challenges. The Smart Belfast programme relies primarily on third-party funding sources and in-kind contributions from participating partners. Below are details of the current significant initiatives, a number of which require Member approval.</p>
3.2	<p>Republic of Korea Innovation Twins programme</p> <p>The Innovation Twins programme is fully funded by DSIT and facilitated by Connected Places Catapult. It's designed to build relationships between four cities with existing urban innovation programmes (Belfast, Glasgow, Birmingham and Liverpool) and their South Korean counterparts with the aim of fostering long term collaborations that can generate trade, FDI and knowledge exchange. South Korea has one of the most successful innovation economies in the</p>

	<p>world and has ambitions to build much stronger trade and exchange relationships with Europe and north America.</p>
3.3	<p>Belfast City Council and its Innovation City Belfast partners, including Invest NI's team in South Korea, have been working with Sejong city officials to agree a joint roadmap that would be of benefit to both cities. A long-list of proposals for the roadmap was developed with partners over the past eighteen months which has now been shortlisted to seven initiatives which both cities want to progress. Members should note that these are all still at a formative stage, and each will require further work and agreement between both cities before they are confirmed as projects. The shortlist includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Global Innovation Network – Belfast's SME accelerator 'Catalyst' will work with Sejong Technopark and the Korean Centre for Creative Economy and Innovation to provide a platform for companies from both cities to support global collaboration, increase R&D activity, increase innovation rates and help to scale high growth driven innovation enterprises. 2. Security in Space – Queen's University ECIT team will work with Korea University to investigate post-quantum cryptography systems that will secure next-generation satellite communication systems. 3. Green City Accelerator – An MoU between Belfast City Council and Sejong City Council to develop energy and net zero projects led by our Climate Commissioner. 4. Cyber-cities – Queen's will collaborate with Korea University on a cyber-security Hackathon for students and a global cyber conference in Sejong. 5. Invest NI's Smart Cities missions – A smart city mission will take place enabling Northern Ireland companies to visit Sejong (and elsewhere in South Korea) to promote bi-lateral trade, collaboration and strengthen innovation eco-systems. A mission for Sejong companies to Belfast will also be facilitated by Invest NI and Sejong Technopark. 6. Internet of Things – Ulster University and Digital Catapult will work with Sejong to develop urban testbeds enabled by 5G, with applications in the fintech and health-tech sectors. 7. Pathway to Net Zero – Translink and Sejong partners will explore innovative technologies to support ambitions to be carbon positive by 2040. 8. In addition to these proposals, Sejong also wish to explore tourism collaboration. The city plans to open a new national museum in 2025, and officials are keen for Belfast to be represented in the museum. Officials from Sejong are travelling to Belfast in June to engage with Titanic Belfast, Ulster Museum, Belfast Stories and Belfast 2024. While tourism as a theme sits outside of the roadmap, it is something that Sejong has placed great emphasis on, and is expected to form part of the content of the Lord Mayor's visit.

3.4	<p>The Lord Mayor's mission to Sejong</p> <p>The primary purpose of the mission is for the mayors of both cities to sign the Innovation Twins roadmap as a basis for further development. The mission, which is fully funded under the terms of the Innovation Twins programme, is planned for 25 April to 1 May. The Lord Mayor will be accompanied by the Chief Executive, the Climate Commissioner; and an Innovation Broker from the City Innovation Team.</p>
3.5	<p>Invitations have also been extended to Catalyst, Queen's University, Ulster University and the Digital Catapult. The visit will also be supported by Invest NI's South Korean office and officials from the Connected Places Catapult. Members should note that Connected Places Catapult funding may also be made available to accompanying organisations to support their travel to Sejong.</p>
3.6	<p>The official itinerary is still being finalised with Sejong officials but it will include a unique visit to the South Korea Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and visits to a number of centres that have contributed to making South Korea a powerhouse of the global economy. These include the Electronics and Telecommunications Research Institute, the Autonomous Vehicle Big Data Control Centre, the Smart City Centre, Korea University, the Hongik Maker Land, the Sejong Centre for Creative Economy & Innovation and Sejong Technopark which works directly with South Korean SMEs to commercialise research and innovation.</p>
3.7	<p>Members are asked to note the outline itinerary for the Lord Mayor's Innovation Twins mission. And Members are also asked to approve the signing by the Lord Mayor of the Innovation Twins roadmap as a basis for further direct and bi-lateral development work with Sejong.</p>
3.8	<p>Belfast's Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator</p> <p>Ulster University is preparing a major bid to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's 'Place-based Innovation Accelerator Account' to create a Belfast-based Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator that aims to build innovation capacity amongst the local digital health care cluster by encouraging more collaboration with university researchers, clinicians and directly with communities.</p>
3.9	<p>Ulster University is requesting a letter of support from Belfast City Council that would include making an in-principle commitment to the programme with in-kind staff time to the value of £100,000 over four years and to work with City Deal partners to develop a potential complementary challenge fund aimed at stimulating innovation amongst Belfast region health tech SMEs.</p>

3.10	Members are asked to approve a letter of support from Belfast City Council, with any final decision in commitment being subject to the terms of the winning bid and approval by a future Committee.
3.11	<p>Systems approaches to the transition to net zero</p> <p>Queen's University has been engaging with the City Innovation Office on a potential £5 million bid to UKRI for a five-year research programme that will focus on opportunities and barriers to achieving net zero across urban systems such as transport, health, housing, etc.</p>
3.12	Surrey University is lead applicant with Queen's while other partners include Oxford University, University College London, Newcastle and Birmingham. The deadline for an outline application is 26 March. If successful, applicants will then be invited to develop their bid further for final submission (at which point an update will be brought back to committee on the bid and the potential role of Belfast City Council).
3.13	<p>All-Island Smart Cities Network</p> <p>Belfast City Council was a founding member of a smart cities forum in 2017 that now includes most large town and cities on the island of Ireland. (Derry and Strabane and Newry Mourne and Down Councils are also members). The forum was set up to share and promote smart cities practice and to work on joint projects and funding bids. For example, the City Innovation Office worked with Smart Dublin on a successful €800,000 Last mile delivery challenge competition in 2019.</p>
3.14	Membership of the Forum requires in-person attendance at a small number of workshops in Dublin usually on a quarterly basis. Members are asked to approve this travel.
3.15	<p>City Hall immersive experience</p> <p>Members should note that work continues with BT on the development of the City Hall immersive experience that will sensitively complement elements of the existing exhibition. This experimental project, which aims to open from mid-autumn as part of Belfast 2024's programme, is being developed with the City Innovation Office, Belfast 2024, and the Functions and Exhibitions team.</p>
3.16	Under a collaborative agreement, BT are investing significant R&D resources into the experience while the Council is benefiting from working alongside of the UK's most creative multi-media companies specialising in heritage sectors. Members are asked to note progress on the development of the experience and that details on the proposed experience will be presented to Committee in the coming months.

	Financial & Resource Implications
3.17	Unless otherwise noted below, budgets for the initiatives noted above are funded via third-party sources, with any Council contributions identified within the existing City Innovation Office and Belfast Region City Deal budgets.
3.18	Council travel costs for Sejong are covered by a grant received from Connected Places Catapult for the Innovation Twins programme.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.19	None.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None



Belfast
City Council

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Subject:	Apprenticeship Programme Funding
Date:	22 nd March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
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Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to advise members on how the apprenticeship programme could be funded.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to agree to funding the 2024/25 apprenticeship programme from realignment of specified reserves with the costs for future years being incorporated into the medium-term financial plan.
3.0	Main report
3.1	In February 2024 the Director of Human Resources presented a report to the Strategic Policy and Resources committee on the introduction of an apprenticeship programme for the council. This report highlighted two potential areas where this could initially be introduced, namely Fleet and Resources and Digital Services. The Committee noted the content of the report and agreed that a further report be submitted on how such a programme could be financed.
3.2	The report highlighted the full year costs of the initial programme was approximately £77k per annum, including salary and training costs. This equates to an ask in 24/25 of approximately £45k. These initial apprenticeships will last for 3 years at a total cost of approximately £231k, subject to nationally agreed pay awards.
3.3	As referred to in the Director of Human Resources' report, there currently is no budget for this programme, either departmentally or centrally. Normally we would review the year -end financial position and if there are funds available set aside money in a specified reserve to fund this for 24/25. However, it is likely that the recruitment process will need to commence before we know the year end position so to ensure the recruitment of this programme can go ahead in a timely manner, I am proposing the following financial options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Agree to realign £45k from specified reserves to this scheme for 24/25; 2) If funds available at year end, replenish the specified reserve; 3) Incorporate the future funding requirement into the medium-term financial plan currently being devised.
3.4	As part of the medium-term financial planning further discussions will be held with the Director of Human Resources and relevant Directors re the expansion of the apprenticeship programme into other areas.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.5	There is no additional in year cost, however, there will be recurring costs of approximately £77k per annum from 25/26 onwards.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.6	None
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None



Subject:	Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 – Updated KPIs
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty Karen Anderson-Gillespie, Strategic Performance Manager Ryan Berry, Strategic Planning & Performance Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues				
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the proposed amendments to the performance indicators to be included in the Council's 2023-24 Performance Improvement Plan following discussions and engagement with the NI Audit Office (NIAO) and Department for Communities (DfC).				
2.0	Recommendation				
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• agree to the recommended changes to the performance indicators to be included in the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.• provide approval for officers to update and publish the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 following final agreement with DfC and NIAO.				
3.0	Main Report				
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act requires Councils to agree improvement objectives on an annual basis and publish these in the form of a Performance Improvement Plan. In August 2023, Members agreed the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24, which contains our commitment to securing continuous improvement as well as delivery of five improvement objectives. The Act also requires us to monitor and report on progress in an annual assessment of performance.</p>				
3.2	<p>Improvement Plan 2023-24</p> <p>In August 2023, the SP&R Committee approved the Performance Improvement Plan for 2023-24. It was then published on the council website as required by legislation. To date, Council has provided two quarterly delivery updates to the NIAO for 2023-24 and was in the process of compiling a Quarter 3 report. However, following recent feedback, engagement and discussions with senior officials within the NIAO and the DfC, officers have been working to revise and amend a number of our performance indicators to ensure that we can report on our progress and performance more effectively going forward.</p>				
3.3	<p>The Improvement Plan 2023-24 sets out the following improvement objectives:</p> <table><tr><td>Our services and facilities</td></tr><tr><td>Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.</td></tr><tr><td>Our communities</td></tr><tr><td>Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.</td></tr></table>	Our services and facilities	Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.	Our communities	Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.
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Our communities					
Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.					

	<table><tr><td>Our economy</td></tr><tr><td>Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.</td></tr><tr><td>Our environment</td></tr><tr><td>Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.</td></tr><tr><td>Our city</td></tr><tr><td>Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.</td></tr></table>	Our economy	Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.	Our environment	Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.	Our city	Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.		
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3.4	<p>Each improvement objective is supported by a range of actions and milestones that we are required to report on quarterly. Several KPIs and targets are also attributed to help us evidence the extent to which we have achieved our objectives.</p> <p>Officers have engaged with the CMT and brought a report to Audit and Risk Panel on the 5 March, to outline and agree the approach and next steps to revising the KPIs within the current Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24, subject to S&PR approval of the changes and final agreement with the DfC and NIAO.</p>								
3.5	<p>A revised copy of the Improvement Objectives with the proposed new indicators is attached in Appendix 1 and the changes are summarised below:</p> <p>Please note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current KPIs that have been scored through are recommended to be removed.• Current KPIs not scored through will remain.• Proposed new / additional KPIs in green have been agreed by departments (data will be available for reporting and aligned to improvement objectives). <table><tr><td colspan="2">Improvement Objective 1: Our services and facilities</td></tr><tr><td colspan="2">Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.</td></tr><tr><td>Current KPIs</td><td>Proposed new / additional KPIs</td></tr><tr><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resident satisfaction with Belfast City Council• Percentage of residents who agree that council provides good customer service• Percentage of residents who agree that is easy to contact the council or access council services• Percentage of residents who agree Council provides good value for money• Percentage of residents who agree their local area is clean and attractive</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer contact service level (people answered within 120 secs)• Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe.• Number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school).• Throughput / footfall – number of people using leisure centres (individual unique customer visits).</td></tr></table>	Improvement Objective 1: Our services and facilities		Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.		Current KPIs	Proposed new / additional KPIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resident satisfaction with Belfast City Council• Percentage of residents who agree that council provides good customer service• Percentage of residents who agree that is easy to contact the council or access council services• Percentage of residents who agree Council provides good value for money• Percentage of residents who agree their local area is clean and attractive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer contact service level (people answered within 120 secs)• Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe.• Number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school).• Throughput / footfall – number of people using leisure centres (individual unique customer visits).
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Current KPIs	Proposed new / additional KPIs								
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resident satisfaction with Belfast City Council• Percentage of residents who agree that council provides good customer service• Percentage of residents who agree that is easy to contact the council or access council services• Percentage of residents who agree Council provides good value for money• Percentage of residents who agree their local area is clean and attractive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customer contact service level (people answered within 120 secs)• Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe.• Number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school).• Throughput / footfall – number of people using leisure centres (individual unique customer visits).								

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resident satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities.	
<div>Improvement objective 2: Our communities</div> <p>Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.</p>	
<div>Current KPIs</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage of residents who are satisfied with their local area a place to live.• Percentage of residents who agree council shows good leadership.• Percentage of residents who agree council consults and listens to the views of local residents.• Percentage of residents who agree that their local area has good quality parks and green.• Percentage of residents using council parks at least monthly (resident survey data).• Number of parks and green spaces with green flag accreditation.• Number of responses to consultation surveys per annum (via Your Say Belfast).• Public participation levels in participatory budgeting (PB) decision making events.• Number of residents accessing online cost-of-living support and advice or 'warm and welcome spaces'.	<div>Proposed new / additional KPIs</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investment in new/ upgraded playgrounds.• Total BCC capital investment in neighbourhoods.
<div>Improvement objective 3: Our economy</div> <p>Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.</p>	
<div>Current KPIs</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Number of jobs promoted through the 'Go For It' programme [Statutory performance indicator]• Business start-up and growth activity:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Number of business plans developed- Number of participants or businesses supported	<div>Proposed new / additional KPIs</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No additional indicators required / recommended

Improvement objective 4: Our environment

Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.

Current KPIs

- ~~Percentage of residents who agree that Belfast is an environmentally friendly city~~
- One Million Trees Programme - number of trees planted per annum.
- Carbon disclosure project (CDP) score
- Northern Ireland environmental benchmarking survey rating.
- Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable council collected waste that is landfilled [Statutory performance indicator]
- % of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use) [Statutory performance indicator]
- Amount (tonnage) of council collected municipal waste arisings [Statutory performance indicator]

Proposed new / additional KPIs

- % of the council's vehicle fleet switching fuel consumption to HVO

Improvement Objective 5: Our city

Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

Current KPIs

- ~~Resident satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live~~
- ~~Percentage of residents who agree the city centre is vibrant and attractive, with lots going on~~
- ~~Percentage of residents who agree that Belfast:~~
 - ~~– is easy to get about~~
 - ~~– has good infrastructure~~
- Number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme.

Proposed new / additional KPIs

- The total number of previously vacant city centre properties that have been awarded the Vacant to Vibrant grant and will become occupied as a result of the intervention.
- The total amount of funding (£) awarded to city centre traders to address vacancy.
- The total number of people engaged (traders, developers, business owners, landlords etc) in assisting with the completion of applications to the Vacant to Vibrant intervention.

Current KPIs

Planning [Statutory performance indicators]

- Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications
- Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications
- Percentage of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks.

3.6	Next steps <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subject to SP&R approval, officers will present the revised KPIs to DfC and NIAO for final agreement. • Subject to approval by DfC and NIAO, officers will publish the revised Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 on our website and will submit a combined Q3 and Q4 update to the SP&R Committee in June 2024. This combined Q3 and Q4 and all future reports will be based on the revised KPIs.
3.7	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> There are no finance or resource implications contained within this report.
3.8	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality implications contained in this report.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Draft Improvement Plan 2023-24 - Updated KPIs.

Improvement objective 1: Our services and facilities

What we want to achieve

Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.

What we will do

- Improve our customer care practices by continuing to implement our customer focus programme.
- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of key services, focusing this year on our services that help make the city clean and green.
- Upgrade and improve our Leisure facilities by continuing to implement our Leisure Transformation Programme.

How we will measure our performance (potential new / additional)

Performance Indicators	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 Target
Customer contact service level (people answered within 120 secs)	-	67%	68%	73%
Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe	65.5%	71.6	72.3%	75%
Number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school)		23,339	27,582	30,500
Throughput / footfall – number of people using leisure centres (individual unique customer visits)		2,029,310	2,810,202	3,100,000

Activities to support this improvement objective

Improve our customer care				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Create a strategy for expanding the provision and uptake of automated digital channels	✓			
Develop of performance metrics to measure the impact of the customer programme			✓	

Develop service level agreements and transactional customer satisfaction measurement			✓		
Develop and implement an approach for seamless customer transactional relationship across all contact channels (single view of customer)					✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Programme Director Customer Focus				
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee				

Improve key services					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Carry out a robust review of city centre governance and management arrangements			✓	✓	
Convene a 'City Centre Delivery Group' to bring together key stakeholders to implement city centre strategies			✓	✓	
Develop an operational improvement plan for delivery of pest control services			✓		
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services				
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee				

Improve our facilities					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Complete construction works at Templemore Baths and launch facility		✓			
Continue to develop business case for Girdwood indoor sports facility		✓	✓	✓	✓
Continue to develop options for Leisure Transformation Phase 4 aligned to the Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy		✓	✓	✓	✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Physical Programmes				
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee				

Improvement objective 2: Our communities

What we want to achieve

Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.

What we will do

- Support our residents, especially those most vulnerable, through the cost-of-living crisis.
- Improve the physical condition of local neighbourhoods.
- Improve our parks and playgrounds and encourage people to be physically active.
- Enhance and improve how we engage and involve our residents.

How we will measure our performance and impact (current)

Performance Indicators	2021-22	2022-2023	Target	Mid-year
Number of parks and green spaces with green flag accreditation	20	20	20	20
Number of responses to consultation surveys per annum (via Your Say Belfast)	6,797	8, 846	n/a	3434
Public participation levels in participatory budgeting (PB) decision making events	-	-	150	675*
Number of residents accessing online cost-of-living support and advice or 'warm and welcome spaces'	-	-	n/a	-

How we will measure our performance and impact (potential new / additional)

Performance Indicators	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 Target
Investment in new/ upgraded playgrounds				£580k
Total BCC capital investment in neighbourhoods				TBC

Activities to support this improvement objective

Support our residents, especially those most vulnerable, through the cost-of-living crisis				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Develop framework for provision of council services to help address cost-of-living crisis	✓	✓	✓	
Develop a cost-of-living support and awareness campaign to signpost residents to support services and advice	✓	✓	✓	
Develop targeted initiatives to address food and fuel poverty and their impact on low-income households	✓	✓	✓	✓
Undertake a review of council and Department for Communities funded advice services	✓	✓	✓	✓
Implement the Belfast warm and well programme to support vulnerable people in cold homes during winter			✓	✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of City and Organisational Strategy and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and People and Communities Committee			

Improve our neighbourhoods - Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund:				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Stage 2: development (uncommitted projects) - work with groups at Stage 2 to develop their projects	✓	✓	✓	
Stage 3: delivery (committed projects) – work with groups at Stage 3 to implement their projects.				✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy & Resources Committee			

Improve our parks and playgrounds and encourage people to be physically active				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Initiate major capital project to improve Marrowbone Millennium Park.	✓	✓	✓	
Initiate major capital project to improve Pitt Park		✓	✓	✓
Complete major capital project to improve Paisley Park Sportsplex	✓	✓	✓	
Initiate major improvement works to Ballysillan Playing Fields in collaboration with partners	✓	✓	✓	✓

Deliver the Playground Improvement Programme for 2023 – 2024 including Loughside Park playground, Northlink playground and New Lodge playground		✓	✓	✓	✓
Maintain our green flag and green flag heritage award status across our parks and open spaces (20)			✓		
Develop and implement a Physical Activity and Sports Strategy					✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Physical Programmes and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services				
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee, Strategic Policy & Resources Committee				

Enhance and improve how we engage and involve					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Support the Active Belfast participatory budgeting (PB) pilot		✓	✓	✓	
Improve how we engage with newer communities and other seldom heard groups within Belfast		✓	✓	✓	✓
Explore options for enhancing engagement with the Youth Council		✓	✓	✓	✓
Provide training and develop guidance notes for staff to ensure widest participation and good practice.		✓	✓	✓	✓
Support the Belfast Youth Council to identify key priorities and actions for taking forward in 2023-24		✓	✓	✓	✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of City and Organisational Strategy and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services				
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and People and Communities Committee				

Improvement objective 3: Our economy

What we want to achieve

Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.

What we will do

- Deliver support through our local business start-up programmes.
- Deliver the 'Go for it' programme for start-up support for 2023-2024.
- Help mobilise and deliver the new enterprise support service.

How we will measure our performance and impact (current)

Performance Indicators	2021-22	2022-23	Target	Mid-year
Number of jobs promoted through the 'Go For It' programme [statutory performance indicator]	311	299	163	-
Business start-up and growth activity:				
- Number of business plans developed	518	476	260	263
- Number of participants or businesses supported	731	503	658	-

How we will measure our performance and impact (new / additional)

Performance Indicators	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 Target
Nothing additional recommended				

Activities to support this improvement objective

Support local businesses, social enterprises and co-operatives				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Continue to deliver the 'Go for it' programme for start-up support for 2023-2024	✓	✓		
Work with councils across the region to mobilise the new enterprise support service (launch in September 2023)	✓	✓		
Deliver the new enterprise support service			✓	✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Director of Economic Development			
Reporting Committee	City Growth & Regeneration Committee			

Improvement objective 4: Our environment

What we want to achieve

Help tackle climate change, protect our environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.

What we will do

- Help tackle climate change by developing and implementing a BCC Climate Plan.
- Continue to protect our environment by developing a BCC tree strategy, a local biodiversity action plan and by continuing to roll out the One Million Trees programme.
- Increase the level of recycling across the city and reduce our reliance on landfill.

How we will measure our performance and impact (current)

Performance indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Target
One Million Trees Programme - number of trees planted per annum	39,000	24,000	63,500	45,000
Carbon disclosure project (CDP) score	-	B	A	A
Northern Ireland environmental benchmarking survey rating	-	-	-	Silver

Statutory performance indicators	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Target	Mid-year
Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable council collected waste that is landfilled	30,071	35,783	28,444	28,000	6,955
% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use)	43%	41%	41%	42%	42%
Amount (tonnage) of council collected municipal waste arisings	171,795	168,037	157,892	158,000	82,514

Note: The waste figures for mid-year have been verified.

How we will measure our performance and impact (new / additional)

Performance Indicators	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 Target
% of the council's vehicle fleet switching fuel consumption to HVO				90%

Activities to support this improvement objective

Climate change				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Agree a strategic approach to climate mitigation and action within council:				
- Publish a council climate risk plan	✓	✓		
- Publish a council climate plan	✓	✓		
- Publish a council climate investment plan			✓	
Roll out the council climate fund	✓	✓	✓	✓
Undertake energy audits across four council buildings	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maintain our carbon disclosure score and apply to the Northern Ireland environmental benchmarking survey	✓	✓		
Responsible Chief Officer	Belfast Climate Commissioner			
Reporting Committee	Climate & City Resilience Committee			

Protecting our environment				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Develop a 5-year action plan for the delivery of the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy			✓	✓
Review capacity to ensure compliance with statutory biodiversity duty, including control of invasive species, and resource any changes identified		✓	✓	

Take steps to transition council fleet (vehicles) to alternative or greener fuels		✓	✓	✓	✓
Complete development of a tree strategy for Belfast				✓	
Commence year 1 of associated action plan					✓
Belfast One Million Trees					
Carry out site identification and assessment		✓	✓	✓	
Carry out tree planting				✓	✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services and Belfast Climate Commissioner				
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee and Climate & City Resilience Committee				

Increasing recycling and managing our waste					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Agree the way forward for the expansion of the kerbside sortation model for recycling		✓	✓		
Utilize treatment technologies to increase recycling and reduce reliance of landfill		✓	✓		
Work with partners to explore options that promote a circular economy		✓	✓	✓	✓
Develop a proposal for single-use plastics policy for the council		✓	✓	✓	✓
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services				
Reporting Committee	People and Communities Committee				

Improvement objective 5: Our city

What we want to achieve

Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

What we will do

- Encourage digital innovation across the city by continuing to deliver the Smart District programme.
- Revitalise and support our city centre by continuing to implement the Vacant to Vibrant City Centre Scheme.
- Improve public spaces and greenways across the city.

How we will measure our performance and impact (current)

Performance indicators	2019	2021	2023	Target
Number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme	New	New	145	30

How we will measure our performance and impact (new / additional)

Performance Indicators	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 Target
The total number of previously vacant city centre properties that have been awarded the Vacant to Vibrant grant and will become occupied as a result of the intervention	-	-	5	16
The total amount of funding (£) awarded to city centre traders to address vacancy.	-	-	£92,432.70	£290,000*
The total number of people engaged (traders, developers, business owners, landlords etc) in assisting with the completion of applications to the Vacant to Vibrant intervention.	-	-	219	360

*Rationale for funding target = 10 awards@25k + 2 awards @ 15k + 4 awards @ 2.5k = 16 awards @ 290k

Activities to support this improvement objective

Encourage digital innovation					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
City SME challenge programme					
Complete and gain approval for the £1m City Deal business case		✓			
Public launch of the competition			✓		
Phase 1 Accelerator for SME applicants				✓	
Phase 2 Proof of Concept development					✓
Building citizen digital innovation capacity (CODI):					
Complete feasibility and stakeholder engagement		✓			
Business case developed for funding with city partners			✓	✓	
Establish core functions for phase 1 CODI delivery					✓
Establish first Smart District innovation hub					
Agree optimal location for first testbed programme with partners		✓			
Complete testbed programme design		✓			
Submit business case for funding – infrastructure and SME competition				✓	
First SME challenge call competition					✓
Responsible Chief	Strategic Director of Corporate Services				
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee				
Revitalise and support our city centre					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Vacant to Vibrant scheme: process applications and manage the scheme		✓	✓	✓	✓
Vacant to Vibrant scheme: prepare an interim (year 1) review report for committee.		✓	✓		

Responsible Chief	Director of City Regeneration and Development
Reporting Committee	City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Improve public spaces and greenways				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Initiate major capital project to improve Cathedral Gardens	✓	✓	✓	✓
Complete construction of Forth Meadow Community Greenway	✓	✓	✓	✓
Complete construction of phase 2 at the Lagan Gateway	✓	✓	✓	✓
Install new statues and stained-glass windows in Belfast City Hall	✓	✓	✓	✓
Responsible Chief	Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Planning [Statutory performance indicators]

Planning	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-2024 Target
Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications	37	31	57.6(p)	30
Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications	14	17	20.2(p)	15
Percentage of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks	93.2	83%	86.5%(p)	70%

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Subject:	Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-25
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officers:	John Walsh, Chief Executive John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officers:	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty, Karen Anderson-Gillespie, Strategic Performance Manager Ryan Berry, Strategic Planning & Performance Officer

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
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After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
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1.1	The purpose of this report is to present the draft Council performance improvement objectives for 2024- 25 and to seek Committee approval to issue these for public consultation, in line with our statutory performance duty obligations.												
2.0	Recommendations												
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to agree the draft performance improvement objectives for 2024-25 and, subject to any amendments, approve their issue for public consultation in line with statutory guidance. The proposed improvement objectives for 2024-25 are as follows:</p> <table><tr><td>Our Services</td></tr><tr><td>We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.</td></tr><tr><td>Our people and communities</td></tr><tr><td>We will enhance the quality of life for our residents and support them to become healthier, engaged and more resilient.</td></tr><tr><td>Our place</td></tr><tr><td>We will create a more vibrant city centre and improve our neighbourhoods.</td></tr><tr><td>Our planet</td></tr><tr><td>We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.</td></tr><tr><td>Our economy</td></tr><tr><td>We will help business start-up and growth and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment</td></tr><tr><td>Compassionate city</td></tr><tr><td>We will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis.</td></tr></table>	Our Services	We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.	Our people and communities	We will enhance the quality of life for our residents and support them to become healthier, engaged and more resilient.	Our place	We will create a more vibrant city centre and improve our neighbourhoods.	Our planet	We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.	Our economy	We will help business start-up and growth and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment	Compassionate city	We will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis.
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We will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis.													
3.0	Main report												
	<u>Background</u>												
3.1	Members will be aware that the Council has a statutory duty to agree performance improvement objectives and develop an annual performance improvement plan, which must be published by the 30 June each year. The performance improvement plan doesn't represent everything that the council plans to do but focuses on a small set of key improvement priorities, as informed by the evidence base and engagement feedback.												
3.2	The new performance improvement objectives are aligned to the key themes and priorities identified within the new refresh of the Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan. This provides a balanced approach to identifying improvement objectives that contribute to improving services, council functions and the quality of life for residents/ communities. Members should also note that the council's strategic and collective partnership commitments to deliver shared city outcomes for												

	the citizens of Belfast and the continuous improvement of internal organisational priorities will continue to be delivered and enhanced as part of the Corporate Plan and the Belfast Agenda.												
3.3	We will formally consult on the performance improvement objectives using the online YourSay Belfast platform for a period of 8 weeks and will use a range of other communication methods to raise awareness and encourage participation/ reach e.g., posters located within community centres, leisure centres and libraries, social media related activity, signposting via established networks, for example Community Planning Partners (CPP) and other Council networks.												
3.4	A copy of the draft improvement objectives and indicative actions that we propose to deliver during the coming year, have been included in Appendix 1, for illustration purposes.												
	Next Steps												
3.5	Councils are legally required to consult on their improvement objectives and to publish a Council Improvement Plan by 30 June each year. Subject to approval, we will issue the performance improvement objectives for public consultation for a period of 8 weeks. We will continue to work with Departments to firm up the actions, milestones, KPIs and targets, that sit below the improvement objectives. Improvement activity will be reflected within the Corporate Plan, Committee plans, business plans and strategic programmes, where relevant, ensuring that improvement is embedded within our planning and delivery processes. A final report and draft Council Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 will be brought to the SP&R Committee for ratification and publication in June 2024.												
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>WHAT</th><th>WHEN</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>SP&R Agree draft Improvement Objectives 2024-25</td><td>22 March 2024</td></tr> <tr> <td>Carry out 8-week consultation process</td><td>April – May 2024</td></tr> <tr> <td>Refine improvement actions, milestones, KPIs and targets</td><td>April – May 2024</td></tr> <tr> <td>SP&R approves Council Improvement Plan for publication</td><td>June 2024</td></tr> <tr> <td>Council Performance Improvement Plan published</td><td>By 30 June 2024</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	WHAT	WHEN	SP&R Agree draft Improvement Objectives 2024-25	22 March 2024	Carry out 8-week consultation process	April – May 2024	Refine improvement actions, milestones, KPIs and targets	April – May 2024	SP&R approves Council Improvement Plan for publication	June 2024	Council Performance Improvement Plan published	By 30 June 2024
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Council Performance Improvement Plan published	By 30 June 2024												
3.6	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> There are no Financial or Human Resource implications arising directly from this report. Improvement actions are part of business planning processes.												
3.7	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality/ good relations or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.												
4.0	<u>Appendices – Documents Attached</u>												
	Appendix 1 – Draft Performance Improvement Objectives and indicative actions (2024-25)												

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Appendix 1: Draft Council Performance improvement objectives and indicative actions 2024 - 25

Draft Improvement Objectives (draft subject to consultation and engagement)	What we will deliver – Indicative Actions (draft subject to consultation and engagement)
Our Services We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop the Phase 3 Customer Focus Programme and prioritise service improvement projects / system replacements supported by the Digital Programme of work. • Update the Planning Service Improvement Plan to include a review of PAD/PPA processes and charges and S76 and enforcement processes and continued implementation of the Belfast Local Development Plan. • Pilot the introduction of smaller refuse collection vehicles to improve the waste collection service to narrow and congested streets and develop the business case for permanency. Create an operational control room to assist pre-planning, daily control of collections and data analysis. • Street cleansing programme.
Our people and communities We will enhance the quality of life for our residents and support them to become healthier, engaged and more resilient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to deliver Leisure Transformation Programme – Phase 3 and 4 • Continue to deliver Playground Improvement Programme • Deliver animation/ outreach activities across our community, leisure development, and parks outreach programmes • Capital developments in our city parks and open spaces • Greenways programme • Participatory budgeting programme • Green Flag and Green Flag Heritage awards and Ulster in Bloom accreditation awards
Our place We will create a more vibrant city centre and improve our neighbourhoods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund • Vacant to Vibrant programme • City Centre Regeneration schemes (Future City Centre Programme etc) • Belfast and Bloom programme • Belfast 2024 Year of Cultural Celebrations.
Our planet We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver the Belfast Tree Strategy and action plan • Continue delivery of the 1 million trees programme • Continue to lead on the Climate Action Programme • Develop the Belfast Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategy • Develop the council energy plan • UP2030 Net Zero Neighbourhood • Net Zero fleet replacement

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate Household Recycling Centre's services across Belfast segregating various waste streams and working in partnerships with others to ensure items are reused, recycled or recovered.
Our economy We will help business start-up and growth and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver employment academies in priority sectors in line with industry demand, focusing on inclusive growth target areas. • Progress the Labour Market Partnership to deliver key programmes including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Gateway to Choices ➢ Bridges to Progression ➢ Digital Badging initiative ➢ Employment pathways • Extend business engagement in the Belfast Business Promise (BBP) • Social Value Procurement
Compassionate city We will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extend the delivery of cost-of-living support programmes i.e., Hardship Funding • Food and fuel poverty interventions • Social supermarkets • Community grant process • Community advice services



Subject:	Customer Focus Programme Update
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Cormac Quinn, Customer Development Manager

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

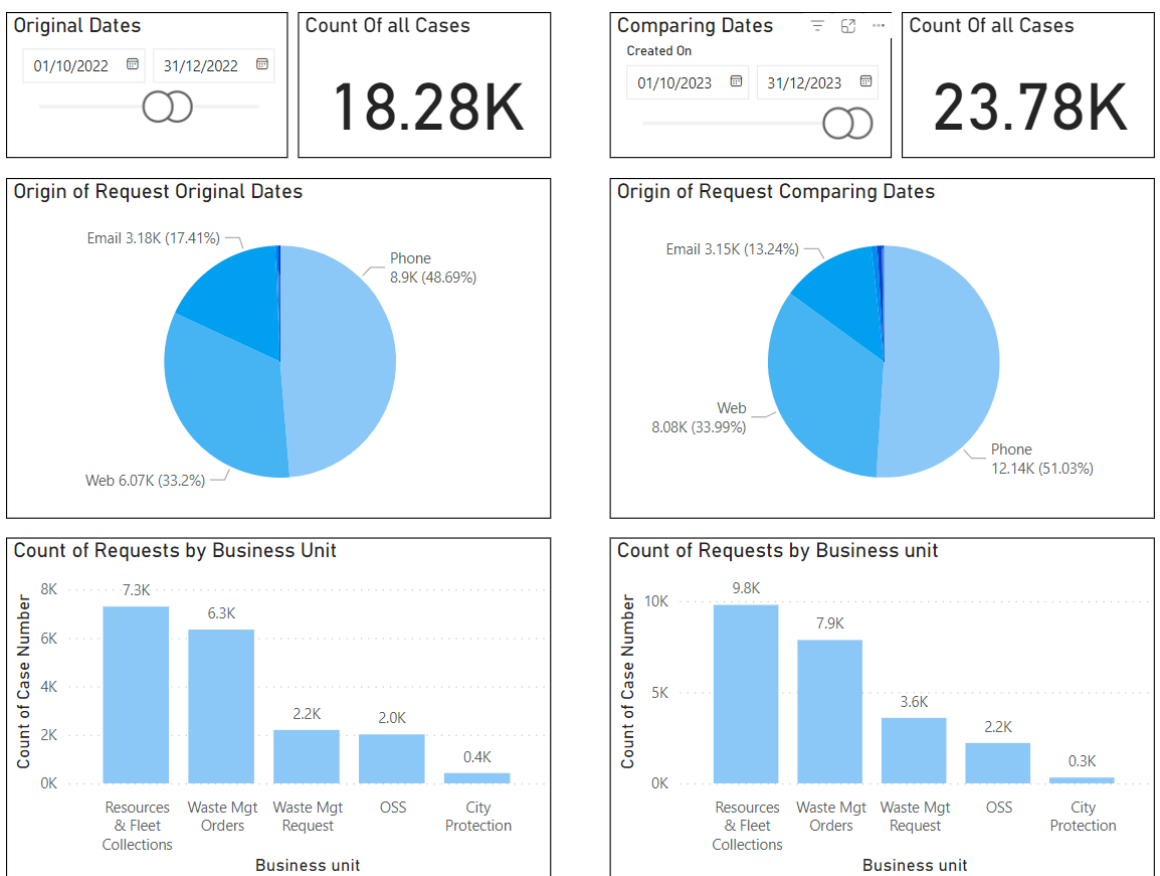
Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update Elected Members on the Customer Focus Programme and the Customer Hub.

1.2	For Elected Members to note the intention to use bulk text message as a communication channel for upcoming changes to waste collections over the Easter Bank Holidays.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the update and the intention to use bulk text messaging as a communication channel for changes to waste collections.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Customer Focus Programme and Customer Hub</p> <p>The Customer Hub was set up as part of the Customer Focus Programme and went live in April 2021 during COVID lockdowns. Whilst the Hub has been in place for almost three years, staffing establishment levels remain the same as April 2021, despite significant increases in customer contact across all contact channels.</p>
3.2	<p>The Customer Hub has been able to provide improved service despite increasing volumes through the promotion and improvement of our digital channels and making these automated. This is across channels such as web forms and email, whilst delivering service levels via phone calls and in person visits. The Customer Hub handles around 70% of all calls to the Council and around 60% of all customer contacts including email and web forms.</p>
3.3	<p>The Customer Hub experiences significant service issues with massive increases in volumes when there is major disruption to operational services such as waste collections.</p>
3.4	<p>At present the range of services that have been onboarded to the Customer Hub are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resources and Fleet Waste Collections Resources and Fleet Waste Management Open Spaces and Street Scene Complaints General Enquires Switchboard
3.5	<p>Customer Hub Contact Volumes</p> <p>The Customer Hub on average deals with of 550 phone calls per day. The Hub also processes emails and webforms of around the similar volume and would regularly handle around 1,000 – 1,200 customer contact per day. During high periods of demand, such as significant service disruption (Inclement weather, Bank Holidays etc) the Customer Hub can experience significantly more calls, which can be challenging.</p>

3.6 Customer Hub volumes and channels of contact is provided below for Q3 2022 and Q3 2023. As you will note there is a **significant increase in the volume of customer contact processed at the Customer Hub in comparison to the same quarter last year, an increase of around 5,000 more contacts which is a 30% increase**, this is across all contact channels, phone, web form, and in person visits to the Cecil Ward Building.

3.7 The graphic below depicts the increase in customer contacts from Q3 2022 to Q3 2024, a breakdown of the contact channel in the pie chart and a breakdown of the services in the bar chart.



3.8 It should be noted that telephone contact has also increased significantly from 9,000 contacts in Q3 2022 to 12,000 contacts in Q3 2023. The capability to answer such an increase in calls has been achieved through the targeted introduction of automations to web forms. This has enabled Assistants within the Hub to spend less time doing low valuable data entry to provide more valuable direct interaction with customers calling the Hub.

3.9 **Cost saving and Process Efficiencies**
 The Customer Focus Programme actively tracks the benefits from the products produced and handed over to services as business as usual. These products have been co-created with the operational services, the programme office and with the support of services such as Digital Services or Continuous Improvement. This ensures a collective agreement on what is to be produced, when

	it is to be produced and that the service and producers sign the product off together. These are only signed off when ready to achieve the benefit they were created for.
3.10	<p>It is important to note the benefits support the Belfast Agenda and that these products actively support efficiencies or cost avoidance. The introduction of automated Web forms has provided the capability for the Customer Hub to handle significantly more volume since its inception in April 2021. These improvements have allowed the staff within the Hub to focus on higher value work and more complex and time-consuming customer issues.</p> <p>CURRENT PRODUCTS DELIVERED BY THE CUSTOMER FOCUS PROGRAMME</p>
3.11	<p>Elected Members app: The Elected Members app was fully rolled out to all Elected Members in 2021 and to all new members on induction to Council. This is used by Elected Members to achieve the benefits of registering service requests, track these service requests, contact the officer in charge and to have visibility of the records and where requests are closed and a history of their requests.</p>
3.12	<p>The use of the app varies between Elected Members with some members making significant repeated use and others as and when required. This is to be expected as we are offering a 'digital first', not 'digital only' method of contacting the Hub for transactional issues.</p>
3.13	<p>Officers would like to explore how we could increase the uptake of the Elected Members app, since the benefits of this approach ensures that we can identify any patterns in service performance issues and improve our understanding of why service issues have arisen. Elected members are asked to note that the current average time for the Customer Hub to pass calls to services is within one hour of being received with the majority of these passed on within 30 mins or faster. Though there will of course be occasions when this is done more quickly for high priority or urgent cases.</p>
3.14	<p>Report it app: A significant proportion of the work in Phase Two of the Customer Focus Programme has been supporting service delivery within Resources and Fleet Collections. This has included the design, development and deployment and operational use of a staff Report It App. This has allowed collections teams to report on the issues live "on the ground" affecting collection, for example, no access due to parked cars.</p>
3.15	<p>This has been particularly beneficial for the Customer Hub and collections managers who can view the live reporting to support decision making and provide customers with live updates on collection issues at the point of contact. This allows customers to clearly understand issues that are beyond the collection team's controls such as parked vehicles or contaminated or overfilled and damaged bins and is of major added value to the customer at the point of contact.</p>

3.16






Previously this work would have done using manual processes, creating a considerable time lag for customer information meaning that this was of little use. Often, prior to the development of the Report It App, there would have been work that should have not been carried out for example a recollection of a contaminated bin etc.

3.17

The Next Phase of the Customer Focus Programme

The programme is taking onboard views of Chief Officers as part of the planning of its next phase, in the form of a planning workshop. This will include participants from the Customer Focus Oversight and Delivery boards along with a wider group of stakeholders. The pillars/themes of the new phase have already been agreed by the Oversight board and are displayed below for Elected Members to note.

High Level Customer Focus Programme Phase 3

 <p>Automation & Channel Shift</p> <p>Creation of a Strategy and design principles for provision and promotion of automated Digital Channels</p> <p>By Q4 2023:</p> <p>Bulky Waste Exemplar</p> <p>1st service to have no online presence, fully call based with channel shift of +40%</p> <p>Improvement in Cost to Serve</p> <p>Potential to Automate over 10,000 calls per Ann and deflect many more</p> <p>Releases Capacity for transition of other services</p> <p>Informs development of Channel Shift Strategy.</p>	 <p>Data Analytics</p> <p>Development of Performance Metrics for CMT, DMT's and Operational Service</p> <p>By Q4 2023:</p> <p>Visualising service provision</p> <p>Developing potential efficiency indicators</p> <p>Utilising Information to bring insight into Service Failure</p> <p>CMT Reporting - Customer Service Performance Measurement</p> <p>In 2024:</p> <p>Data Analytics Training for services to self-serve on Analytics</p>	 <p>Onboarding of Services</p> <p>Development and Implementation of Transition and Transformation Toolkit</p> <p>By Q2 2024:</p> <p>Cost to Serve Baseline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Channel Assessment reduction of cost to serve •SLA and Standards assessment and agreement •Assessment of Risks and issues for Services to onboard •Integration of LOB Systems replacement and integration with Customer Hub/Dynamics 	 <p>Organisation Customer Experience</p> <p>Implementation and embedding of all Customer Standards at a corporate level</p> <p>In 2024</p> <p>Service Level Agreements</p> <p>Front line Customer Service Training</p> <p>Customer Satisfaction Measurement</p> <p>Introduction of Service Level Customer Satisfaction baseline monitoring</p> <p>User Experience Training</p> <p>In 2024/5:</p> <p>Customer Experience CX Maturity Model assessment</p>	 <p>Omni Channel</p> <p>Development of an approach to have a Single view of Customer across all channels</p> <p>In 2024:</p> <p>This will be progressed through assessment of the following means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Customer Account/Portal, Business case, design principles and implementation pathway •Proof Of concept Webchat & Chat Bot Virtual agents internal •Provision of Service Information – deflection •Bulk Text Messaging •Creation of a business case for Transactional Social Media integration to Dynamics
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3.18

New product ready for implementation – Bulk Text Messaging

A key infrastructure product within the Customer Hub has been to integrate the telephony system with the Corporate Dynamics CRM. As part of this, the ability to send text messages to customers was developed. This is available on a 1 to 1 basis for sending only, for example sending the link of an online form to a customer.

3.19

The functionality that supports this also supports the sending large volumes of text messages through the Notify Service via notify.gov.uk. Elected Members may have received text messages from this service, for example the Driver & Vehicle Agency send appointment reminders text message for MOT Services.

3.20	Elected Members currently receive text messages from the Emergency Coordination team that are sent on a bulk basis, to all Elected members and senior officers, for communication and updates regarding an emergency response or weather warnings etc.
3.21	The Customer Hub now has the capability to send bulk text messaging - to send service disruption or service change information directly to customers' mobile phones. This functionality adds to our existing communications channels, such as our website or social media.
3.22	The Customer Hub proposes to deploy this capability for communicating changes to bin collection schedules that will occur over Easter as part of the wider communications campaign. This process will be developed and fully agreed with the Director of City Services Resources and Fleet and the Director for External Affairs, Communications and Marketing and the Customer Hub prior to being implemented. This capability has also been reviewed with the Information Governance Unit to ensure compatibility and compliance with all Data Protection Legislation and Policies.
3.23	Elected Members will also receive an email briefing via democratic services ahead of the usual communications and text messaging being sent. All usual channels will be used for customer communications confirming the arrangements for Easter with the addition of the use of text messaging service.
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.24	None
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.25	None
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None



Subject:	Physical Programme Update including Capital Programme 2024/25
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	Shauna Murtagh, Portfolio Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 	
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="width: 70%;"> <p>After Committee Decision</p> <p>After Council Decision</p> <p>Sometime in the future</p> <p>Never</p> </div> <div style="width: 25%; text-align: center;"> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/> </div> </div>	

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	<p>The Council's Physical Programme currently includes over 200 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. The Council's Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents an update on the 2024/25 Capital Programme and associated capital financing, as well as requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to –</p> <p>Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2024/25</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the update on Capital Financing as outlined in 3.3 below and the update on the Capital Programme for 2024/25 at 3.5 below and in Appendix 1 • agree to hold Party Group Briefings to update Members on the status of projects along with the emerging implications for future capital investment decisions and in particular the potential impact on the future district rate in line with the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan to inform the future proposed workshop on capital priorities. • Capital Programme Movements - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter project – agree to move the project to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course. ○ St George's Market – New Stalls project – agree to move the project to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course. ○ Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme project – agree to move the project to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> under the Waste Plan to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course. ○ Belfast Blitz Fire Service Permanent Acknowledgement project – note that this project has been moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
3.0	<p>Main report</p> <p><u>Key Issues</u></p>

Capital Programme

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. Members will recall that the detailed Physical Programme Half Year Update was presented last month and that the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.

Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2024/25

- 3.2 The Council incurs both capital expenditure and capital financing costs in the delivery of its Capital Programme:

- **Capital Expenditure** is the expenditure incurred in the actual delivery of contracts e.g. the actual payments to the contractor for a construction contract (see Appendix 1)
- **Capital Financing** is the method the council uses to fund the capital expenditure. The capital financing costs include loan repayments (principal and interest); revenue contributions (cash payments to repay or avoid taking out loans); capital receipts and external funding.

Members need to be aware that each decision they take in relation to progressing a capital project or agreeing additional money towards any one project has a consequential impact on the level of financing that is available for other capital projects and each individual decision therefore subsequently limits the capacity of the Council to progress other capital projects thereby potentially necessitating some difficult decisions for Members in terms of prioritisation.

- 3.3 The **SP&R Committee has approved a capital financing budget of £22,274,022 for 2024/25**. Members will be aware however that the Council has already committed financing to a range of physical projects under the Capital Programme as outlined in Appendix 1 and a number of non-recurrent projects.

Table 1- Existing Capital Financing Budget 2024/25

Existing Capital Financing Budget		£22,274,022
Less: Physical Programme Commitments (capital programme and non-recurrent projects)	£17,998,911	
Existing BCC Loans	£1,484,802	
Lisburn/ Castlereagh Transferred Loans	£598,675	
Balance Remaining		£2,191,634

3.4	<p>Members are asked to note that although the above shows that there is a financing budget balance remaining of approx. £2m it is recommended that no significant decisions are taken pending work on the new Capital Programme.</p>
3.5	<p>The current Capital Programme</p> <p><i>Capital three-stage approval process</i></p> <p>The Council has agreed a three-stage approval process which all Council Capital Programme and larger projects funded externally must go through. Each stage movement is subject to Council ratification before the project formally progresses to the next stage. Projects move through <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> where they are required to complete a Strategic Outline Case and then progress to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>. Following production of an Outline Business Case, a project can move to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i>. Following a procurement exercise, projects must then demonstrate that the project is within the affordability limits of the Council before proceeding. At each of these stages, the project is reviewed internally before coming to SP&R Committee for a decision and a committed budget. Associated revenue costs are considered at each stage. A number of years ago it was further agreed that a final investment decision and final budget would only be allocated to a project once the tender process is concluded and it was confirmed to be within the affordability limits of the Council. This process has proved to be extremely robust and central to ensuring that projects are delivered within the agreed budget envelope. A small number of schemes have historical budgets where a budget had been previously agreed/ring-fenced by Committee early in the development cycle. This is not the agreed process now under the three-stage approach where Committee is only asked to agree a budget following return of tender. This means that those pre-emptive budgets are not reflective of the current market or requirements. This does not affect many schemes and Members will be updated on a case-by-case basis as tenders are returned so these schemes are gradually being brought into line with the process.</p> <p><i>Schemes at Stage 3 – Committed</i></p> <p>The Capital Programme already comprises 30+ projects at Stage 3 – Committed, where procurement is underway or projects are already in contract, see Appendix 1. Stage 3 projects also include capital projects on Council assets which are fully funded by external bodies or developer contributions. Members are updated on these schemes via regular reports to Area Working Groups and SP&R Committee. Most of these schemes have confirmed budgets and associated financing, and a number are coming to a close over the next financial year.</p>
	<p><i>Schemes at Stage 2 – Uncommitted or Stage 1 – Emerging</i></p>

	<p>Members are asked to note that there are a range of physical projects which the Council must undertake from a health and safety, legislative and/or operational perspective in order to ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory duties and continues to run 'fit for purpose' services. These will all require capital financing. A number of these are already on the Capital Programme and include: Waste Plan – New citywide kerbside collection system and Waste Transfer Station projects, Relocation of Dunbar Link Cleansing Depot, New Cemetery and Roselawn Extensions, Cremated Remains Burial Plots, Playground Improvement Programme, Waterfront Hall Chiller Units and Smoke Curtains, HWRCs and Civic Amenity Sites Containers (Skips and Compactors), Fleet Programme and IT programme. Projects at these early stages do not have final budgets agreed however estimates have been used in order to calculate the impact of these on the capital financing budget and the availability of capital financing in the future.</p> <p>In addition, there are several other major enhancement projects on the Capital Programme (Stage 1 or Stage 2) with developmental work underway including: LTP – Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility, Belfast Stories via Belfast Region City Deal, five greenway schemes and others, see Appendix 1. Many of these schemes will be attractive to external funders and schemes are developed with this in mind.</p>
3.6	<p>Next steps</p> <p>Members will appreciate that the Council's capital and wider physical programme is one of the most important programmes delivered by the Council and due to the nature of capital projects it is also one of the most visible and easily recognisable signs of the Council's civic leadership role in the city. Moving forward the Council will face a number of key challenges in respect of the capital programme. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The available capital financing budget will come under significant pressure if all current and emerging proposed projects are to be delivered. • The need to ensure that Investment decisions are taken within the context of strategic alignment with the Belfast Agenda, Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and in full consideration of what assets already exist in an area and how these are being used
3.7	<p>Typically the Capital Programme has an expenditure horizon of around three years. CIPFA capital planning guidance recommends that local authorities take a longer-term view (8-10 years). This is intrinsically linked to the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. To facilitate this it has been agreed to hold a series of workshops for Members regarding future capital priorities linked to the medium-term financial planning process. To prepare for this it is recommended that a series of Party Group Briefings are held in the first instance to update</p>

	<p>Members on the existing Capital Programme, ascertain future priorities to determine the level of financing required, as well as exploring the implications of any future investment decisions and the potential impact on the district rate.</p> <p>The outcome of this work will likely mean a wave of new proposals being added simultaneously to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> so that a suite of schemes can be brought forward for consideration, ensuring a flow that is manageable from a financing perspective. All projects will continue to follow the three-stage capital approvals process outlined above. This will require additional investment in early stage project development in 2024/25 onwards.</p>															
3.8	<p><u>Capital Programme - Proposed Movements</u></p> <p>As outlined above Members have agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme:</p> <table><tr><th>Project</th><th>Overview</th><th>Stage movement</th></tr><tr><td>Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter</td><td>The erection of dual language street signs en bloc within the Gaeltacht Quarter.</td><td>Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</td></tr><tr><td>St George’s Market – New Stalls</td><td>Replacement of market stalls in St George’s Market.</td><td>Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</td></tr><tr><td>Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme</td><td>Part of the Waste Plan. The project involves the phased expansion of the kerbside glass collection scheme to households in the outer city/ blue bin area.</td><td>Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</td></tr><tr><td>Belfast Blitz Fire Service Permanent Acknowledgement</td><td>A permanent memorial to all of the Fire Services efforts during the Belfast Blitz</td><td>Moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</td></tr></table>	Project	Overview	Stage movement	Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter	The erection of dual language street signs en bloc within the Gaeltacht Quarter.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted	St George’s Market – New Stalls	Replacement of market stalls in St George’s Market.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted	Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme	Part of the Waste Plan. The project involves the phased expansion of the kerbside glass collection scheme to households in the outer city/ blue bin area.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted	Belfast Blitz Fire Service Permanent Acknowledgement	A permanent memorial to all of the Fire Services efforts during the Belfast Blitz	Moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
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Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter	The erection of dual language street signs en bloc within the Gaeltacht Quarter.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted														
St George’s Market – New Stalls	Replacement of market stalls in St George’s Market.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted														
Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme	Part of the Waste Plan. The project involves the phased expansion of the kerbside glass collection scheme to households in the outer city/ blue bin area.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted														
Belfast Blitz Fire Service Permanent Acknowledgement	A permanent memorial to all of the Fire Services efforts during the Belfast Blitz	Moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted														
3.9	<p><u>Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter</u></p> <p>In October 2023, SP&R Committee agreed that Dual Language Street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter would be taken forward en bloc and that the project would be delivered as a capital project. As per the three stage approvals process, a Strategic Outline Case has been completed and the team can now progress to Outline Business Case stage.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that ‘Dual Language Street Signs – Gaeltacht Quarter’ be moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> on the Capital Programme to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.</p>															
3.10	<p><u>St George’s Market – New Stalls</u></p> <p>In November 2023, SP&R Committee agreed that St George’s Market – New Stalls project would be taken forward. The project is for the replacement of the 180 market stalls in St Georges Market. The current stalls are more than 18 years old and many are in a poor state of repair,</p>															

	<p>presenting a health and safety risk both for staff and for traders. As per the three stage approvals process, a Strategic Outline Case has been completed and the team can now progress to Outline Business Case stage.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that ‘St George’s Market – New Stalls’ be moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> on the Capital Programme to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.</p>
3.11	<p><u>Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme</u></p> <p>The Expansion of Glass Collection is brought forward under the existing Waste Plan Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> on the Capital Programme. The project involves the phased expansion of the kerbside glass collection scheme to households in the outer city/ blue bin area. An application has been lodged with DAERA for 50% match funding and a decision is awaited. As per the three stage approvals process, a Strategic Outline Case has been completed and the team can now progress to Outline Business Case stage.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that ‘Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Recycling Scheme’ be moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> on the Capital Programme as part of the Waste Plan to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.</p>
3.12	<p><u>Fire Service Belfast Blitz</u></p> <p>In March 2023, SP&R Committee agreed that the ‘Fire Service Belfast Blitz’ project be added to the Capital Programme as a <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> project. The project involves the installation of a permanent memorial to all of the Fire Services efforts during the Belfast Blitz. It was agreed by SP&R via the City Hall Working Group in October 2023 to move it to <i>Stage 2 - Uncommitted</i> on the Capital Programme. This will allow a more detailed brief to be worked up and to determine financial requirements for the scheme.</p> <p>Discussions have previously taken place with representatives from Fire Brigade Unions, both Belfast and Dublin, and it has been suggested that a permanent piece in the form of a resin cast of a fire brigade helmet be procured and installed. It has been agreed that such acknowledgement include the Auxiliary Fire Services for their efforts during the Belfast Blitz. It has been agreed that the piece be located initially in the Rotunda of City Hall for a defined period of time and subsequently relocated to the City Hall exhibition. Officers will identify a suitable location on the Rotunda and suggest a number of options for relocation within the City Hall exhibition. There have been early conversations with NIWM (Northern Ireland War Memorials) in relation to advice and guidance. The City Hall Working Group will continue to receive updates on this project.</p>

	Members are asked to note that 'Fire Service Belfast Blitz' project has been moved to the Capital Programme <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> project to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
3.13	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> <i>Financial</i> – None <i>Resources</i> – Officer time to deliver as required
3.14	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u> All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Capital Programme 2024/25

	Project	Gross Budget	External Funding	Capital Programme Net Budget	Other Council Funding	Forecast 2024/25	Forecast 2025/26	Forecast 2026/27	Forecast 2027/28
Schemes at Stage 3 - Committed Projects									
Tier 2 - Schemes currently underway									
	North Foreshore - Development Sites Infrastructure works	6,900,656	-	6,900,656		2,050,000	1,925,838		
	Finance Replacement System	650,000	-	650,000		100,000	70,000		
	Playground Refurbishment Programme 2022/23	580,000	-	580,000					
	Playground Refurbishment Programme 2023/24	580,000	-	580,000		218,436			
	Fleet Replacement Programme 2022/23	2,200,000	-	2,200,000					
	Fleet Replacement Programme 2023/24	2,250,000	50,000	2,200,000					
	Forth Meadow & Springfield Shared Spaces -Peace IV, DFC, DFI	5,334,591	5,334,591	-					
	Peace IV Contingency	300,000	-	300,000		147,448			
	City Cemetery - HLF - Including Relocation of Service Yard at Falls Park (Foxes Yard)	2,446,743	1,482,023	964,720					
	Belfast Zoo - Programme of Works, including Works at Large Cat enclosure & Aviary	1,710,000		1,710,000					
	LTP - Avoniel	8,450,000	450,000	8,000,000					
	LTP - Templemore	16,839,567	4,839,567	12,000,000					
	IT Programme - Corporate HR/Payroll System	457,910	-	457,910		8,711			
	IT Programme - Customer Focus Programme - New Telephony System	150,000	-	150,000		8,000			
	IT Programme - Customer Focus Programme - Web CMS Project	135,000		135,000					
	IT Programme - Additional Telephone Licences	80,000		80,000		1,095			
	IT Programme - Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS)	150,000	-	150,000					
	IT Programme - Replacement Hardware for NIHE System	360,000	-	360,000					
	IT Programme - Building Control System Replacement	250,000	-	250,000		163,769	73,454		
	IT Programme - Server and storage technology refresh	513,000	-	513,000					
	IT Programme - SIEM QRadar Log Manager Replacement	45,000	-	45,000					
	IT Programme - Replacement of Planning Portal	955,000	-	955,000					
	Belfast Bikes Asset Upgrade (Revitalisation Scheme)	300,000	300,000	-					
	Belfast Bikes 4 Docking Stations (Revitalisation Scheme)	120,000	120,000	-					
	Covered Cycle Stands (Revitalisation Scheme)	100,000	100,000	-					
	Blue and Green Infrastructure Active Travel	167,000	167,000	-					
	Active Travel Hub Containers	-		-	66,581				
	Adelaide Street Works	271,250	271,250	-					
	Alleygating - Holylands	106,000	106,000	-					
	Upsurge - Botanic Gardens	409,367	409,367	-					
	Animal Welfare Van	24,545	24,545	-					
	City Hall Statues - Winifred Carney and Mary Ann McCracken	300,000	-	300,000		23,323			
	2 Royal Avenue - Bank Square Enhancement	335,300	335,300	-					
	DC - Botanic Studios	104,165	104,165	-					
	DC - Knocknagoney Park	90,000	90,000	-					
	DC - Tullycarnett Park (Rosepark House)	53,000	53,000	-					
	DC - Belmont Park (Lands at Castlehill Manor)	39,550	39,550	-					
	HWRCs and Civic Amenity Sites - Containers		-	-					
	Paisley Park Refurbishment	1,358,600	1,358,600	-					
	Tier 2 Total	55,116,244	15,634,958	39,481,286	66,581	2,720,782	2,069,292	-	-
Tier 1 - Schemes at tender preparation stage									
	Fleet Replacement Programme 2024/25	2,200,000		2,200,000		2,200,000			
	New Crematorium at Roselawn	18,000,000	-	18,000,000		15,059,901	3,150,852	1,116,839	
	Tier 1 Total	20,200,000	-	20,200,000	-	17,259,901	3,150,852	1,116,839	-
Tier 0 - Schemes at risk									
	Alleygating Phase 5	85,400	85,400	-	500,000	416,178			
	Reservoir Safety	1,600,000	-	1,600,000		1,448,741			
	Cathedral Gardens (Buoy's Park)	5,000,000	-	5,000,000		2,000,000	2,840,000		
	IT Programme - F5 Access Policy Manager Project / Web Application Firewall		-	-					
	IT Programme - Grants Management System		-	-					
	In Cab Technology & Routing System	-	-	-					
	Tier 0 Total	6,685,400	85,400	6,600,000	500,000	3,864,919	2,840,000	-	-
	Stage 3 Total	167,680,014	19,144,728	148,535,286	566,581	23,845,602	8,060,144	1,116,839	-
Schemes at Stage 2 - Approved by Committee									
	LTP - Girdwood	6,410,274	410,274	6,000,000			2,800,000	2,971,522	
	Roselawn Extensions	-	-	-					
	Belfast Stories	525,000	25,000	500,000	1,800,000	559,312	200,000		
	Waste Plan - New citywide kerbside collection system	-	-	-					
	Waste Transfer Station Upgrade								
	Relocation Dunbar Link	60,000	-	60,000		1,641			
	2 Royal Avenue – Phase 2 Refurb	177,574		177,574					
	Fleet Replacement Programme 2025/26	2,200,000		2,200,000			2,200,000		
	Fleet Replacement Programme 2026/27	2,200,000		2,200,000				2,200,000	
	Access to the Hills (Connections from Cavehill to Divis Mountain and Black Mountain)		-	-					
	Black Mountain/Upper Whiterock Greenway		-	-					
	Glencairn Park/Ligoniel Park Greenway	-	-	-					
	Sydenham Greenway	-	-	-					
	Colin Greenway	-	-	-					
	Stained Glass Windows City Hall - Health Service & LGBT Community	-	-	-					
	Cremated Remains Burial Plots project	-	-	-					
	New Cemetery	-	-	-					
	Stage 2 Total	11,572,848	435,274	11,137,574	1,800,000	560,953	5,200,000	5,171,522	-
Schemes at Stage 1 - Emerging Proposals									
	Ballymacarrett area masterplan	825,978	606,732	219,246				219,246	
	Waste Plan Programme	-	-	-					
	Parks Improvement Programme	-	-	-					
	Gasworks Northern Fringe Infrastructure	-	-	-					
	Falls Park Masterplan	-	-	-					
	Waterfront Hall - Chiller Units	-	-	-					
	Waterfront Hall - Smoke Curtains	-	-	-					
	Loughside Playing Fields	-	-	-					
	Pitches Programme - Phase 2	-	-	-					
	Connectivity - Access to Hills	-	-	-					
	Palm House, Botanic Gardens	-	-	-					
	City Hall External Christmas Tree	-	-	-					
	St George's Market – New Stalls	-	-	-					
	Fire Service Belfast Blitz project	-	-	-					
	Stage 1 Total	825,978	606,732	219,246	-	-	-	219,246	-
	Capital Programme Total	180,078,840	20,186,734	159,892,106	2,366,581	24,406,555	13,260,144	6,507,607	-

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Belfast
City Council

Subject:	i) Blythefield Park - Licence Variation to NITHCo ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence to Friends of the Field iii) St George's Market Unit 2 – Lease Renewal
Date:	22 nd March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property and Projects
Contact Officer:	Pamela Davison, Estates Manager

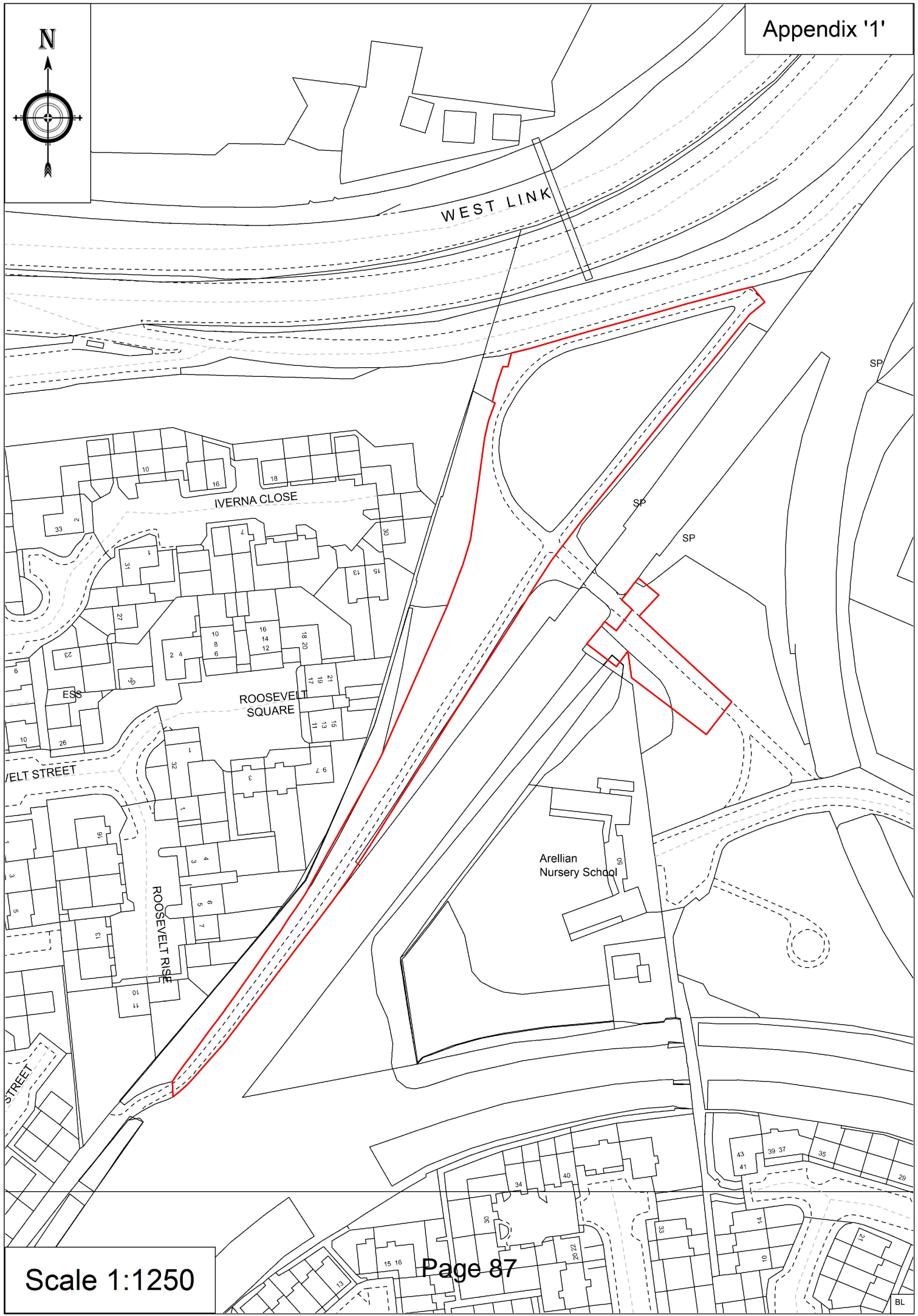
Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

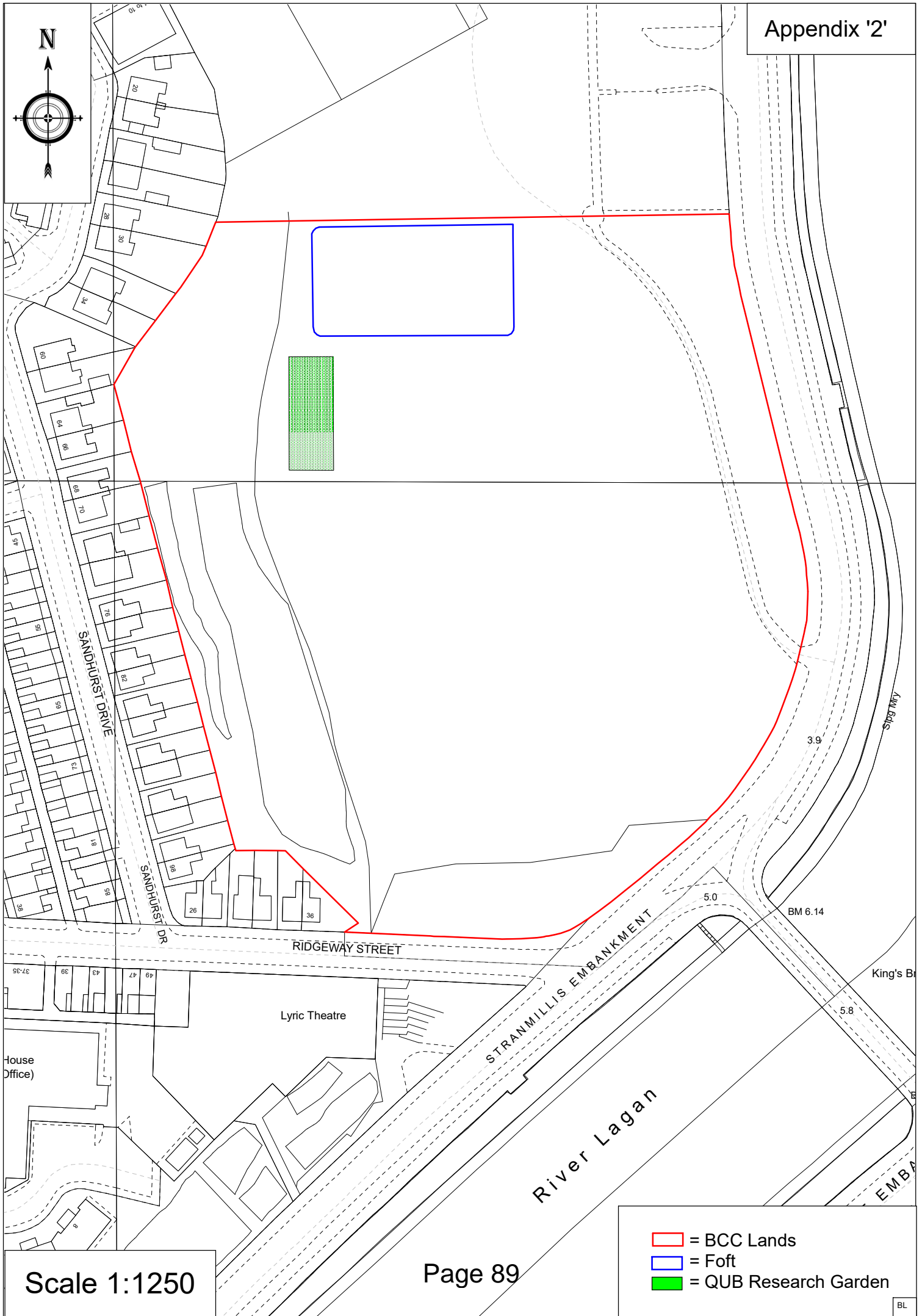
1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Committee on asset related disposal, acquisition, and estates matters.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <p>i) Blythefield Park - Licence Variation to NITHCo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - approve an extension to the Permitted Hours on lands at Blythefield Park held under licence by NITHCo. <p>ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence to Friends of the Field</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - approve the grant of a Licence between the Council & Friends of the Field for use of portion of land at Botanic Gardens. <p>iii) St George’s Market Unit 2 – Lease Renewal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - approve the renewal of a Lease at Unit 2 St George’s Market.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>i) Blythefield Park - Licence Variation to NITHCo</p> <p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Blythefield Park has been closed to the public since late 2020 to allow for the construction of a secure builder’s yard to store materials and machinery in connection with the Belfast Transport Hub project. The land is currently held by NITHCo on two licences from Belfast City Council for a period of 5-years from November 2020 (see Appendix 1). These contain a Permitted Hours clause restricting the days and hours during which works can be carried out on site. In December 2023 two periods of 24/7 working at weekends were undertaken by NITHC’s contractors to test the mitigation measures and noise levels. NITHCo subsequently undertook a public consultation exercise which concluded that the public had no issues with 24-hour working. NITHCo have requested 24-hour working over the Easter period to facilitate extensive engineering works including track laying between Lanyon Place and the new Grand Central Station. The period requested is from 00:01 on Saturday 30th March to 06:30 on Monday 8th April 2024. It is recognised that full Council approval will not be available prior to the 24-hour commencement date but Members should note that consent can be granted under delegated authority and authorised by means of a side letter drafted by Legal Services. During the extended working period, NITHCo has committed to continuing its public awareness programme by means of letter drops and regular progress meetings in the local community centre. To meet the construction programme for the new station the summer months will see further large-scale track laying works between Lanyon Place, Grand Central Station and Portadown. To minimise rail network closures and the need for bus substitutions, NITHCo has requested consent for 24-hour working from 00.01 on Saturday 11th May to 23.59 on Sunday</p>

	<p>25th August 2024. It is not anticipated that works will be continual throughout this time. During this period NITHCo will continue to liaise with local residents and local Elected representatives. Regular surveys will provide data for analysis and inclusion in a Residents Engagement Evidence Summary Report.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The side letter will be drafted by Legal Services on the instructions of Estates Management Unit.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.3	<p>ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence to Friends of the Field</p> <p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The People & Communities Committee on 9th January 2024 approved, in principle, the use of a part of Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) as an agroecology community garden by Friends of the Field (FotF), in conjunction with the Horizon 2020 UPSURGE project. Subject to Members approval, the Council will enter into an initial 12-month licence agreement with FotF which will be extendable on a month-to-month basis in order for FotF to fulfil objectives of the Upsurge Project through their use of a portion of the Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) as an agroecology community garden. FotF are partnering with the Council in the delivery of the Upsurge Project. See map attached at Appendix 3 showing the location of the proposed licence area delineated blue to FotF and existing research garden area shaded green which Queen's University Belfast presently occupy in delivering the Horizon 2020 UPSURGE project in partnership with the Council.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resources Implications</u></p> <p>Legal Services shall act on the instructions of the Estates Management Unit.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
3.3	<p>iii) St George's Market Unit 2 – Lease Renewal</p> <p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Unit 2 St George's Market is held under a 20-year Lease dated 14 December 1999 by the current tenant. The Tenant wishes to renew the Lease and terms have been agreed for a new 10-year lease from 1 March 2020, subject to Members approval. A revised rent of £20,990 per annum has been agreed which is an uplift from the passing rent of £17,380, this uplift will also result in an increase in the service charge payable which is fixed at 10% of the passing rent. The rent shall be reviewable at the end of year 5 to an open market rent. A tenant only break option has also been agreed at the end of year 5. The Unit will continue to be used as a convenience shop.</p>

	<p><u>Financial and Resources Implications</u></p> <p>Legal Services shall act on the instructions of the Estates Management Unit. The Council shall receive a rent of £20,990 per annum.</p> <p><u>Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Blythefield Park - Site Map outlined in red.</p> <p>Appendix 2 –Map showing the location of the proposed licence area delineated blue to FotF and existing research garden area shaded green which Queen’s University Belfast presently occupy.</p>



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Scale 1:1250

- = BCC Lands
- = Foft
- = QUB Research Garden

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Subject:	Update on Area Working Groups
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	Shauna Murtagh, Portfolio Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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

Insert number

☐

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐
☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To present to the Committee for approval the minutes of the most recent meetings of the Area Working Groups.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Committee is asked to approve the minutes of the meeting of the South AWG of 19 February, North AWG of 27 February, West AWG of 28 February and East AWG of 28 February and 7 March 2024, as attached.
3.0	Main report
	<u>KEY ISSUES</u>
3.1	Area Working Group Minutes <p>It was agreed in June 2016 that the minutes of the meetings of the Area Working Groups would be presented to the SP&R Committee for approval going forward, in line with the Council's commitment to openness and transparency and to ensure a consistent approach with other Member-led Working Groups. The Committee is asked to approve the most recent round of meetings, as attached.</p>
3.2	Project Updates North AWG <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund</u> - the North Belfast AWG recommended to the Committee that the request from the Belfast Orange Hall to use the NRF allocation to progress with a reduced scope of works be approved. West AWG <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Belfast Investment Fund</u> - the West Belfast AWG recommended to the Committee that Glencairn Community Project is moved to <i>Stage 3 - Committed</i>.
3.3	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None.
3.4	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u> None
4.0	Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Minutes – South Belfast Area Working Group 19 February 2024 Appendix 2 - Minutes – North Belfast Area Working Group 27 February 2024 Appendix 3 - Minutes – West Belfast Area Working Group 28 February 2024 Appendix 4 - Minutes – Special East Belfast Area Working Group 28 February 2024 Appendix 5 - Minutes – East Belfast Area Working Group 7 March 2024

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 19th February, 2024

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Murray (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan); and
Councillors Bunting, Gormley, T. Kelly,
Lyons, G. McAteer, and McKeown.

In attendance: Ms. S. Murtagh, Portfolio Manager, Property and Projects;
Ms. D. Smith, Neighbourhood Integration Manager
(South Belfast);
Mr. B. Carr, Portfolio Manager, City and Organisational
Strategy;
Mr. S. Lavery, Programme Manager;
Ms. S. Rafter, Area Intervention Manager (University and
Lower Ormeau);
Mr. C. McCann, Lead Officer - Community Provision;
Ms. N. Mulrine, Regeneration Project Officer; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported from Councillors T. Brooks and McDonough-Brown.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 27th November, 2023 were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McAteer declared an interest in the item "Request to Present at a Future Meeting – ArtsEkta", in that a relation of hers worked for ArtsEkta, but as the nature of the item was not relating to a financial decision, it was deemed unnecessary for her to leave the meeting.

Councillor Gormley declared an interest in the item "Presentation – LORAG" in that he was a Director of LORAG (Lower Ormeau Residents' Actions Group). However, as the nature of the item was a presentation from the group, with no financial decision, it was deemed unnecessary for him to leave the meeting.

Presentation - LORAG

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. G. Rice, Manager, and Ms. N. Brennan, HLC Manager, to the meeting, who were in attendance to provide an update in relation to their Lockhouse Gateway Development project which had received LIF funding.

They advised the Working Group that their project aim had been to reconnect the community with the River Lagan by maximising local assets and providing healthy, enterprising and inclusive activity.

The Members were provided with an overview of the Community Garden and Shed.

The Working Group was advised of a number of programmes which LORAG had been delivering, including water sports education programmes and taster sessions for all ages. The representatives explained that LORAG had been working with Lagan Search and Rescue and Tollymore National Outdoor Centre to build up the skills of local people in regards to water safety. The Working Group was also updated in relation to a future access point at McConnell's Weir which was being taken forward by the Department for Communities, which they hoped to be operational within 18 months.

During discussion, a Member suggested that Castlewellan Forest Park provided a number of outdoor water activities on the lake, and that LORAG might wish to engage with them.

A further Member stated that the ecology and biodiversity elements were also a key factor along the Lagan and welcomed the work which had been carried out in regards to rewilding. The LORAG representatives advised the Working Group that apple and pear trees had been planted, as well as particular hedging which was geared towards attracting wildlife. Ms. Brennan advised the Members that it was a learning journey for them.

A number of Members congratulated LORAG on the project which provided inner city residents with access to a community garden and that the progress on reconnecting the community with the river was something to take pride in.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance.

Noted.

Physical Programme Update

The Portfolio Manager, Property and Projects, presented the following report to the Working Group:

"1. Introduction

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This

report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to note the physical programme update for South Belfast.

3. Local Investment Fund (LIF)

Members are reminded LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG areas; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation. Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding spend to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 24 projects received 'In Principle' letters under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 21 have been completed; 2 projects at delivery stage, and 1 project still at initial stage. Further details of these are outlined below.

LIF breakdown – South	LIF 1		LIF 2	
<i>Stage/ Description:</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount (£)</i>	<i>No. Projects</i>	<i>Amount/ (£)</i>
Number of Projects Completed	12 (92%)	£1,053,600	10 (91%)	£716,000
Number of Projects in Delivery			1 (9%)	£80,000
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects in Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	1 (8%)	£30,000		
Total Number of Approved Projects	13	£1,083,600	11	£796,000

The table below provides an overview of progress and actions around the remaining live projects – Holylands Area Improvement Initiative (£80,000) and Finaghy Bridge (£30,000). Members are asked to note the status of the live LIF projects and the ongoing actions.

LIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
SLIF2-13	LORAG - The Lock House	£40,000	Complete	LIF project completed. Community garden and landscaping works completed.	Continued engagement with the group; engagement with UV regarding overall project.

SLIF2-07	Holylands Area Improvement Initiative	£80,000	Phase 1 completed	Phase 1 completed. Phase 2 locations agreed with members by email circulation to meet planting window. Works are onsite and due to be complete this month.	Continue engagement with partners
SLIF017	Finaghy Bridge	£30,000	Design stage	Approved at SP&R Committee in May 2016 to undertake improvements to the bridge. DfI Roads Highways Team are taking the lead on design and the Council will contribute the LIF funding to DfI.	Continue engagement with DfI Roads.

4. **Belfast Investment Fund (BIF)**

Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250k investment from Council. BIF – South Belfast was allocated £5.5m; with additional £500k ringfenced for new areas (outer South) that had joined the District area under Local Government Reform. In South Belfast, 6 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment, thereby fully allocating its £5.5m, and £500k pot of funding. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

Summary of BIF allocated projects

South	Stage 3—Lagan Gateway—£2.1m; Lanyon Tunnels—£1.3m; Bredagh GAC—£700k Stage 2— Coffee Culture - £286k; Arts & Digital Hub- £584k Stage 1— Sandy Row Open Space project- £479k; Belfast Islamic Centre—no commitment
Balmoral DEA	Stage 3 - Knockbreda Parish Church Hall—£250k Stage 2— Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC—£250k

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF19	Bredagh GAC	£700,000	Complete	Project completed.	Continue engagement with the group on post monitoring
BIF04	Lagan Gateway	£2.1m	Stage 3 -- Committed	Design of Phase 2 has gone through consultation process. Site investigations have been undertaken and detailed drawings developed. Planning application was due to be submitted in 2023 however due to further discussions that were required this is now scheduled for pre-Easter.	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.
BIF07	Lanyon Tunnels	£1.3m	Stage 3- Committed	Site at Stewart Street has been acquired by DfC. Roundtable meeting took place in September 2023 including Urban Villages and DfC. Plans have been amended and additional surveys carried out. New planning application was submitted in October 2023. Ongoing discussions with group, DfC and TEO and updated governance is in place.	Officer engagement with Executive Office and DfC as key funders, and stakeholders.
BIF33	Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC	£250,000	Stage 3- Committed	NIHE has confirmed that the Council is the preferred purchaser of the site (playing fields) subject to internal approval and contract. The Council is	Continue engagement with the group and partners.

				continuing to engage with NIHE in connection with the purchase of site.	
BIF46	Coffee Culture	<i>BIF-£286,519 SOF-£100,000 UV- £482,923 DfC-£100,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed Part of Sandy Row Area projects	Partnership project with UV and DfC. Property purchase completed. Planning application submitted in June 2023. Procurement of contractor underway and scheduled to move to tender stage in the next two months.	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF48	Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub	<i>BIF-£584,167 UV-£706,856</i>	Stage 3- Committed Part of Sandy Row Area projects	Partnership project with UV. Property purchase completed. Planning approval secured in Dec 2023. Procurement of contractor underway scheduled to move to tender stage in Feb.	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF47	Sandy Row Open Space project	<i>£479,314*</i>	Stage 1- Emerging Part of Sandy Row Area projects	Scoping work underway <i>*The remaining balance of the ringfenced allocation for the Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Continue engagement with the group.

5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. 3 projects in South Belfast received an In-Principle funding commitment, and 2 are completed. Similar to LIF and BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. Members are asked to note the progress update of the remaining project in the table below.

SOF – South Belfast project overview

Project	Award	Status and update	Action/ Recommendation
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SOF02 Coffee Culture	£100,000	As above at BIF46. Partnership project with UV and DfC. Property purchase completed. Planning application submitted in June 2023. Procurement of contractor underway and scheduled to move to tender stage in the next two months.	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.
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6. **Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund is a £10m capital fund to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. £1.9m was allocated to South Belfast and 5 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. Projects remaining at Stage 2 continue to have the support of a Client Manager for their proposals.

South Belfast – NRF overview

South	Stage 3 - Sólás New Build project, GVRT Branching Out project, Lagan Water Access Activity Hub, Redevelopment of former School of Music, Market Heritage Hub Stage 2 (Reserve) - Redevelopment of Riddel's Warehouse Stage 1 (Reserve) - The Avenue Arts Centre, An Droichead Annex, Lagan Legacy
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South Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
Sólás New Build project	£308,248	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
GVRT- Branching Out project	£500,000	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Lagan Water Access Activity Hub	£308,248	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Redevelopment of former School of Music	£308,248	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.

Market Heritage Hub	£500,000	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Risk of losing property remains - vendor wants sale to be complete but it may be outside NRF timeframes. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
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7. **Capital Programme**

The Capital Programme is a rolling programme to either enhance existing Council assets or build / buy new assets or facilities. Table below provides an update on current live projects South Belfast area. Members are asked to note status and update.

South Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
City Hall Statues – Winifred Carney & Mary Ann McCracken	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Work is progressing well. The unveiling is scheduled to take place on International Women's Day on 8 March 2024.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> In January, SP&R Committee agreed terms of reference for a local inquiry in the event that an objection to a proposed Gating Order is received. Members granted approval for the publication of a Gating Order in November 2023 for certain streets and to proceed with a ten-week consultation for the remaining streets. Members are to be informed via CNS when that consultation process commences.
City Hall – Installation of Two Stained Glass Windows	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Business case currently being worked up.
City Hall External Christmas Tree provision	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Strategic case is under review.
Waterfront Hall Chiller Units	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Procurement documentation is now being prepared.
Waterfront Hall Smoke Curtains	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Procurement documentation is now being prepared.
Palm House, Botanic Gardens	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This early stage project on a Council asset is being actively considered as a candidate for partnership working with the Heritage Fund.
Belfast Bikes Expansion	Further expansion – A new station in Elms Village/Malone Road was installed in August 2023 and is operational. A proposed new station at Drumglass was delayed as it required DfI Roads Service approval. This has been

	received now and installation is scheduled for March.
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8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for several government department on key capital investment programmes, namely Urban Villages (UV) from the Executive Office as well as a number of schemes with DfC and DfI. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to South Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

Table below is the status update on UV projects in South Belfast – note the UV programme has a defined South Belfast geography (Sandy Row; Donegall Pass and Markets).

UV – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
The Lockhouse - Gateway to the River / Walkway	Partnership project with UV. Contractor for main works has been appointed. Works for this Urban Villages funded element are now due on site within weeks following the release of additional funding post-procurement.
Coffee Culture	As above at BIF46. Partnership project with UV and DfC. Property purchase completed. Planning application submitted in June 2023. Procurement of contractor underway and scheduled to move to tender stage in the next two months.
Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub	As above at BIF48. Partnership project with UV. Property purchase completed. Planning approval secured in Dec 2023. Procurement of contractor underway scheduled to move to tender stage in Feb.
Accidental Theatre (Shaftesbury Square)	Business Case not yet commenced, currently at good relations development stage.
Donegall Pass Good Relations Hub	Council is acting as delivery agent. Emerging project with Clanmil Housing Association. Legal documentation progressing. Approved business case received. Letter of Offer is in development by Executive Office. Surveys and investigations underway
Market Tunnels	As above at BIF07. Site at Stewart Street has been acquired by DfC. Roundtable meeting took place in September 2023 including Urban Villages and DfC. Plans have been amended and additional surveys carried out. New planning application was submitted in October 2023. Ongoing discussions with group, DfC and TEO and updated governance is in place.

DfC funded projects

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Communities in South Belfast.

DfC – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Belfast Islamic Centre – Renovations of Aldersgate House, University Rd	Project completed. Community launch held in Jan.
Holylands Alleygating and Cleansing Project	Project progressing. Link to the citywide Alleygating Phase 5 project.
Southwest Quarter Revitalisation Scheme	Council is acting as delivery agent. Contract for funding/ Letter of Offer received. Works underway.
2 Royal Avenue – Bank Square Enhancement	Project aims to improve the linkages and connectivity between Royal Avenue and Bank Square. Works are underway on site.

DfI funded projects

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Infrastructure in South Belfast.

DfI – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Lagan Gateway	As above as BIF04. Design of Phase 2 has gone through consultation process. Site investigations have been undertaken and detailed drawings developed. Planning application was due to be submitted in 2023 however due to further discussions that were required this is now scheduled for pre-Easter.
Finaghy Bridge	As above at SLIF017. Design stage.
Covered cycle stands Phase 2	<i>Via DfI Active Travel Enablers Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund</i> Ormeau Park – complete ; Botanic Gardens – complete ; Cherryvale Park – complete Funding has been received for Phase 3; potential locations are Lagan Towpath, Clement Wilson/ Barnett Demesne, Sir Thomas & Lady Dixon Park and P&R Blacks Road.

Other externally funded projects

Project	Status and update
UPSURGE Project/ Access to community gardens on the demonstration site	On ground – infrastructure works completed . Botanic Gardens. Supported via UK Shared Prosperity Fund and EU Horizon funding. City-centered approach to catalyze nature-based solutions through the EU Regenerative Urban Lighthouse for pollution alleviation and regenerative development. Works include research plots and a community garden.”

A Member sought clarity in relation to alleygating. The Portfolio Manager (Property and Projects) advised the Members that the City and Neighbourhoods

Department was about to commence a ten week consultation in relation to Phase 5 of the Alleygating Scheme.

In response to a further Member's question, she confirmed that the project which had reached Stage 2 (Reserve) in the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund process, namely, Hearth Historic Buildings Trust - Redevelopment of Riddel's Warehouse, continued to have the support of a Client Manager for its proposal.

A further Member asked how decisions were made around the locations for the covered cycle stands (Phase 3). The Portfolio Manager advised the Members that she would circulate information relating to the locations and back up locations of the stands in due course.

A Member raised the issue of the Local Investment Fund project at Finaghy Bridge and the significant delay in its progress.

Moved by Councillor McAteer
Seconded by Councillor Lyons and

Resolved - that the Working Group agrees to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to request a meeting regarding the delay on the Finaghy Bridge project, which had been allocated £30,000 of LIF funding; and

also to request that a representative from the Department for Infrastructure be invited to attend a future meeting of the Working Group to provide an update on the project.

Holylands Update - Presentation

The Portfolio Manager (City and Organisational Strategy) explained that societal issues in the Wider University and Lower Ormeau (WULO) area had proven difficult to address over a prolonged period despite the recent development of Purpose-Built Managed Student Accommodation throughout the city centre. He advised the Members that the Council and Community Planning Partnership had agreed to focus on the area, aligned with the Belfast Agenda commitment to develop place-based interventions where there were opportunities to collaborate, improve outcomes and provide solutions to systemic local challenges.

The Members were advised that the aim was to ensure that the area was welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive to all, making it a great place to live, work and invest. He outlined that a collaborative Inter-Agency approach was being taken, with a range of short and medium-term actions and with a dedicated Intervention Manager having been appointed in April 2022. He explained that Ms. S. Rafter, had recently been appointed to the post in November 2023 and that her role would be funded for twelve months.

The Working Group was provided with an overview of the various workstreams. The Members were advised that a draft Action Plan was being finalised, based on baseline analysis and extensive community consultation feedback.

In regards to alleygating, the Portfolio Manager confirmed that £120,000 had been secured from the Department for Communities and that planning consultation had since been completed. The Notice of Intention for the streets meeting the threshold would be advertised for 30 days on 7th February for representations and further objections. A report

would then be brought to the People and Communities Committee seeking enactment of the legislation. The Members were asked to note that if a substantive objection was to be received then a local inquiry would be established.

The Working Group was advised that proposed Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) within the area would not proceed due to feedback from the PSNI regarding the need and cost.

The Department of Justice had funded a review which had been undertaken by Queen's University. A number of legislative changes had been identified in relation to ASBO, criminal justice order and housing orders.

In December 2023, the Stranmillis Residents' Association had been reestablished. A Lower Ormeau Traders Forum had also been established.

The Members were reminded that £80,000 had been secured under the Local Investment Fund towards the Holylands Area Improvement Initiative, with a focus on tree planting. To date, 32 trees had been planted as part of the pilot in Carmel, Palestine and Jerusalem Streets, Dudley Street, Rugby Road, University Avenue and Magdala Street.

The Working Group was provided with statistics which showed a downward trajectory regarding noise complaints in the WULO Area from January 2021 through to December 2023.

The Portfolio Manager presented the Co-Design Action Plan. He explained that the focus would be across the following four themes:

1. reducing crime and ASB;
2. community cohesion;
3. the well-being of residents; and
4. continued operational planning for peak periods of the year.

The Members were provided with the engagement feedback on the Co-Design Action Plan. Concerns had been expressed around crime and anti-social behaviour, particularly the safety of women. Other suggestions included initiatives to encourage reporting of crime/ASB, improving trust in policing, diversionary activity for young people, issues regarding fly tipping and graffiti and noise pollution. Some concerns were raised regarding community tensions between a range of vulnerable, transient and new populations. However, the Members were advised that newcomer communities had stated they were positive about living in the area.

Participants had outlined St Patrick's Day, Freshers week, Halloween, the first days returning after holidays, student grant days, end of term and any major concert/festival as the key times of the year. A number of proactive ideas were put forward, including communal skips/additional bin collections at the end-of-term, encouraging reuse/repair/recycle and community events, other diversionary activity and ensuring that neighbourhood staff from key agencies were more visible.

The Working Group was advised that the Partners had been asked to consider and review phase 2 engagement feedback and review, amend and agree action plans in advance of the next Inter-Agency Group Meeting. Appropriate leads and resources required to deliver the action plan were also to be agreed.

The Portfolio Manager advised that the action plan would only work with joint ownership, integrity and commitment from all partners, with a focus on quick-wins and immediate opportunities, while laying the groundwork for medium and longer-term ambitions.

The Working Group noted the update which had been provided.

St. Patrick's Day Planning - Verbal update

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager for South Belfast provided the Working Group with an overview of the plans which were in place for St. Patrick's Day celebrations in the City. She outlined that:

- the Council's Gold, Silver and Bronze command teams would be operational along with Safer Neighbourhood and Alcohol Control Officers;
- the lead in time would begin from 11th March;
- representatives from the Council, Queen's University and the PSNI would be on the ground on the day;
- the Noise Team would be operational until 4am on Monday, 18th March;
- last year, Officers from the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) unit were in Silver command which had proved very successful in terms of contacting landlords quickly;
- the Cleansing team would do an early morning (between 6am and 7am) clearance within the Wider University and Lower Ormeau area on the morning of Monday 18th March; and
- the Emergency Planning Team would be briefed and updated on all planning.

A Member thanked and congratulated the officers who had been involved in the work last year. In response to a question, the Portfolio Manager confirmed that the Inter Agency Group would meet again before St. Patrick's Day.

In response to a Member's query, the Neighbourhood Integration Manager confirmed that she would check whether the Cleansing team could also carry out an early morning clean on Tuesday 19th March, given that celebrations were also likely to take place on Monday 18th March.

In response to a further query, the Working Group was advised that the new Area Intervention Manager for the University and Lower Ormeau had been appointed in November 2023, and that the position would be funded for one year. A Member suggested that the Working Group would consider writing to the Department for Communities, at a later date, to confirm future funding for the post.

In response to a further Member's question, the Neighbourhood Integration Manager confirmed that half of the Safer City officers would be located within the University and Holylands area, as there was an acknowledgement that other areas in the City also had large numbers of people attending St. Patrick's Day celebrations.

The Working Group noted the update which had been provided.

Summer Programming Additional Needs - Verbal update

The Lead Officer - Community Provision explained that children with special needs were often not able to avail of summer schemes due to their high support needs and that a report had recently been submitted to the People and Communities Committee to consider the inclusion of children with special needs in the holiday scheme programme.

He outlined that, in order to contribute to addressing that gap in provision, the Committee had agreed that a request be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee seeking funding for specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, one in each area of the City, at a total cost of £80,000 (maximum £20,000 per scheme), which would allow increased numbers of children to participate in summer schemes that were suitable for their needs, with discussions to take place with the relevant Area Working Groups and the Youth Council in advance of any locations being agreed.

During discussion, the Members agreed to email the Lead Officer with recommendations of any particular groups which operated within South Belfast which he might not have yet engaged with.

A Member suggested that the programme could be needs based rather than area-based, as long as the required transport could be provided to the children.

The Members agreed that the schemes should be as inclusive as possible and it was agreed that a report on the progress of the Programme would be submitted to the following meeting.

Request to Present at a Future Meeting – ArtsEkta (Councillor Lyons to raise)

At the request of Councillor Lyons, the Working Group agreed to invite ArtsEkta to a future Special meeting of the Working Group, the date of which would be agreed with the Chairperson, to discuss its Finaghy Canvas project.

Chairperson

North Belfast Area Working Group

Tuesday, 27th February, 2024

NORTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Bradley (Chairperson);
Alderman McCullough; and
Councillors Anglin, Cobain, Doran,
Magee, Maskey, Nelson, Ó Néill
and Whyte.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st November were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Withdrawn Item

The item under the heading "Summer Programming Additional Needs" was withdrawn from the agenda.

Physical Programmes Update

The Director of Property and Projects provided the Working Group with an overview of the undernoted report:

"1. Introduction

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering in behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the physical programme update for North Belfast, and;
- Consider the request from Belfast Orange Hall to use the NRF allocation to progress with a reduced scope of works.

3. Local Investment Fund

LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG areas; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation with the North being allocated £1.127m under LIF1 and £800,000 under LIF2.

Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 43 projects in total have received In Principle support under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 36 have been completed; 2 are at delivery stage; 1 is at pre-construction stage and 4 remain at due diligence/ initial stages.

LIF breakdown – North	LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description	Projects	Value (£)	Projects	Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	23 (92%)	£996,500	13 (72%)	£624,867
Number of Projects On-going Delivery			2 (11%)	£96,667
Number of Projects in Pre-construction			1 (6%)	£46,667
Number of Projects in Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	2(8%)	£131,000	2 (11%)	£30,000
Total Number of Approved Projects	25*	£1,127,500	18**	£798,201

**This includes additional funding for a LIF 2 project, Ballysillan Youth for Christ.*

*** This includes additional funding for two LIF 1 projects, Marrowbone Parochial Hall and Jennymount Church.*

The table below provide an overview of progress and actions around the remaining live projects. Members are asked to note the status of the current LIF projects and the ongoing actions.

LIF Ref	Project	LIF Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
NLIF2-14	Star Neighbourhood Centre	£58,467	Complete	Project completed.	Continue engagement with the group on post monitoring
NLIF2-21	Somme Group – cross	£21,667	Complete	Works complete.	Continue engagement with group.

	community memorial			Snagging underway.	
NLIF2-22	Sailortown, St. Joseph's Church Refurbishment	£75,000	On Ground	On ground. Works on gallery paused pending HED consent. Architectural option drawings for HED designed and submitted for HED approval. Awaiting decision.	Continue engagement with group and HED.
NLIF2-19	Women's Tec	£46,667	Pre-construction	Project approved by Due Diligence Group. Funding agreement has been signed and sealed. Contractor to commence works imminently.	Continue engagement with Group
NLIF014	Westland Community Centre - new building (<i>Link to UV Project</i>)	£65,000	Due Diligence stage	Partnership project with UV. Work is progressing on the land arrangements and the governance model. A Letter of Offer is awaited from the Executive Office.	Continue engagement with Group and The Executive Office
NLIF057	Ardoyne Holy Cross Boxing Club (<i>Link to UV project – ABC Trust H&L Hub</i>)	£66,000	Due Diligence stage	On ground. This project is part of the UV development of St Gemma's School - ABC Trust. Phase 1 works are complete. Boxing Club LIF project will be part of Phase 2 which has now commenced.	Continue engagement with Group and with UV
NLIF2-03	Holy Cross Trust/ Houben Centre (<i>The Parent Room</i>)	£15,000	Due Diligence stage	Agreed in June 2018. Project remains at Due Diligence	Continue engagement with Group to provide support with project.

				stage. Project plan is being updated by the group to reflect the current requirements however it is continuing to prove challenging to progress the project.	
NLIF2-05	Mercy Primary, Crumlin Road	£15,000	Due Diligence stage	Agreed in June 2016. Officers requested more information on the community use and benefit along with details on the logistics of opening the playground to the community within a school facility. Additional information requested is still outstanding.	Continue engagement with the school to obtain requested information for DD.

4. Belfast Investment Fund

Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250k investment from Council BIF – North Belfast was allocated £5.5m. In North Belfast, 7 projects have received an In-Principle funding commitment under BIF, thereby fully allocating its £5.5m: and 2 projects are on the longer BIF list. Each of the 'In Principle' projects are taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

Members are asked to note the status update of these projects provided below. The table provides a summary of BIF allocated projects i.e. project stage; project title; and funding allocated.

Summary of BIF allocated projects

North	Stage 3 - Cancer Lifeline—£575k; Grace Family Centre —£1.3m; Midland Boxing Club £550k; Marrowbone Park £750k; Cavehill Tennis Club- £71k Stage 2- Malgrove- £950k, Cultural Community Hub - £350k Stage 1 - Cliftonville Community Forum, Sunningdale Community Centre - no commitment
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BIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF41	Marrowbone Millennium Park	BIF- £750,000; DfC- £700,000; UV- £2,535,086	Completed	Project completed.	Continue engagement with stakeholders on post monitoring.
BIF49	Cavehill Tennis Club	£71,413	On Ground	All works complete bar resurfacing of one court due to adverse weather conditions. Resurfacing will complete in Spring 2024	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF15	Malgrove	£950,000; £808,607 – additional funding (£900k less expenditure on Basement)	Uncommitted - Design stage	Detailed design agreed for a 4-team changing pavilion. Planning submitted and verified	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF43	Cultural Community Hub	£350,000	Uncommitted – Due Diligence stage	Design team appointed to work up designs to planning stage. Design signed off by group and planning application has been lodged. Will go back into DD for full sign-off once planning has been obtained and tender returned.	Continue engagement with the group and stakeholders.

Malgrove reallocation – Members will recall that in September 2023, SP&R Committee agreed to the NBAWG recommendation that the funding allocated to Basement Youth Club/Elim Church be withdrawn and reallocated to the Malgrove project. Members are asked to note that the Basement YC incurred an eligible cost of £91,393 through project development so there is a remaining balance available for reallocation of £808,607. A total of £808,607 has been reallocated to the Malgrove project.

5. **Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund is a £10m capital fund to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. NRF – North Belfast was allocated £2.4m and 5 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

North Belfast – NRF overview

North	Stage 3— Belfast Orange Hall, Ulster Supported Employment Ltd (USEL), Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum, Sailortown Regeneration Group, Ardoyne Youth Enterprises,
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	<i>Stage 1 (Reserve)— Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain, Indian Community Centre, North Belfast Working Men's Club, North City Business Centre, Quaker Service, Belfast Charitable Society, Sinclair Seamen's Presbyterian Church, Arts for All, Ligoniel Improvement Association</i>
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North Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3- Delivery

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
USEL - Green Growth & The Circular Economy	£518,191	Stage 3- Committed	Business case complete. Meeting scheduled with group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Cliftonville Community Enterprise	£1,452,700	Stage 3- Committed	Business case complete. Officers met with group and discussed next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Ardoyne Youth Enterprises – Community Hub	£154,696	Stage 3- Committed	Business case complete. Link to UV programme.	Continue engagement with the group.
Belfast Orange Hall Refurbishment	£154,696	Stage 3- Committed	<p>Business case complete. Officers met with group and discussed next steps.</p> <p>A reduced scope of works has been proposed following the NRF allocation to include external improvements to roof, external walls and windows and internal improvements to multiple rooms on different floors but not the new heating system. The project remains subject to final Due Diligence.</p> <p>Members are asked to consider the group's request to use the NRF allocation to progress with a reduced scope of works.</p>	Continue engagement with the group.
St Joseph's Restoration project	£154,696	Stage 3- Committed	Business case complete. Officers to meet with group and discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.

6. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building / buying new ones. Members are reminded of the 3-stage approval process in place for every project on the council's Capital Programme, as agreed by SP&R Committee. The table below provides an update on current live projects in the North Belfast area.

Members are asked to note the updates on the Physical Programme.

North Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
Belfast Zoo – Programme of Works (Works to the Large Cats Enclosure, Sea Lion, etc)	Project completed.
North Foreshore - Development Sites Infrastructure Works	On ground. Storm Drainage Infrastructure Installation complete. The Landfill Gas Ring Main tender has been reviewed due to material price increases and will be re-issued with returns anticipated in Summer 2024. Foul Pumping Station to be tendered before Summer 2024. NIE connection required for future supply is being progressed.
Reservoir Safety Programme	<i>Stage 3- Committed.</i> Works to Alexandra Park, Waterworks Upper and Waterworks Lower. Consultants appointed and undertaking investigative work to assess the existing condition of the reservoirs and associated structures. Project has been integrated into Peace Plus application Reconnected Belfast under Theme 1.4. Reimagining Communities submitted in September 2023. Public consultation is well underway and open until 21 March 2024.
Cathedral Gardens (including Belfast Blitz)	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Design team is continuing to develop the project to RIBA Stage 3 – Spatial Coordination. Stakeholder engagement ongoing, including discussion with NI War Memorial on Belfast Blitz element. Aim to submit planning application in April 2024.
Playground Improvement Programme	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Works at Loughside Park playground are scheduled to be complete in March and New Lodge playground is scheduled to be complete in June 2024.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> In January, SP&R Committee agreed terms of reference for a local inquiry in the event that an objection to a proposed Gating Order is received. Members granted approval for the publication of a Gating Order in November 2023 for certain streets and to proceed with a ten-week consultation for the remaining streets. Members are to be informed via CNS

	when that consultation process commences.
LTP - Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> DfC partnership project. Proposal submitted to DfC for new leisure facility. Continued liaison with key stakeholders around options for new facility and overall development of the Girdwood site.
Relocation of Dunbar Link Cleansing Depot	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> OBC being worked up. Viable alternative site at Corporation Street Car Park being assessed by design team. Designs progressing to RIBA Stage 3-4 up to Planning application stage. Confirmation of design requirements is progressing.
Glencairn Park/ Ligoniel Park Greenway	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Project outline details submitted to DfI as part of the Greenway Development priority projects.
Access to the Hills – connections from Cavehill to Divis Mountain and Black Mountain	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Will also be considered within the wider study as below.
Waste Plan – Waste Transfer Station Upgrade	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> OBC being worked up. Link to Duncrue Masterplan and city wide kerbside scheme.
Connectivity - Access to Hills Programme (city wide)	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Secured DAERA funding for the Access to the Belfast Hills Feasibility Study. Study and delivery plan has been completed in April 2023. Ongoing consultation with other stakeholders. Presented to Members in Autumn 2023. One of identified routes submitted in Peace Plus Local Action Plan application.
Belfast Bikes Expansion	Expansion in the North area for Phase 4: <i>Grove Leisure Centre</i> – installed and operational <i>Yorkgate</i> – the temporary solution on carpark didn't receive approval. The permanent location is outside the newly developed train station, agreed with Translink. Translink confirmed that the area for the Belfast Bikes docking station will be complete in early summer.

7. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for several government departments on key capital investment programmes, including Urban Villages (UV) from the Executive Office and Peace IV under SEUPB. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to North Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

The table below shows the status on UV projects in North Belfast – note the UV programme has a defined North Belfast geography (Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan).

North Belfast – Urban Villages Initiative overview

Project	Status and update
Marrowbone Millennium Park (links to BIF programme)	Project completed.
ABC Trust Health and Leisure Hub (links to LIF programme)	On ground. Partnership project with UV DfC, DfI and Flax Trust. Phase 1 of the project completed which provided a modern, purpose-built sports hall, support space and accommodation for BCT NI. Phase 2 works are progressing with completion anticipated middle 2025.
Ballysillan Playing Fields	Partnership project with UV, DfC and DfI Living With Water Programme. Planning approval secured. Due to inflationary pressures project costs have escalated from projections. Awaiting confirmation of business case addendum from TEO. Detailed design stage ongoing in consultation with NI Water and DfI LWWP to consider options. It is anticipated that a main contractor will be appointed and onsite Spring 2024.
Ardoyne Youth Enterprises (AYE) Social Enterprise Project (links to NRF programme)	Partnership project with Urban Villages. The project team is managing issues with rising costs and delays related to site clearance. Planning approval secured. Demolition have completed and site investigation reports are progressing. Outstanding legal issues are being progressed and the project remains subject to Due Diligence.
Sunningdale Community Centre	Council is acting as delivery agent, proposed on Council land. Lease being finalised. The Design Team has been appointed and planning application has been submitted. Continue to gather reports and surveys to support the planning application. Scheduled to begin on site in early Summer subject to planning.
Westland Community Centre (links to LIF programme)	As above under LIF. Partnership project with UV. Work is progressing on the land arrangements and the governance model. A Letter of Offer is awaited from the Executive Office.

Peace IV/ Peace Plus

Members are asked to note the update on Peace IV - Forth Meadow Community Greenway and the proposed Reconnected Belfast project under Peace Plus.

Project	Status and update
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Forth Meadow Community Greenway project	Project completed. Signage package to be installed subject to agreement via Committee and Council.
Reconnected Belfast - Waterworks and Alexandra Park	<p>The Reconnected Belfast proposal focuses on the redevelopment of the Waterworks and Alexandra Park. The proposal will enhance and improve connectivity within and between the two parks as well as enhance linkages with other parts of the city and to the Belfast Hills.</p> <p>The application has been submitted under PeacePLUS Theme 1.4 – Reimagining Communities and feedback is expected by Spring 2024.</p>

UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Project	Status and update
Enhancement Loughside Park Trim Trail	Project completed.

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Following a suggestion from the Director of Property and Projects, the Working Group agreed to undertake site visits to the project sites and to look at holding some future meetings at external venues related to the projects mentioned within the report.

The Working Group agreed to write to Holy Cross Trust and Mercy Primary School to request a definitive, time bound response as to whether they wish to remain within the Local Investment Fund (LIF) process.

The Working Group noted the report and acceded to the request from Belfast Orange Hall to use the NRF allocation to progress with a reduced scope of works.

Chairperson

West Belfast Area Working Group

Wednesday, 28th February, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF THE WEST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor McCann (Chairperson),
Alderman McCoubrey;
Councillors Black, M. Donnelly,
R. M Donnelly, Duffy,
Canavan, Garrett,
McCabe, McDowell, R. McLaughlin,
Nic Bhranair, Verner and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. M. Doherty, Programme Delivery Manager;
Ms. A. McGlone, Neighbourhood Integration Manager;
Mr. S. Lavery, Programme Manager;
Mr. C. McCann, Lead Officer - Community Provision; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported from Councillor I. McLaughlin.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 23rd November 2023 and 11th January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Presentation - First Street Community Benefit Society

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. Kathleen Smyth, Mr. Seán Byers and Ms. Naomi Connor, representing First Street Community Benefit Society.

The representatives commenced by advising that First Street Community Benefit Society was a recently established entity and was a collective of cooperative and charitable organisations.

They advised the Members that First Street CBS proposed to develop a Community and Cooperative Hub at 4 North Howard Street. The building which had been built in the 1860s was currently owned by NTL Hodge Ltd, it was a three storey former linen mill, on a site area of 0.54 acres, and was currently for sale on the open market for approximately £500k.

The representatives explained that the existing building was a heritage building at risk as it was once part of the linen industry in Belfast and sadly it had been derelict for over 15 years. With the aid of powerpoint, the Elected Members were shown pictures of both the location and inside of the property.

The representatives then provided the Members with an overview of the timeline of works to date.

In term of progressing with the vision to see this old mill brought into community ownership for local social and economic benefit, the representative advised that, to date, engagement had been undertaken with the following stakeholders:

- Conway Mill;
- Community organisations/representatives;
- Local Elected Members;
- NIHE;
- Heritage based organisations;
- Department of Justice;
- Department of Finance;
- Department for Communities HED;
- Department for Communities Neighbourhood Renewal;
- Belfast City Council; and
- Potential funders.

In terms of funding, the Members were advised that funding had been secured from the NIHE, Architectural Heritage Fund, The Pilgrim Trust, DfC Historic Environment Fund, BCC Go Social/Go Succeed and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Further funding was being sought from Peace Plus (1.4 Reimagining Communities), the Community Ownership Fund and the NIHE.

The representatives concluded by advising that the next steps would be to set up a stakeholder round table, complete a feasibility study for the redevelopment and to explore options for acquisition of the building, either through purchase or community asset transfer.

They advised that they would be keen to engage further with the Elected Members and the communities that they represented and encouraged them to make contact directly should they wish to discuss the proposal further or undertake a site visit to 4 North Howard Street.

The Democratic Services Officer undertook to e-mail a copy of the presentation to the Members of the West Area Working Group, along with a video link containing further information on the proposals.

Following some discussion with the Members, who broadly welcomed the vision which the organisation had for the building, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for attending and they left the meeting.

Physical Programmes Update

The Programme Delivery Manager, Property and Projects, presented the following report to the Working Group:

“1. Introduction

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- note the updates on the Physical Programme for West Belfast,
- note the project movement for Glencairn Community Project to *Stage 3 - Committed*.

3. Local Investment Fund

Members are reminded LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG areas; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation. (LIF 1 – West - £1,127,500 + Shankill £490,000 and LIF 2 - £1,400,000).

Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 50 projects have received In Principle support under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 49 have been completed and 1 project is at delivery stage. In total, 98% of all LIF West projects have been completed. Further details of these are outlined below.

LIF breakdown – West	LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	25 (100%)	£1,617,500	24 (96%)	£1,341,788
Number of Projects On-going Delivery			1 (4%)	£58,212
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects in Initial Stage (Due Diligence)				
Total Number of Approved Projects	25	£1,617,500	25	£1,400,000

The table below shows an overview of the remaining live project:

LIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action / Recommendation
WLIF2-08	Berlin Swifts Football Club	LIF £65,085; SOF £113,000	On Ground	Contractor works and all other utilities connections are now complete. Liaison with NI Water for final sewer connection is ongoing - fees paid and awaiting connection date.	Continue engagement with NI Water Re: sewer connection.

4. Belfast Investment Fund

Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration, partnership projects, with a minimum £250k investment. The West AWG had a total allocation of £9m comprising £5.5m from the original allocation, an additional £1.2m which was ring-fenced for projects in the Shankill area when this became part of the West AWG following the Council elections in 2015, and £2.5m which was ringfenced for projects in the Colin area following LGR.

6 projects have received an In-Principle funding commitment under BIF accounting for the full allocation. Each of the 'In-Principle' projects are taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. Table below provides a summary of BIF allocated projects.

Summary of BIF allocated projects

West	Stage 3—Davitt's GAC—£1m; Raidió Fáilte—£950k; St Comgall's- £3.5m; Colin Glen Forest Park—£2.5m; Greater Shankill Community Council - RBL project- £300k, Stage 2— Glencairn Community Project— £700k; St Mary's CBS— no commitment Stage 1— An Sportslann; Suffolk Community Forum; Belfast Hills- Black Mountain Access—no commitment
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BIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF29	Greater Shankill Community Council - RBL	BIF- £300,000; SOF- £507,000	Complete	Project completed. Handover held on 21 February 2024.	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF09	Glencairn Community Project	BIF- £700,000; NRF- £200,000	Uncommitted; Due Diligence	The revised concept design for a smaller scale modular build has	Move to Stage 3- Committed

				been prepared and costed. Project has received an in-principle NRF allocation of £200k.	
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5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is a £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. 5 projects in West Belfast received an In-Principle funding commitment. Similar to LIF and BIF, all projects are subject to a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award.

SOF – West Belfast projects overview

West	Stage 3— James Connolly Interpretative Centre—£650,000; Rock Centre —£200,000; Belfast Orange Hall Museum- £80,000; Roddy McCorley Museum - £1,350,000; Berlin Swifts Football Club - £113,000; Greater Shankill Community Council - £507,000; Shankill Road Environmental Improvement Project - £50,000; Woodvale Park - £80,000
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An overview of the remaining SOF projects is outlined in the table below -

SOF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action / Recommendation
SOF05	Roddy McCorley Museum	SOF: £1,350,000 DfC: £250,000; £20,840	Complete	Project completed and premises open to the public. Landscaping works complete. Official opening took place in September 2023.	Continue engagement with the group.
SOF10	Shankill Road Environmental Improvement Project	£50,000	Complete	Funding agreement for Phase 2 to be prepared. Due Diligence complete.	Continue engagement with the group.
SOF13	Woodvale Park	SOF: £80,000; IFA/ DMCS: £120,000	Due Diligence	Works for replacement MUGA and floodlights are scheduled to commence on-site after Easter 2024, funded by IFA / DCMS.	Continue engagement with the group. Management arrangements to be confirmed with the club along with a response on their requests.

				<p>Discussions on management arrangements are ongoing including consideration of additional requests from club.</p> <p>The cost estimate for a sensory garden was estimated at £310,000 in Jan 2023 and would require additional funding sources in order to progress.</p>	
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6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund is a £10m capital fund to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. £3.3m was allocated to West Belfast and 6 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

West Belfast – NRF overview

West	<p>Stage 3— The Mountainview Hotel, Michael Davitt's Community Heritage Centre, Croí na Carraige - 'The Heart of the Rock' - Phase 1, The ACT Initiative Community Hub & Visitors' Centre, The Road, Glencairn Community Project (Hub)</p> <p>Stage 1— <i>Improving the Environment at Patrick Sarsfield's GAC, Corrigan Park Redevelopment Project, WCC New Purpose-Built Childcare and Family Support Centre, Curam Leanaí na Fuiseoige, Conway Mill - redeveloping for the future, Westcourt Uplift Project, Lamh Dhearg Renewable Energy & External Lighting Improvement scheme, St. Gall's Milltown Community Development, Colin Glen Eco Air-Cruizer, CNP Regeneration of Cloona House</i></p>
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West Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
The Mountainview Hotel	£1.5m	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the	Continue engagement with the group.

			group to discuss next steps.	
Michael Davitt's Community Heritage Centre	£647,000	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps. Group has secured a development grant funding of £99k from Heritage Fund.	Continue engagement with the group.
Croí na Carraige - 'The Heart of the Rock' - Phase 1	£500,000	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
The ACT Initiative Community Hub & Visitors' Centre	£295,000	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
The Road	£210,759	Stage 3- Committed	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Glencairn Community Project	£200,000	Stage 3- Committed	Link to BIF project. NRF Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	See note above at BIF09

7. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building/buying new ones. Members are reminded of the 3-stage approval process in place for every project on council's Capital Programme, as agreed by SP&R Committee. The table below provides an update on current live projects on the Council's Capital Programme in the West Belfast area.

West Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
City Cemetery Visitor Centre– Heritage Fund/ DfC	Project complete. The new centre is operational. <i>Members will continue to receive reports on this</i>

	<i>project until the other external works and signage are completed.</i> Final restoration works are now complete at the Central Steps, and work is continuing on the Victorian Fountain. External dual language signage works are due to be installed in March.
Playground Programme – Northlink	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Northlink playground works are scheduled to complete in April 2024.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> In January, SP&R Committee agreed terms of reference for a local inquiry in the event that an objection to a proposed Gating Order is received. Members granted approval for the publication of a Gating Order in November 2023 for certain streets and to proceed with a ten-week consultation for the remaining streets. Members are to be informed via CNS when that consultation process commences.
Access to the Hills - connections from Cavehill to Divis Mountain and Black Mountain	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> This is also being considered within the wider study as below and is part of the Peace Plus 'Access to the Hills' application.
Black Mountain / Upper Whiterock Greenway	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Design stage. Design team is continuing to develop the project to prepare for planning application. Ongoing engagement with DfI as key partner.
Colin Greenway	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Business case related to the development of the Colin Active Travel Routes prepared. In contact with funding partners requesting support to deliver the project. Ongoing engagement with DfI as key partner.
Connectivity - Access to Hills Programme (city wide)	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Secured DAERA funding for the Access to the Belfast Hills Feasibility Study. Study and delivery plan was completed in April 2023. Ongoing consultation with other stakeholders. Presented to Members in Autumn 2023. It is one of identified routes submitted in the Peace Plus Local Action Plan application.
Belfast Bikes Expansion	Further expansion – Workshop with Members to be arranged. Falls Road/Coláiste Feirste – complete and operational since October 2023. Glencairn – will be installed in Spring 2024. The contract with existing operator that is coming to an end in March 2024, will be extended until the end of the year. The tender for a new provider/operator will be published in Spring 2024.

8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for several government departments on key capital investment programmes, namely Urban Villages (UV) from the Executive Office, Peace IV, DfI as well as schemes with DfC. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to West Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

The table below shows the status on UV projects in West Belfast – note the UV programme has a defined West Belfast geography (Colin area).

West Belfast – UV overview

Project	Status and update
Colin Community Health and Wellbeing Hub	Council is acting as Delivery Partner. This is a developing project from Colin Neighbourhood Partnership. At business case stage and subject to TEO approval. This project is classified as transformational. Planning application submitted. Funding application submitted by the Group to the PeacePLUS Programme.

PEACEIV – Capital Projects

Members are asked to note updates on the capital projects that are related to the PEACEIV Programme.

West Belfast – Peace IV Capital Projects overview

Project	Status and update
Forth Meadow Community Greenway	Project completed. Signage package to be installed subject to agreement via Committee and Council.
Black Mountain Shared Space Project	On ground. Phase 1. Works progressing. Liaising with end users regarding reducing the deficit through applications for funding. Funding deficit being finalised. Phase 2. Design team appointed. Planning permission received. Procurement of works contractor complete. Funding deficit and currently liaising with existing funders IFI/DfC/DoJ and BMSSP regarding additional funding.
Shankill Shared Women's Centre	On ground. Works complete, snagging and mobilisation underway. End users staggered decant from their existing premises from March to June to maintain existing service provision. Liaising with end users regarding reducing the deficit for programming. Funding deficit being finalised. Official opening tentatively set for 27 June 2024.

Dfl funded projects

Below is the status update on projects funded by Department for Infrastructure in West Belfast.

Dfl – West Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Covered cycle stands Phase 2	<i>Via Dfl Active Travel Enablers Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund</i> Complete - Andersonstown Leisure Centre, Páirc Nua Chollann and Brook Leisure Centre. Funding has been received for Phase 3 of this programme. It will see the delivery of covered cycle stands in locations at Musgrave Park, Falls Park and Whiterock Leisure Centre.

DfC funded projects

Members are asked to note that projects match funded by Department for Communities are covered elsewhere - Berlin Swifts Football Club, Forth Meadow Community Greenway, Black Mountain Shared Space Project, except Paisley Park Sportsplex refurbishment which is reported below.

Project	Status and update
Paisley Park Sportsplex refurbishment	<i>On ground.</i> Refurbishment of the existing 3G pitch, provision of floodlighting, changing facilities and associated amenities. 3G pitch completed. Base for changing facilities has been installed and modular unit now on site. Changing facilities will be operational in March. Ongoing discussions with DfC regarding land arrangements."

A Member highlighted antisocial behaviour issues that were occurring at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway at Springfield Road, and asked officers to liaise with Youth Workers and Community organisations in the area to try and resolve any issues.

A further Member referred to the success of the refurbished Muga Pitch at Woodvale Park and asked officers to liaise with her outside of the meeting in regard to the possibility of the Shankill Juniors accessing the Pavilion space at Woodvale Park.

The Working Group recommended to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it adopt the recommendations at paragraph 2.0 of the report and note the update on the capital projects related to the PEACEIV Programme.

Summer Programming Additional Needs - Verbal update

The Lead Officer - Community Provision explained that children with special needs were often not able to avail of summer schemes due to their high support needs and that a report had recently been submitted to the People and Communities Committee to consider the inclusion of children with special needs in the holiday scheme programme.

He outlined that, in order to contribute to addressing that gap in provision, the Committee had agreed that a request be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee seeking funding for specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, one in each area of the City, at a total cost of £80,000 (maximum £20,000 per scheme), which would allow increased numbers of children to participate in summer schemes that were suitable for their needs, with discussions to take place with the relevant Area Working Groups and the Youth Council in advance of any locations being agreed.

Several Members welcomed the introduction of the additional summer schemes but highlighted the need for the programme, post pilot, to be needs based rather than area-based.

Noted.

Request to Present at a Future Meeting – St Michael’s Boxing Club

At the request of the Chairperson, Councillor McCann, the Working Group agreed to invite St Michael’s Boxing Club to a future meeting of the Working Group.

Chairperson

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East Belfast Area Working Group

Wednesday, 28th February, 2024

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Flynn (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor and Rodgers;
Councillors Bower, R. Brooks, P. Donnelly,
D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Ferguson, Hanvey,
Long, McCormick, F. McAteer, McMullan,
and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. Kalke, Client Manager;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. E. Gowdy, Lead Officer, Open Spaces and Streetscene;
and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Department for Infrastructure - Active Travel Discussion

The Working Group was reminded that, at its meeting in October, it had agreed to invite the Department for Infrastructure to attend a future meeting to discuss the expansion of the Belfast Bikes Network, the Belfast Bike Scheme and issues impacting the East of the city.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. McParland, Head of Active Travel, and Ms. S. Dustagheer, representing the Department for Infrastructure, to the meeting.

Mr. McParland answered a range of questions in relation to the Belfast Cycle Network Plan, its resources, funding challenges and implications, staffing pressures,

He stated that the funding for the Belfast Cycle Network for next year had not yet been agreed, however, detailed designs for part of the routes of the short term delivery phase of the Network had been completed and would be open for consultation and engagement soon.

He outlined the Active Travel Teams ambitions for the future and provided an update on the schemes at Ravenhill Road, Mount Road and the Sydenham Greenway, together with the consideration of the Victoria Park Underpass. One Member raised issues regarding the Montgomery Road Scheme in relation to residents' concerns regarding the trees at the rear of their properties and the land ownership, together with the potential removal of parking bays.

Mr. McParland advised he would investigate the issues raised and provide further information in due course.

During discussion, Mr. McParland and Ms. S. Dustagheer outlined the process of delivery and highlighted that it typically took two years to deliver a scheme. He confirmed that a number of schemes were ready to be delivered in 2024, with a majority of the remaining schemes to be delivered in 2025. He advised that it was anticipated that critical junctions on the network would also be improved.

Mr. McParland advised that the cycle network played an important role in making short term journeys attractive and highlighted that the Belfast Cycle Network was the focus for delivery in Belfast and confirmed that schemes had been laid out city wide.

In response to a Member's question in relation to promoting active travel within schools, Mr. McParland described how the Cycling Proficiency Programme and the Active School Travel Programme were both still running and were very valuable. He highlighted that the Department added the greatest value in providing suitable infrastructure to enable school children to feel safe on their journeys.

During further discussion, the representatives explained the different types of cycle lanes, together with the temporary measures and interventions. They also answered a range of questions on the gritting of cycle lanes in bad weather and restricted speed zones.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, Mr. McParland would provide further information on the issues raised.

Additional Item – Expansion of the Belfast Bikes Network

The Working Group was reminded that, at its meeting in September 2023, it had discussed the potential for a new stand on the Upper Newtownards Road. As an agreement with local businesses/landowners could not be secured in the preferred location, Members had agreed a back-up location on Sandown Car Park. Several options in the car park were explored and the initial option would result in the loss of three car parking spaces.

The Client Manager advised that the car park team had refused the location due to the risk of a legal challenge if they suspended parking bays under the current Off Street Parking Order. Subsequent discussions with the Department for Infrastructure in relation to the legislation and the possibility for a pilot scheme were held and, though the DfI would not contradict a pilot scheme on this site, it would be a lengthy process. The Client Manager reported that the team had identified an alternative area within the Car Park, close to the bus stop (also supported by DfI) and suggested that the Working Group move forward with the Bike Stand at Sandown Road Car Park.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed that, as part of the expansion in the East area for Phase 4 2022/23, a new bike station be installed at the car park at Sandown Road.

Chairperson

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 7th March, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Flynn (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor and Rodgers;
Councillors Bower, R. Brooks, de Faoite,
P. Donnelly, S. Douglas, Ferguson, Hanvey,
Maghie, F. McAteer, McCormick, McMullan and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. D. Logan, Programme Delivery Manager;
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Services Integration Manager;
Mr. C. McCann, Lead Officer - Community Provision; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor D. Douglas.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 30th November were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to Item 5 – Request to Present – Hanwood Trust, Councillor S. Douglas declared an interest in that he was a Board Member of the organisation and left the meeting while the item was under consideration.

Physical Programme Update

The Programme Delivery Manager presented the following report to the Working Group:

“1. Introduction

The Council’s Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the physical programme update for East Belfast, and;
- Note the proposed site visits to two NRF Stage 2 Projects - Dundela Football, Athletic and Social Club - Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park, and East Belfast Mission - Hosford Community Homes

3. Local Investment Fund

LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG areas; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation with the East being allocated £1.127m under LIF1 and £1.2m under LIF2.

Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding spend to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 22 projects received In Principle support under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 19 have been completed and 2 projects are at due diligence stage.

LIF breakdown – East	LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	8 (80%)	£931,902	12 (100%)	£1,161,589
Number of Projects in Delivery				
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects at Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	2 (20%)	£100,000		
Total Number of Approved Projects	10	£1,031,902	12	£1,161,589

The table below provides an overview of progress and actions around the remaining live projects.

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action / Recommendation
ELIF31	Bloomfield FC, Clonduff FC, East Belfast FC and Glentoran Academy, Tullycarnet, Cregagh Wanderers, Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Bredagh GAC –	£65,000 (£30k plus £35k reallocation)	Due Diligence	Phase 1 – Bloomfield FC, East Belfast FC, Tullycarnet FC and Cregagh Wanderers projects, including the Cregagh toilet facility have been signed off at Due Diligence. Containers have been delivered to Tullycarnet and Bloomfield. Cregagh ground work is complete and	Continue engagement with the groups

	storage facilities			<p>delivery of container and toilet is due to be complete by mid March. Awaiting signed funding agreement from East Belfast FC.</p> <p>Phase 2 - Bredagh is ready for consideration by the Due Diligence Group in March. Some information is still outstanding from the remaining groups including landowner permissions for Glentoran and Nettlefield Multi-sports. Updated DD information will be required from Clonduff FC once the location of the proposed container has been agreed.</p>	
ELIF29	Cycling Ireland	£70,000	Due Diligence	Due diligence stage ongoing. Project design and licence arrangements in discussion and to be confirmed.	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.

4. **Belfast Investment Fund**

Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250,000 investment from Council. In East Belfast 9 projects have received an In-Principle funding commitment under BIF. There are 5 projects on the longer BIF list. Each of the In Principle projects are taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. The table below provides a summary of BIF allocated projects i.e. project stage; project title; and the funding allocated.

Summary of BIF allocated projects:

East	<p>Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£440k</p> <p>Stage 2—Lagan Village Youth & Community—no commitment</p> <p>Stage 1—East Belfast Mission; Belmont Bowling Club; Bloomfield Presbyterian Church; St. John's Orange field, Church of Ireland, Tullycarnet Community Support Services—no commitment / on long list</p>
Outer East	<p>Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh</p>

	Presbyterian Church—£382k
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The table below provides an overview of the remaining projects. Members are asked to note the actions and recommendations.

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF12	Strand Arts Centre	£6,940,069 Comprising: LUF £4m BIF £1,550,000 HF £255,000 (Development Grant), £768,069 (Delivery Grant)	Stage 3 – procurement stage	The application to HF for Delivery funding has been successful. Discussions with DfC on potential funding are also continuing. The project is at RIBA Stage 4. Preparation for contractor procurement is underway with appointment expected by Spring 2024.	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF13	Bloomfield Community Association	£715,009 Comprising £440,000 plus reallocations of £60,009 and £215,000	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	<i>[No change]</i> . The Group is continuing to actively explore additional funding opportunities to meet the shortfall estimated at approx. £100k as of June 2023. An application to DfC has been submitted but no funds are available at present.	Continue engagement with the group.

Outer East BIF Projects

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF38	Castlereagh Presbyterian Church	£382,000	Stage 3 – Due Diligence	Due Diligence preparation has been carried out – the information has been collated and will be considered in March.	Continued engagement with group and progress through Due Diligence.

5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. There is one project under SOF for East Belfast - Eastside Visitor Centre – with an In-Principle funding commitment. Similar to BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award.

Project	SOF Award	Status and update
Eastside Visitor Centre <i>Link to UV project</i>	£700,000	<i>Business case stage.</i> Partner project with Urban Villages. The project proposal is for the extension of the existing visitor centre at C.S. Lewis Square. Funding gap identified. Status remains as reported previously - Final draft business case completed and remains with Executive Office.

6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund is a £10m capital fund to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. £2.2m was allocated to East Belfast and 6 projects are now Stage 2- Development. Each project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place.

East Belfast – NRF overview

East	Stage 2 - Eastside Container Hotel, Impact Belfast, Nevin Spence Centre Visitor Experience, Portview Exchange, Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park, Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road
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East Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 2 - Development

Project name	Status	Action/ Recommendation
Eastside Container Hotel	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Impact Belfast	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Nevin Spence Centre Visitor Experience	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Portview Exchange	Stage 2 development complete. Officer is in contact with the group to discuss next steps.	Continue engagement with the group.
Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park	Consultant has been appointed to develop Business Case. Project development ongoing with estimated completion by end of April 2024. Site visit for Members will be arranged in the coming weeks.	Continue engagement with the group and consultant. Site visit for Members to be arranged.
Hosford Community Homes: 335	Consultant has been appointed to develop Business Case. Project development ongoing with	Continue engagement with

Newtownards Road	estimated completion by end of April 2024. Site visit for Members will be arranged in the coming weeks.	the group and consultant. Site visit for Members to be arranged.
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7. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building / buying new assets. Members are reminded of the 3-stage approval process in place for every project on council's Capital Programme, as agreed by SP&R Committee. The table below provides an update on current live projects in East Belfast. Members are asked to note the status and update.

East Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
New Crematorium	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> RIBA Stage 4 Technical Design is complete. Planning Approval received in June 2023. Tender process is underway. Alternative use for existing building is being explored currently.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> In January, SP&R Committee agreed terms of reference for a local inquiry in the event that an objection to a proposed Gating Order is received. Members granted approval for the publication of a Gating Order in November 2023 for certain streets and to proceed with a ten-week consultation for the remaining streets. Members are to be informed via CNS when that consultation process commences.
Cremated Remains Burial Plots	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Business case is being developed with CN&S Department and surveys are being arranged.
Sydenham Greenway	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Business case to be worked up with DfI who are at design development stage for the greenway. Ongoing discussion with DfI regarding joint delivery.
Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan. Officers had been liaising with the Education Authority on a potential youth facility at the council owned Ballymacarrett site. Representatives at EA have advised that they are developing a business case for capital funding for youth provision at this site for 2024/25 onwards. Officers are continuing to liaise with EA on the way forward.
Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to the Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East project.
Belfast Bikes Expansion	Further expansion:

	<p>Castlereagh Road – complete and operational since August 2023. Sandown Rd carpark – will be installed in Spring 2024.</p> <p>The contract with existing operator that is coming to an end in March 2024, will be extended until the end of the year. The tender for a new provider/ operator will be published in Spring 2024.</p>
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8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for a number of government departments on significant capital investment programmes, namely the Urban Villages Initiative (UV) funded by the Executive Office, and number of schemes with DfC. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to East Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

Project	Status and update
Pitt Park redevelopment <i>Council asset</i>	<i>Project underway.</i> This UV funded project is on a Council site and the Council is acting as the delivery partner. Contractor started on site in August 2023 and project completion is anticipated in Spring 2024. Ongoing community engagement information sessions are taking place.
Hosford Community Homes Inclusion Hub	<i>Project underway.</i> Council is acting as Delivery Partner. Contractor has been appointed with estimated completion in Spring 2025.
Pop EastSide- Landmark East <i>Link to SOF project 'Eastside Visitor Centre' and NRF 'Eastside Container Hotel'</i>	<i>Business case stage.</i> Partner project with Urban Villages. The project proposal is for the extension of the existing visitor centre at C.S. Lewis Square. Funding gap identified. Status remains as reported previously - Final draft business case completed and remains with Executive Office.
Titanic People Exhibition	<i>Letter of Offer stage.</i> The Council awaits a Letter of Offer from the Executive Office. The contractor is expected on site late Spring 2024 with project completion anticipated by Spring 2025.
Portview Exchange <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i>	<i>Business case stage.</i> The Letter of Offer is expected by Autumn 2024 once TEO have approved the business case.

DfC and DfI funded projects

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Infrastructure and the Department for Communities in East Belfast.

DfI and DfC – East Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
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Covered cycle stands Phase 3 –East	<p><i>Via DfI Active Travel Enablers Blue and Green Infrastructure Fund</i></p> <p>The third phase of this programme will see the delivery of covered cycle stands in locations at Connswater Community Greenway, Victoria Park, Orangefield Park and Tullycarnet Centre (Comber Greenway).</p>
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EB Northern Ireland Ltd (Landfill Communities Fund)

One project is receiving capital funding via EBNI in East Belfast:

Project	Status and update
Cherryvale Playing Fields Improvements Pitch 1	The project involves erection of catch nets, spectator fencing and path on one boundary of Pitch 1 at Cherryvale Playing Fields. All fencing works are complete. Ball catch netting to be installed when ground conditions improve and in advance of season commencing in April 2024.

Update to Members following site visit - Braniel Community Centre

In September 2023, the East AWG agreed that the Property & Projects Department would undertake a visit to the Braniel Community Centre and report back to the Area Working Group.

Officers visited the centre in September 2023 and discussed the centre, pitch and playground. Officers within City & Neighbourhood Services Department were also contacted. Members are updated as follows:

- The centre is situated at Warren Grove and comprises a main hall, a committee/small meeting room and a youth room. There is an outdoor mini pitch. The centre is a bookable space with no set opening hours. Usage is typically below the target figure for Council centres.
- In terms of the pitch provision, the Council is currently progressing an overall pitches strategy to understand demand for pitches.
- The Braniel playground mean quality score for 2023 was classified as ‘very good’ and the equipment is considered in satisfactory condition.
- A process is underway across the Council in terms of identifying future capital priorities. These requirements are significant across the city. Any suitable external funding sources are also being explored where applicable, and officers continue to work with partners to maximise investment in areas. The discussions to date on Braniel have been captured as part of the list of emerging capital requests and will be considered as part of that wider piece of work moving forward.”

During discussion, the Working Group thanked the Property and Projects Team for their hard work and delivery of worthwhile projects.

After discussion, the Working Group:

- Noted the physical programme update for East Belfast, and;
- Noted the proposed site visits to two of the NRF Stage 2 Projects - Dundela Football, Athletic and Social Club - Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park, and East Belfast Mission - Hosford Community Homes.

Larder Foodbank Engagement Update

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager reminded the Working Group that, following a members' site visit to The Larder in November 2023, the Working Group had agreed that officers would engage with The Larder on their future plans and report back to the Area Working Group.

She advised that officers had met with the group and discussed its plans for the future. She confirmed that the group had consulted with architects on the purchase and operation of containers to help expand their work but they have found this to be too costly an option, at present.

She highlighted that she had shared details of potential external capital funding opportunities and The Larder had also been linked into the Council's Climate team in City and Organisational Strategy via the Sustainable Food Partnership.

The Working Group noted the information provided and that the Larder might wish to engage further with the Working Group in the future.

Summer Programming Additional Needs - Verbal Update

The Lead Officer - Community Provision explained that children with special needs were often not able to avail of summer schemes due to their high support needs and that a report had recently been submitted to the People and Communities Committee to consider the inclusion of children with special needs in the holiday scheme programme.

He outlined that, in order to contribute to addressing that gap in provision, the Committee had agreed that a request be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, seeking funding for specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, one in each area of the City, at a total cost of £80,000 (maximum £20,000 per scheme), which would allow increased numbers of children to participate in summer schemes that were suitable for their needs, with discussions to take place with the relevant Area Working Groups and the Youth Council in advance of any locations being agreed.

During discussion, one Member highlighted that Mitchell House School already used the Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, so would be a good starting point for engagement, together with other special needs schools.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the update and that Members would send the Lead Officer any further recommendations of any particular groups which operated within East Belfast which he might not have yet engaged with.

Request to Present - Hanwood Trust

Alderman Lawlor advised that he had received a request from the Hanwood Trust who operated the football pitch in Tullycarnet. He suggested that they had ambitions plans which they wished to present to the Area Working Group.

The Working Group agreed that representatives of the Hanwood Trust be invited to attend a future meeting of the Working Group.

Chairperson



Subject:	Medium Term Financial Plan Update 2024/25 – 2027/28
Date:	22 nd March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	Anne Millar, Financial Planning Manager

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The purpose of the report is to present members with an update on the work underway to implement a robust approach to longer term financial planning in compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the work to be completed to agree priorities for 2025/26 to 2027/28.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	SP&R at its meeting on 19 January 2024 agreed to an update report on the development and implementation of a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).
3.2	Integrating and aligning strategies with resources is central to financial resilience and stability as the impact of actions or decisions on one or more of these strategies will have an impact on the others. The key planning processes in the Council are:
3.3	<p>Financial Planning - Revenue Estimates – August to January</p> <p>The striking of the district rate by 15th February each year is a statutory requirement set out in the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland)2011. The financial planning process each August with the issuing of High-Level Guidance to Chief Officers, after consultation with Members. After consideration of draft estimates, each Standing Committee considers their cash limit for the following financial year as recommended by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. Full Council must ratify the Council estimates before 15th February each year.</p>
3.4	The revenue budgets for 2024/25 have been approved by Council in February and provide the cash limit available to each Chief Officer for delivering services. The Council's Financial Regulations require each Chief Officer to deliver a balanced budget by the year end. Should the need for unbudgeted expenditure arise during the year, the Director of Finance will assess funding options for the proposal which should only proceed with his approval.
3.5	<p>Corporate Planning</p> <p>The four-year corporate planning cycle is timed around the electoral cycle so that a new plan is agreed for the April following the local government elections. This gives elected Members approximately nine months to work with Officers in establishing the priorities for the Council over the next four years. At its meeting on 18th August 2023, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved a report on the proposed approach and timeline for the development of the 2024 – 28 Corporate Plan and accompanying Committee and Departmental Plans for 2024-25 as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Party Group Leaders, Committee Chairs and Chief Officers Workshop – late September 2023 • Committee Planning Workshops – early October 2023 • Draft Corporate Plan/Committee Plans/Departmental Plans – (CMT 8th November 2023) • All Member Workshop – November 2023 • Strategic Policy and Resources Committee – 24th November and 15th December • Draft Corporate Plan and Committee Plans to Committee – January/February 2024

3.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight Week Public Consultation Period – February/March 2024 • Final Four Year Corporate and Committee Plans agreed – April – May 2024 <p>The corporate planning process is ongoing and the revised timeline for the completion of the Corporate Plan and the accompanying Committee and Departmental Plans is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CMT consider the draft 2024-2028 Corporate Plan and 2024-2025 Delivery Plan and Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-2025 return suggested changes/ additions to the Strategy, Policy and Partnerships Team by 20 March 2024. • Draft performance improvement objectives presented to SP&R Committee on 20 March 2024. - CMT agree that DMTs be invited to the extended CMT workshop on 27 March 2024 and inform SPP if they would like any additional officers invited. • Extended CMT discussion of draft corporate plan, delivery plan and performance objectives on 27 March 2024; • Public consultation on the draft performance improvement objectives April-May 2024 • All Member workshop with a focus on resourced delivery in 2024-2025 (to inform annual delivery plan) and performance targets (April 2024, date TBC). • Internal engagement with departments on the development of the Performance Improvement Plan (milestones, performance indicators and targets). • Draft Corporate Plan 2024-2028. Annual Delivery plan and Performance Improvement Plan to CMT for final sign off – early May • Draft Corporate Plan and draft Annual Delivery Plan to SP&R Committee for agreement, subject to public consultation (24 May 2024) • Committee Plans agreed at P&C and CG&R Committee – May 2024. • Performance Improvement Plan 2024-2025 agreed by SP&R Committee on 21 June 2024. • Public Consultation - June 2024 • Launch of internal communications plan – June 2024
	Financial Sustainability
3.7	<p>The Council relies on rate income to fund almost 80% of its services. Rate base vulnerability has been and remains a financial risk to the Council. Having an integrated MTFP showing budgetary pressures will focus on progressing income generation and investment opportunities that will lessen the reliance on rate income. In the longer term, this approach will demonstrate the Council's financial resilience which in turn will attract more investors to help achieve the ambitious long-term plans set out in the Belfast Agenda.</p>
3.8	<p>Appendix 1 provides a draft Medium Term Financial Plan Format. This provides information on the background to what is include in a MTFP. Significant work is still to be undertaken in relation to the Forward Planning and Capital Programme areas with further work on the development of these to continue over the coming months.</p>

	Next Steps
3.9	<p>A planning workshop will be held with Members in April to reaffirm Council priorities over the life of the Corporate Plan.</p> <p>Chief Officers will align budgets and reserves to these priorities going forward.</p> <p>Chief Officers will outline new pressures where funding sources do not exist within departmental budgets.</p> <p>An update on the development of the MTFP will be brought to Committee in June</p>
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.10	None
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.11	None
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 To 2027/28

BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024/25 TO 2027/28

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Purpose of the MTFP**
- 1.2 Objectives of the MTFP**
- 1.3 Principles of the MTFP**
- 1.4 Responsibility for Delivery of the MTFP**

2.0 Factors Influencing the MTFP

- 2.1 External and Internal Factors**
- 2.2 BCC Corporate Planning**
- 2.3 BCC Strategies and Plans**

3.0 Resources

- 3.1 Budgets and Reserves 2024/25**
- 3.2 Financial Risks 2024/25**
- 3.3 Forward Planning – 2025/26 – 2027/28**
- 3.4 Capital Programme**

Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28

1.0 Introduction

The Council has faced a sustained period of financial pressures in recent years. Brexit, the Covid pandemic and global instability have all contributed leading to the cost of living crisis, highlighting the vulnerability of Council finances to external, uncontrollable pressures. In 2023/24 the unprecedented level of uncontrollable costs resulted in the Council agreeing to a 2 year funding strategy to meet budget demands, emphasizing the need for better forward financial planning to ensure the financial sustainability of the Council.

Financial planning sits at the heart of strong and robust public financial management. The ability to look strategically beyond the current financial year is essential to support the Council's overall resilience and longer term financial sustainability while providing the framework against which the Council's annual budget is produced.

Given the economic uncertainty both globally, nationally, locally and the widespread pressures on Council spending from growth in demand for services, it is more important than ever that the Council has a thorough understanding of the financial outlook to enable more effective planning for the future.

1.1 Purpose of the MTFP

The purpose of this Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) is to provide Members and Chief Officers with an appreciation of the financial challenges and resources constraints facing the Council over the next four years so that spending decisions can be taken on an informed basis. Going forward the MTFP will link the Council's vision and priorities, as set out in the 4-year Corporate Plan with estimated financial resources. ([put in link to Corporate Plan](#)) The MTFP will bring together all known factors affecting the Council's financial position and its financial sustainability into one place. This should balance the financial implications of objectives, ambitions and policies against the constraint in resources.

The MTFP does not constitute a formal budget. It provides the financial parameters within which budget and service planning should take place to

ensure the Council sets an annual balanced budget. In accordance with the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, the final decisions on the overall budget and district rate increase are for full Council ratification following the appropriate consultations with Chief Officers and Committees of the Council. The financial challenges, assumptions and priorities facing the Council will be updated on an annual basis and refreshed with each new Council.

The MPFP is the pivotal link for translating the Council's ambitions and constraints into deliverable options for the future.

1.2 Objectives of the MTFP

The key objectives of the Council's MTFP are:

- To ensure that the Council sets a balanced, sustainable budget year by year, so that forecast spending does not exceed forecast resources available to it;
- To plan for a level of district rate income that is fair and affordable for ratepayers and has the financial capacity to deliver the Council's policies and objectives;
- To redirect resources over time to support and resource the priorities of the Corporate Plan
- To maintain sufficient reserves and balances to ensure that the Council's long term financial position remains sound.

1.3 Principles of the MTFP

Although the statutory local authority budget setting process continues to be on an annual basis, the CIPFA Financial Management Code recommends that a longer-term perspective is essential if the Council is to demonstrate its financial sustainability.

CIPFA is not at present being prescriptive about the time period of this long-term financial strategy. Different authorities will face different levels of political and financial stability which may have become embedded in different management cultures. However, CIPFA would promote ambition and stress the need for a financial strategy that matches the requirement for a strategic approach to service

planning. The underlying key demand cost drivers, especially those linked to the age profile of the community, can be foreseen at least in broad terms for a decade and more ahead.

The Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan have set out the Council's ambitions, outcomes and priorities for Belfast. The MTFP is the pivotal link for translating the Council's ambitions and constraints into deliverable options for the future. These can only be delivered through a sound understanding of the organisations longer term financial sustainability, enabling decisions to be made that balance the resource implications of plans against the financial constraints.

The governing principles which provide the basis for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 to 2027/28 are that:

- The Council's resources will be directed to achieving the overall objectives and key priorities as agreed by the Council and outlined in the Corporate Plan
- The Council will estimate both income and expenditure required for the delivery of services and the gap between income and expenditure will form the baseline against which income generation, savings options and further efficiencies must be implemented.
- The Council will seek in the first instance to balance its revenue budget over the period of the MTFP without reliance on the use of reserves, maintaining departmental spending within approved budgets.
- The Council will continue to focus on delivering value for money - managing service delivery more efficiently, streamlining processes and systems, getting better value from commissioning and procurement, while seeking to minimise the impact of budget savings on priority services.
- The Council will continue to explore opportunities for working in collaboration and partnership in support of the overall objective and key priorities in the Corporate Plan. This may include different service delivery models and sourcing and securing external funding.
- The Council makes decisions on evidence-based information. Chief Officers must take the necessary steps to improve the accuracy and quality of data throughout the Council to ensure that budget and other decisions are taken on a sound financial basis.

- The Council will maintain general and reserves balances in line with CIPFA recommendations. Reserve forecasts will be reported quarterly to Committees and will be reviewed annually as part of setting the annual rate setting process.

1.4 RESPONSIBILITY FOR DELIVERY OF THE MTFP

The key to the successful implementation of the MTFP is the ability to provide clear, evidenced based information to decision makers on the actions that are needed to ensure long-term financial sustainability. Therefore, ownership of the MTFP by Members and CMT is essential for embedding a sound financial management culture throughout Belfast City Council.

2.0 Factors Influencing the MTFP

2.1 External and Internal Factors

Cost of Living

The Council's financial position is impacted by the wider national and international economic context. The cost-of-living crisis started in 2021 when prices for many essential goods increased faster than household incomes, resulting in a fall in real income. Global factors including the wars in Russia/Ukraine and the Middle East resulted in the energy crisis and supply chain disruption, leading to increased costs in many services. The cost-of-living crisis has impacted on the costs of service delivery and ratepayers ability to pay rates.

One of the main risks in developing and managing the capital programme is that insufficient resources are available to resource the impact of inflationary pressures such as the cost of materials. Current high inflation is impacting on the cost of delivering capital projects and these pressures need to be managed appropriately to limit the revenue impact associated with requiring increased borrowing to fund these costs.

Energy Costs

The Council did not increase its energy related budgets in 2023/24 or 2024/25 because of the on-going volatility in the energy market. In addition, the Bank of England projected decreasing energy costs in the medium term. Current base

budgets for energy are inadequate to cover current utility costs and are being funded from specified reserves. Work is ongoing with the Council's Energy Management consultants to manage the financial risks around energy costs over the medium term.

Inflation

The February 2024 Bank of England Monetary Report reports that inflation in the UK has fallen from a peak of 11% in 2022 to 4% in December 2023. Although still above the 2% target, the Bank of England is clear that the inflation target of 2% applies at all times, reflecting the primacy of price stability in the UK monetary policy framework. The framework recognises that there will be occasions when inflation will depart from the target because of shocks and disturbances. However, the Bank of England's monetary policy will ensure that CPI inflation returns to the 2% target sustainably in the medium term. Therefore, for the period of the Council's MTFP, the outlook for inflation is at or below 2%.

Interest Rates

The Bank of England Base rate is currently at 5.25%, its highest level since 2008. Interest rates impact the Council's borrowing and investments and the impact of interest rates over the medium term is managed through the Treasury Management and Prudential Code Strategies.

National Pay Awards

Pay awards are agreed nationally and paid for by the Council. The settlement for 2024/25 is yet to be agreed. Employee costs account for almost 60% of the Councils revenue budget and therefore the pay awards are a significant factor in medium term planning.

NI Executive

The lack of a functioning Executive for five of the last seven years has put pressure on Northern Ireland's finances. A combination of weak budget management due to the inability to make decisions, inflation and pay pressures have contributed to

Executive Department overspends, leading to the reduction or cessation of financial support to the Council.

The recently restored Executive has been asked to publish a fiscal sustainability plan and it is anticipated that such a plan, when implemented, may result in additional financial support for local government. However, with the overspends and pressures in the Executive there is a risk that support for local government may not be forthcoming, putting pressure on the Council to address funding gaps.

Alternative Delivery Models

The Council uses a number of alternative delivery models to help deliver value for money services. These include:

- BWUH Ltd
- GLL
- Innovation Factory
- Partnerships incl BRCD
- Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau
- Independently Managed Facilities

Reducing the rate burden while improving and transforming service delivery were the drivers for establishing alternative delivery models. The performance of these models should be included in the financial reports to Committee to ensure they continue to support the Council in delivering cost effective services.

In addition, exit strategies need to be developed for services where external funding, included in recurring budgets, will cease in the medium term.

District Rate Increases/Rate Income

BCC relies on rate income to fund almost 80% of its services. Rate base vulnerability is a corporate risk from a financial planning perspective. The changing landscape in the city centre because of the decline in retail and office accommodation may impact negatively on rate income as the city transitions through its regeneration plans.

The Executive have acknowledged that the rating system in Northern Ireland needs to be modernised. Northern Ireland businesses pay the highest business rates in the UK. The Council has a duty to provide value for money services so that rate increases are kept to a minimum.

Belfast Demographics

Services provided by the Council must respond to the needs of residents. The underlying key demand cost drivers, especially those linked to the demographics of Belfast should be visible in departmental plans, with a clear link to future trends to demonstrate why resources need to be continually realigned to demand. The MTFP needs to consider how current and future financing plans will meet the expectations of those who live, work and visit Belfast.

In Belfast:

15.8% of the working age population have no qualifications

58% of the working population travel to work by car or van

22% of children are in low-income

6 out of the 10 most deprived electoral wards in Northern Ireland are in Belfast

15% of people are 65+years and this is predicted to grow to 20% by 2035

42% of the population are 30 years or younger

97 physical barriers or peace walls remain

2.2 BCC Corporate Plan 2024-2028

The MTFP will be aligned to the Council's Corporate Plan (2024-2028) which sets out our direction for the next four years, showing how the Council will play its part in fulfilling Belfast's huge potential. The plan commits to creating a place where people want to live, work, study, visit and enjoy. This will be achieved through continuing to work with partners across the city and using evidence and experience to make intelligent decisions. There is a strong recognition of the importance of the work of other organisations the council works with in delivering a city of opportunity.

2.3 BCC Supporting Strategies and Plans

The Corporate Plan is supported by a number of key corporate and departmental strategies.

Corporate Strategies include:

- People Strategy
- Digital Strategy
- Inclusive Growth Strategy
- Climate Strategy
- Capital Strategy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Corporate Pricing Framework

Departmental Strategies include:

- Tourism Strategy
 - Cultural Strategy
 - Regeneration Strategy
 - Pitches Strategy
 - Waste Strategy
 - Fleet Replacement Strategy
 - Neighbourhood Tourism Strategy
- Etc.....

Successful delivery of the above strategies will depend on the availability of resources.

3.0 Resources

3.1 Budgets and Reserves 2024/25

Council has approved the revenue estimates for 2024/25. The reserves balances for 2024/25 will be approved by Members in May 2024. Departments are expected to maintain expenditure within the approved cash limits and reserve allocations.

Departments are not permitted to exceed these limits without approval from the

Director of Finance. A summary of the overall position for 2024/25 is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: BCC Approved Budget and Reserves 2024/25

Source of Funding	2024/25 Budget/Allocation
Rate Income	
Government Grants	
Fees and Charges	
Other Income	
Expenditure	
Capital Financing	
General Reserves	y/end
Specified Reserves	y/end

3.2 Financial Risks 2024/25

Although the Council has agreed the financing required to support services in 2024/25, the underlying financial environment remains extremely challenging. In addition to the general impact from rising costs and the increasing demand for services, there are a number of key financial risks and uncertainties beyond March 2024, including:

Covid legacy – the impact particularly in terms of delivery models and lost or reduced income needs to be addressed in the MTFP

Interest rate risks – the sustained level of high interest rates increases the cost of borrowing for the Council, impacting on investment plans

Inflation risk – For the past number of years, except for contractual CPI, services have absorbed inflationary increases. Although the Bank of England projects that it will meet its 2% inflation target by the end of 2024, baseline prices have increased, and future inflationary increases will have to be included in uncontrollable costs. Inflation also has a significant impact on the delivery of the Council's capital programme.

Use of Reserves - for 2023/24 and 2024/25, the Council's base budget was supported using reserves. This is not a sustainable strategy over the medium term. The rate setting process for 2025/26 will revisit the use of reserves in supporting recurrent budgets.

Reliance on rate income – the Council relies on rate income to fund almost 80% of its services. The MTFP needs to consider a corporate framework for the scoping, development, implementation and management of a range of income generation and commercial opportunities to mitigate against the reliance on rate income.

Executive Funding – the Council sets its budget for the year ahead each February before support from Executive departments is known. Lack of clarity around the sustainability of Executive funding makes it difficult to plan effectively for service delivery. In addition, funding cuts in year puts pressure on the Council to deliver services when commitments to deliver have been made.

3.3 Forward Planning – 2025/26 – 2027/28

The rate setting process for 2025/26 and subsequent years will begin in August. As well as incorporating growth areas identified in the Corporate Plan, consideration must be given to the financial impact of the following issues over the next 3 years:

Expenditure related pressures

- Nationally agreed pay awards
- Superannuation – updated valuation due 2025/26
- Inflation
- Contractual commitments
- Corporate Plan commitments
- Unbudgeted expenditure 2024/25 - utilities
- Committee commitments made during 2024/25
- Revenue implications of capital investment
- **Budget Gap**

Closing the Gap

- District Rate Increase
- Income generation
- Efficiencies

3.4 Capital Programme



Subject:	CIPFA Prudential Code Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Indicators 2024/25
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	Helen Lyons, Corporate Finance Manager

Restricted Reports	
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"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	The Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 and the supporting Prudential and Treasury Codes produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), require the Council to consider the affordability and sustainability of capital expenditure decisions through the reporting of prudential and treasury management indicators.
1.2	The Prudential Code requires the Council to produce a Capital Strategy for 2024/25. This report provides information for Members on the Capital Strategy, incorporating the prudential indicators for Belfast City Council for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27, and the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the contents of this report and the prudential and treasury management indicators included within the appendices to the report. <p>And agree:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Authorised Borrowing Limit for the Council of £145m for 2024/25. • The Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25, which has been included as Appendix B to this report.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>The Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 requires the Council to adopt the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. In doing so, the Council is required to agree a minimum revenue provision policy annually and to set and monitor a series of Prudential Indicators, the key objectives of which are to ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of the council are affordable, prudent and sustainable.</p>
3.2	<p>At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 9 December 2011, Members approved the Council's Treasury Management Policy which is based on the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice. The Treasury Management Policy requires that a Treasury Management Strategy be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on an annual basis and that it is supported by a mid-year and year end treasury management reports. Recent changes in the CIPFA Prudential Code recommends best practice that treasury management reports are submitted on a quarterly basis.</p>
3.3	<p>The Capital Strategy, incorporating the prudential indicators, is included as Appendix A, while the Treasury Management Strategy and treasury management indicators have been included as Appendix B.</p>
3.4	<p>The comparison of "Gross Debt" to "Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)" is the main indicator of prudence when considering the proposed capital investment plans of the Council. Estimated gross debt should not exceed the CFR for the current year plus two years. The Council's estimated gross debt position, illustrated in Table 6, Appendix A, is comfortably within the CFR in the medium term. The Director of Finance therefore considers the estimated levels of gross debt as being prudent.</p>

3.5	Table 10 (Appendix A) shows the estimated financing costs for capital expenditure as a percentage of the estimated net revenue stream for the Council, based on the medium term. These illustrate that in the medium term, capital financing costs will represent an average of 6.27% of the Council's net running costs. On this basis the Director of Finance is satisfied that the level of capital expenditure is affordable.
3.6	The Finance Act requires the Council to set an affordable borrowing limit, relating to gross debt. The Prudential Code defines the affordable limit as the "Authorised Borrowing Limit" and gross borrowing must not exceed this limit. Table 8 (Appendix A) sets out the recommended "Authorised Borrowing Limit" for the Council as being £145m for 2024/25.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.7	As detailed in the report
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u>
3.8	None
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix A – Capital Strategy Report 2024/25 Appendix B – Annual Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25

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Capital Strategy Report 2024/25

1. Introduction

This capital strategy report gives a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability.

2. Capital Expenditure and Financing

Capital expenditure is where the Council spends money on assets, such as property or vehicles, which will be used for more than one year. In local government this includes spending on assets owned by other bodies, and loans and grants to other bodies enabling them to buy assets.

In 2024/25, the Council is planning capital expenditure of £52m as summarised below:

Table 1: Prudential Indicator: Estimates of Capital Expenditure in £thousands

	2023/24 forecast	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget	2026/27 budget
General Fund services	18,831	51,617	23,951	22,403

The capital expenditure forecast for 2024/25 continues to be monitored and reviewed, in terms of both project delivery and affordability. The Council is currently working on a long term capital expenditure forecast and will update the above table when this becomes available.

Governance – The Council’s Capital Programme is agreed on a yearly basis by the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in its role as the Council’s investment decision maker. All capital projects must go through a 3-stage approval process and decisions on which projects are added to the Capital Programme and which projects progress are also taken by SP&R Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and allows Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving capital projects. The Property & Projects Department and Financial Services calculate the financing cost of all proposals, including emerging proposals. As part of the final investment decision it must be confirmed that any project is within the affordability limits of the Council.

All capital expenditure must be financed, either from external sources (government grants and other contributions), the Council’s own resources (revenue, reserves and capital receipts) or debt (borrowing and leasing). The planned financing of the above expenditure is as follows:

Table 2: Capital financing in £thousands

	2023/24 forecast	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget	2026/27 budget
External sources	0	0	0	0
Own resources	13,939	22,356	12,745	15,064
Debt	4,892	29,261	11,206	7,339
TOTAL	18,831	51,617	23,951	22,403

Debt is only a temporary source of finance, since loans and leases must be repaid, usually from revenue which is known as minimum revenue provision (MRP). Alternatively, proceeds from selling capital assets (known as capital receipts) may be used to replace debt finance. Planned MRP is as follows:

Table 3: Repayment of debt finance in £thousands (MRP)

	2023/24 forecast	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget	2026/27 budget
Own resources	8,698	9,823	10,688	10,205

The Council's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the capital financing requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure and reduces with MRP and capital receipts used to repay debt. The CFR is expected to increase by £19m during 2024/25. Based on the above figures for expenditure and financing, the Council's estimated CFR is as follows:

Table 4: Prudential Indicator: Estimates of Capital Financing Requirement in £thousands

	31.3.2024 forecast	31.3.2025 budget	31.3.2026 budget	31.3.2027 budget
General Fund services	125,411	144,849	145,367	142,500

Asset Management – The Council is committed to ensuring that all Capital projects contribute to the strategic direction of the city and continue to be of long term use. The Council is currently in the process of looking at its Asset Management Strategy and is implementing a new Asset Management System to support the strategic objectives of better financial management, information management, planning and performance and asset management

Asset disposals: When a capital asset is no longer needed, it may be sold so that the proceeds, known as capital receipts, can be spent on new assets or to repay debt. Repayments of capital grants, loans and investments also generate capital receipts. The Council plans to receive £6m of capital receipts in the coming financial year as follows:

Table 5: Capital receipts in £thousands

	2023/24 forecast	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget	2026/27 budget
Asset sales	£216	£5,946	£2,000	£1,996
Loans repaid	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	£216	£5,946	£2,000	£1,996

3. Treasury Management

Treasury management is concerned with keeping sufficient but not excessive cash available to meet the Council's spending needs, while managing the risks involved. Surplus cash is invested until required, while a shortage of cash will be met by borrowing, to avoid excessive credit balances or overdrafts in the bank current account. The Council is typically cash rich in the short-term as revenue income is received before it is spent, but cash poor in the long-term as capital expenditure is incurred before being financed. The revenue cash surpluses are offset against capital cash shortfalls to reduce overall borrowing.

The Council currently has £39m borrowing and due to legacy loans taken at higher rates in the past and transfers of debt under Local Government, the average interest rate of these loans is 7.87%. The council also has £16m treasury investments at current average rate of 5.23%.

Borrowing strategy: The Council's main objectives when borrowing are to achieve a low but certain cost of finance while retaining flexibility should plans change in future. These objectives are often conflicting, and the Council therefore seeks to strike a balance between short-term loans (currently available at around 6%) and long-term fixed rate loans where the future cost is known (currently over 5%).

Projected levels of the Council's total outstanding debt (which comprises borrowing, leases and transfers from local government reorganisation are shown below, compared with the capital financing requirement (see above).

Table 6: Prudential Indicator: Gross Debt and the Capital Financing Requirement in £thousands

	31.3.2024 forecast	31.3.2025 budget	31.3.2026 budget	31.3.2027 budget
Debt (incl. PFI & leases)	38,521	56,987	65,563	73,348
Capital Financing Requirement	125,411	144,849	145,367	142,500

Statutory guidance is that debt should remain below the capital financing requirement, as can be seen from table 6.

Liability benchmark: To compare the Council's actual borrowing against an alternative strategy, a liability benchmark has been calculated showing the lowest risk level of borrowing. This assumes that cash and investment balances are kept to a minimum level of £10m at each year-end. This benchmark is currently £35m and is forecast to rise to £72m over the next three years.

Table 7: Prudential Indicator: Borrowing and the liability benchmark £thousands

	31.3.2024 forecast	31.3.2025 budget	31.3.2026 budget	31.3.2027 budget
Forecast borrowing	38,521	56,987	65,563	73,348
Liability Benchmark	35,051	56,789	63,806	71,940

The table shows that the Council's borrowing is currently above its liability benchmark. The Council is projecting to borrow over the next few years to meet capital expenditure requirements. This external borrowing is currently projected to be slightly higher than the estimated liability benchmark over the next three years, based on current forecasts. Work is progressing on the long term capital expenditure forecasts and when finalised the budget figures in the above table will be reviewed and amended accordingly.

Affordable borrowing limit: The Council is legally obliged to set an affordable borrowing limit (also termed the authorised limit for external debt) each year and to keep it under review. In line with statutory guidance, a lower "operational boundary" is also set as a warning level should debt approach the limit.

Table 8: Prudential Indicators: Authorised limit and operational boundary for external debt in £thousands

	2024/25 limit	2025/26 limit	2026/27 limit
Authorised limit – borrowing	144,849	145,367	142,500
Authorised limit – PFI and leases	0	0	0
Authorised limit – total external debt	144,849	145,367	142,500
Operational boundary – borrowing	128,849	129,367	126,500
Operational boundary – PFI and leases	0	0	0
Operational boundary – total external debt	128,849	129,367	126,500

Investment strategy: Treasury investments arise from receiving cash before it is paid out again. Investments made for service reasons or for pure financial gain are not generally considered to be part of treasury management.

The Council's policy on treasury investments is to prioritise security and liquidity over yield, that is to focus on minimising risk rather than maximising returns. Cash that is likely to be spent in the near term is invested securely, for example with the government, other local authorities or selected high-quality banks, to minimise the risk of loss. Both near-term and longer-term investments may be held in pooled funds, where an external fund manager makes decisions on which particular investments to buy and the Council may request its money back at short notice.

Table 9: Treasury management investments in £thousands

	31.3.2024 forecast	31.3.2025 budget	31.3.2026 budget	31.3.2027 budget
Near-term investments	13,000	10,000	12,000	11,000
Longer-term investments	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	13,000	10,000	12,000	11,000

Governance: Decisions on treasury management investment and borrowing are made daily and are therefore delegated to the Director of Finance and staff, who must act in line with the treasury management strategy approved by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (SP&R). Quarterly reports on treasury management activity may be presented to SP&R, where this committee is responsible for scrutinising treasury management decisions.

Liabilities

In addition to debt of £39m detailed above, the Council is making payments to cover its pension fund liability. It has also set aside £5.6m to cover risks of insurance claims and Landfill Closure. The Council is also at risk of having to pay for its share of the ARC 21 Joint Committee contingent liability but has not put aside any money.

Governance: Decisions on incurring new discretionary liabilities are taken by departmental Chief Officers in consultation with the Director of Finance. The risk of liabilities crystallising and requiring payment is monitored by central finance and reported quarterly to the Director of Finance. New liabilities exceeding £1m are reported to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval/notification as appropriate.

4. Revenue Budget Implications

Although capital expenditure is not charged directly to the revenue budget, interest payable on loans and MRP are charged to revenue. The net annual charge is known as financing costs; this is compared to the net revenue stream i.e. the amount funded from the District Rate and general government grants.

Table 10: Prudential Indicator: Proportion of financing costs to net revenue stream

	2023/24 forecast	2024/25 budget	2025/26 budget	2026/27 budget
Financing costs (£'000)	9,638	11,860	13,282	13,435
Proportion of net revenue stream	5%	5.79%	6.48%	6.56%

Sustainability: Due to the very long-term nature of capital expenditure and financing, the revenue budget implications of expenditure incurred in the next few years may extend for up to 50 years into the future. The Director of Finance is satisfied that the proposed capital programme is prudent, affordable and sustainable due to the processes in place to scrutinise any plans coming forward and are designed to highlight not only the ongoing financing costs but also the recurring running costs to ensure they remain within the affordability limits identified and agreed by the Council.

5. Knowledge and Skills

The Council employs professionally qualified and experienced staff in senior positions with responsibility for making capital expenditure, borrowing and investment decisions. For example, the Director of Finance is a qualified accountant with over 25 years' experience. The Council pays for junior staff to study towards relevant professional qualifications including CIPFA, ACT (treasury), ACCA, etc.

Where Council staff do not have the knowledge and skills required, use is made of external advisers and consultants that are specialists in their field. The Council currently employs Arlingclose Limited as treasury management advisers. This approach is more cost effective than employing such staff directly, and ensures that the Council has access to knowledge and skills commensurate with its risk appetite.

Annual Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25

1. Introduction

Treasury management is the management of the Council's cash flows, borrowing and investments, and the associated risks. The Council has borrowed and invested substantial sums of money and is therefore exposed to financial risks including the loss of invested funds and the revenue effect of changing interest rates. The successful identification, monitoring and control of financial risk are therefore central to the Council's prudent financial management.

Treasury risk management at the Council is conducted within the framework of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's *Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice 2021 Edition* (the CIPFA Code) which requires the Council to approve a treasury management strategy before the start of each financial year. In addition, the former Department of the Environment (DoE) issued Guidance on Local Authority Investments in October 2011 that requires the Council to approve an investment strategy before the start of each financial year. This report fulfils the Council's legal obligation under the *Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011* to have regard to both the CIPFA Code and the DoE Guidance.

This strategy covers the following issues in respect of 2024/25:

- Outlook for interest rates
- Capital Financing Plans
- Establishing the Borrowing Requirement
- Borrowing strategy
- Debt rescheduling
- Investments
- Treasury Management Indicators

2. Outlook for Interest Rates

The impact on the UK from higher interest rates and inflation, a weakening economic outlook, an uncertain political climate, together with war in Ukraine and the Middle East, will be major influences on the Council's treasury management strategy for 2024/25.

The Bank of England (BoE) increased the Bank Rate to 5.25% in August 2023, before maintaining this level for the rest of 2023. The Council's treasury management adviser Arlingclose forecasts that the Bank Rate has peaked at 5.25% and the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee will start reducing rates later in 2024 to stimulate the UK economy, but will be reluctant to do so until it is sure there will be no lingering second-round effects.

3. Capital Financing Plans

It is essential that the level of borrowing is considered within the context of the Council's capital expenditure and plans, as is required by the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance.

On 29 February 2024, the Council held £39m of borrowing and £16m of treasury investments.

Forecast changes in these sums are shown in the balance sheet analysis in table 1, with the Council planning to increase borrowings over the next three years.

Table 1: Balance sheet summary and forecast

	2023/24 £'000 Estimate	2024/25 £'000 Forecast	2025/26 £'000 Forecast	2026/27 £'000 Forecast
Capital financing requirement (CFR)	125,411	144,849	145,367	142,500
Less: External Borrowing	38,521	56,987	65,563	73,348
Internal Borrowing	86,890	87,862	79,804	69,152
Less: Balance Sheet Resources	100,360	98,060	91,561	80,560
Treasury Investments (new borrowing)	13,470	10,198	11,757	11,408

The underlying need to borrow for capital purposes is measured by the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR), while usable reserves and working capital are the underlying resources available for investment. The Council's current strategy is to maintain borrowing and investments below their underlying levels, sometimes known as internal borrowing.

The Council has an increasing CFR due to the capital programme, but minimal investments and may therefore may be required to borrow up to £55m over the forecast period. The Council's long term capital expenditure forecasts are currently being developed which may change the above forecasts.

CIPFA's *Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities* recommends that the Authority's total debt should be lower than its highest forecast CFR over the next three years. Table 1 shows that the Council expects to comply with this recommendation during 2024/25.

Liability benchmark: To compare the Council's actual borrowing against an alternative strategy, a liability benchmark has been calculated showing the lowest risk level of borrowing. This assumes the same forecasts as table 1 above, but that cash

and investment balances are kept to a minimum level of £10m at each year-end to maintain sufficient liquidity but minimise credit risk.

Table 2: Liability Benchmark

	2023/24 £'000 Estimate	2024/25 £'000 Forecast	2025/26 £'000 Forecast	2026/27 £'000 Forecast
Capital financing requirement (CFR)	125,411	144,849	145,367	142,500
Less: Balance Sheet Resources	100,360	98,060	91,561	80,560
Net loans requirement	25,051	46,789	53,806	61,940
Plus: Liquidity allowance	10,000	10,000	10,000	10,000
Liability Benchmark	35,051	56,789	63,806	71,940

The Liability Benchmark is effectively the Net Borrowing Requirement of a local authority plus a liquidity allowance.

CIPFA recommends that the optimum position for external borrowing should be at the level of the Liability Benchmark (i.e., all balance sheet resources should be used to maximise internal borrowing). If the outputs show future periods where external loans are less than the Liability Benchmark, then this indicates a borrowing requirement thus identifying where the authority is exposed to interest rate, liquidity and refinancing risks. Conversely where external loans exceed the Liability Benchmark then this will highlight an overborrowed position which will result in excess cash in the organisation requiring investment thus exposing the authority to credit and reinvestment risks and a potential cost of carry. The Council's external debt is relatively close to the liability benchmark. The Council is currently working on long term capital forecasts and the above amounts may change. Given the uncertainty in the bank rate, the level of debt required is closely monitored to minimise any interest rate risk.

4. Establishing the Borrowing Requirement

The starting point for ascertaining the appropriate level of borrowing is the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). The CFR is derived from the Balance Sheet and represents the Council's underlying need to borrow for a capital purpose, as it takes account of all capital expenditure incurred which is resourced from borrowing.

However, in addition to the debt position created by historic capital expenditure met from borrowing, the Council also has significant values of reserves, provisions and balances supported by cash, which reduce the net indebtedness of the Council. These positive cash flows allow the Council to consider utilising this cash to support capital expenditure in lieu of external borrowing.

If external borrowing is higher than the CFR, this indicates borrowing in advance of immediate need (permitted within the Prudential Code) and borrowing below CFR

would indicate internal borrowing (i.e. the level of cash used in lieu of external borrowing)

The relatively high levels of reserves and balances on the Council's balance sheet have therefore enabled the Council to benefit from not having to borrow externally to the full extent of the underlying need. However, it cannot be assumed that this position can continue into perpetuity and needs to be given active consideration.

The Council currently holds £39 million of loans, a decrease of £5 million on the previous year. The balance sheet forecast in table 1 shows that the Council expects to borrow up to £25m in 2024/25. The Council may also borrow additional sums to pre-fund future years' requirements, providing this does not exceed the authorised limit for borrowing of £145 million.

5. Borrowing Strategy

In terms of meeting the external borrowing requirement identified above, one of the most important considerations is the timing, in terms of the potential to save significant interest costs and it is key that this position is proactively managed using all information available to inform decisions. It is essential therefore that the considerations of timing of borrowing form a key element of the borrowing strategy.

It is of course not possible for all borrowing to be undertaken at the lowest rates of interest available, as unforeseen events can significantly alter the path of rates. It is therefore essential that the risks to adverse movements are fully understood and actively managed. One of the key borrowing objectives is to strike an appropriately low risk balance between securing low interest costs and achieving certainty of those costs over the period for which funds are required.

Given the uncertainty around local government funding, the Council's borrowing strategy continues to address the key issue of affordability without compromising the longer-term stability of the debt portfolio. Short-term interest rates are currently at a 15-year high but are expected to fall in the coming years and it is therefore likely to be more cost effective over the medium-term to either use internal resources, or to borrow short-term loans instead.

By doing so, the Council is able to reduce net borrowing costs (despite foregone investment income) and reduce overall treasury risk. The benefits of internal / short-term borrowing will be monitored regularly against the potential for incurring additional costs by deferring borrowing into future years when long-term borrowing rates are forecast to rise modestly. Arlingclose will assist the Council with this 'cost of carry' and breakeven analysis. Its output may determine whether the Council borrows additional sums at long-term fixed rates in 2024/25 with a view to keeping future interest costs low, even if this causes additional cost in the short-term.

It is recognised that whilst the capital expenditure and financing plans will be a driver of borrowing costs, the management of risk is the prime objective of the borrowing strategy and reduction of interest rate risk and refinancing risk within the portfolio is essential.

The Council has previously raised the majority of its long-term borrowing from the Government Loans Fund via Department of Finance. Government loans are no longer available to local authorities planning to buy investment assets primarily for yield; the Council intends to avoid this activity in order to retain its access to government loans. The Council may look to borrow any long-term loans from other sources such as banks, pensions and local authorities and may utilise money market brokers to facilitate borrowing from other local authorities for short to medium term borrowing.

6. **Debt Rescheduling**

The prime objective of any restructuring is to reduce risk in the portfolio, whether that be interest rate or refinancing risk. Any savings that may be created as a result will be considered in the context of the overall risk profile.

Debt restructuring opportunities will be kept under constant review, however the penalties of premature redemption of loans at higher rates than prevailing interest rates mean that there may be significant costs associated with this, which will reduce the attractiveness of opportunities.

7. **Investments**

Annual Investment Strategy

The Council has regard to the CIPFA Code and Guidance for Local Government Investments for District Councils in Northern Ireland (the Guidance) as cited under Section 25(1) of the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the Act) when setting the Investment Strategy. The Department recommends that each local authority produce and publish an Annual Investment Strategy, approved by the Council and revised in year as required. This sets out the Council's policies for managing investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments. This investment strategy states which instruments the Council may use for investment purposes, making a distinction between specified and non-specified investments. This strategy also determines limits in respect of their overall levels.

The prime objective of the Council's investment strategy is to ensure prudent investment of surplus funds. The Council's investment priorities are the security of capital, liquidity of investments and, within those objectives, to secure optimum performance.

All investments will be made in accordance with the Council's investment policies and prevailing legislation and regulations.

7.1 **Specified Investments**

An investment is a **specified investment** if:

- The investment is denominated in Sterling and all payments or repayments are payable only in Sterling,
- The investment is not a long term investment (i.e. due to be repaid within 12 months of the date in which it was made or one which the Council may require to be repaid within that period),

- The making of the investment is not defined as capital expenditure by virtue of regulation 12 of the Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2011; and
- The investment is made with a body which has been awarded a high credit rating, or is made with one of the following:
 - a) The United Kingdom Government;
 - b) A District Council;
 - c) A Local Authority in England and Wales or a similar body in Scotland;

The following categories of investments may be used under the definition of specified investments:

- Short term cash deposits
- Call accounts
- Certificates of Deposit (with maturity dates < 1 year)
- UK Government Gilts
- Treasury Bills
- Money Market Funds

The Council considers a high credit rating for money market funds to be those with a long term Fitch Rating of AAA (or the equivalent highest rating from Standard and Poors or Moodys).

The Council will have regard to all 3 rating agencies and considers a high credit rating for other investments to be as follows:

Fitch Credit Rating	Minimum level
Short Term Rating	F1
Long Term Rating	A

Fitch defines these ratings as follows:

A: High credit quality.

'A' ratings denote expectations of low default risk. The capacity for payment of financial commitments is considered strong. This capacity may, nevertheless, be more vulnerable to adverse business or economic conditions than is the case for higher ratings.

F1: Highest short-term credit quality.

Indicates the strongest intrinsic capacity for timely payment of financial commitments

7.2 Non-specified Investments

In respect of **non-specified investments**. The following instruments have been identified by the Council.

Category of Non-specified investment
Sterling denominated Foreign Government Securities

Sterling medium term Deposits or Certificates of Deposit
Floating rate Certificates of Deposit
Highly rated Corporate Bonds (including investments in a Corporate Bond Fund)
Sterling Reserve Funds
Index-linked structured deposits
Collateralised deposits
Foreign Currency denominated investments
Deposits with non-rated Building Societies

The Council do not intend on making any investments in the 2024/25 year which meet the definition of non-specified investments and therefore there is no limit set on this within the Investment Strategy.

The CIPFA Code of Practice recommends that the Investment Strategy sets out the maximum period over which investments will be made.

The Director of Finance recommends that a maximum duration of 2 years should be set, although it is only expected that investments over 12 months will be made only in exceptional circumstances.

Regulation 12(1) (d) of the Local Government (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 states that some categories of investment are defined as Capital Expenditure. This relates to the acquisition of share or loan capital in any body corporate. However, in the event that this expenditure is made as an investment for the prudent management of the Council's financial affairs, it shall not be treated as capital expenditure.

The impact of investing in instruments of this nature are such that, unlike other investment instruments, either capital or revenue resources would have to be applied to this expenditure, and once the investment was sold or matured, the income would be a capital receipt.

The Council will monitor any proposals for such investments and will assess a suitable limit within the Investment Strategy.

7.3 Investment Risk

The prime consideration of risk within investments is the loss of capital invested. Therefore investments will only be made with bodies with a high credit rating defined above. Credit ratings will form the primary driver for assessing credit quality, although it is recognised that this is not the only means of assessing credit quality.

Caution will be exercised in determining the creditworthiness of investment counterparties, even if they meet the minimum criteria above.

In the event that any institutions are at the minimum criteria and are on negative rating watch, monies will not be placed with that organisation until such time that the negative outlook is revised.

Geographical limits will be considered to ensure an appropriate spread of risk. Sovereign ratings will be taken account of when placing funds with institutions outside of the UK.

Credit ratings for existing investment counterparties will be monitored on a monthly basis, as well as immediately before new deposits are placed.

Market intelligence will also be considered before entering into any investments with proposed counterparties meeting the minimum criteria.

7.4 Treasury Management Advisers

The Council currently utilise the services of external advisers, Arlingclose, when determining the credit quality of its investment counterparties. The Council recognise that responsibility for the decision to invest with a counterparty rests with the Council as the principle undertaking the transaction.

Credit ratings will be obtained directly from the rating agencies' websites, and officers will regularly read the financial press for information relevant to the credit-worthiness of counterparties.

7.5 Investment Training

The Council recognises that investments, as well as wider treasury management issues require a high level of specialist knowledge. Officers undertaking the decisions are all qualified accountants with many years of experience. However, the Council recognises the need for officers to be kept up to date with developments and through the annual appraisal system will identify any training needs to further enhance the current skills base.

In the event of new Officers joining the function, they will be provided with significant on the job training as well as being provided with the opportunity to attend relevant external training courses.

The Council recognises that although there may be costs involved with sending officers to training courses, when these costs are considered in the context of the size of the portfolios being managed, and the amount of the Council's money at risk, investment in training is a worthwhile area of expenditure.

In addition to the training of officers, in order for elected members to provide effective scrutiny of the strategy and to have the knowledge to make informed decisions regarding the strategy, it is also important that training is provided to Members of the Council.

7.6 Other Investment Considerations

The level of investment balances is not specifically targeted in the strategy; it will be a consequence of the net spending plans of the Council, and the level of external borrowing to be undertaken. To date, balances have remained relatively stable over recent years. However, the introduction of the Prudential Code, and the self regulation of borrowing limits and capital financing strategies, may result in higher or lower levels of balances going forwards as the level of external borrowing is given active consideration.

It should also be noted that the investments are largely as a result of the level of reserves and provisions that the Council has at any one point in time. In addition, there is an amount of working capital (excess of creditors over debtors) as well as being a factor of the extent to which investment balances have been used in lieu of external borrowing.

Investment balances are expected to decrease as further investment balances are used in lieu of external borrowing.

The remaining cash balances that will not be used in lieu of external borrowing will primarily exist to manage cash flow volatility within the Council. It is therefore not expected that investments of a long term strategic nature will be made. Instead the duration of new investments will remain relatively short in order to meet liquidity demands.

The Council recognises that a consequence of short dated investments is that it exposes the portfolio to interest rate risk, which would otherwise be reduced if investments were made of a long term nature. The budget for investment income takes a prudent approach to expected returns from investments.

8. Treasury Management Indicators

The CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice requires various indicators to be set within the strategy. This section of the report sets these out in the format required by the Code. Whilst they are required to provide boundaries within which the treasury management operations will be managed, it is also important that there is sufficient flexibility to enable officers to react to unforeseen favourable movements in the financial markets which may present beneficial opportunities to the Council.

8.1 Interest Rate Exposures

The Council is required to set upper limits for both fixed and variable exposures for the forthcoming years. The purpose of this indicator is to contain the Council's exposure to unfavourable movements in interest rates. The indicators are expressed as Fixed Rate Borrowing less Fixed Rate Investments and Variable Rate Borrowing less Variable Rate Investments. The Council defines variable rate investments as including those instruments maturing within each year, as the replacement of those instruments will be subject to prevailing rates of interest. The following table shows the upper limit of fixed rate exposure and the upper limit of variable rate exposure for the forthcoming three years.

	Estimate 2024/25 £'000	Estimate 2025/26 £'000	Estimate 2026/27 £'000
Upper limit of fixed rate exposure	128,849	129,367	126,500
Upper limit of variable rate exposure	3,865	3,881	3,795

8.2 Maturity Structure of Fixed Rate Borrowing

The Council is required to set upper and lower limits of fixed rate borrowing maturing within certain periods, in order to contain the exposure to re-financing risk which

may arise if significant proportions of borrowing were maturing within a short period of time. The Council has set the following limits for the forthcoming financial year.

	Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Under 12 months	0.00%	35.00%
12 months – 24 months	0.00%	35.00%
24 months – 5 years	0.00%	50.00%
5 years – 10 years	0.00%	75.00%
10 years and above	0.00%	75.00%

8.3 Total Principal Sums invested for periods longer than 364 days

The purpose of this indicator is to contain exposure to the possibility of loss that may arise as a result of the Council having to seek early repayment of sums invested.

The Council would not, through its normal course of investment activities, expect to make investments beyond 12 months. However, there may be exceptional circumstances which may result in investments being made up to 2 years in duration, as is referred to within the Annual Investment Strategy.

	Estimate 2024/25	Estimate 2025/26	Estimate 2026/27
Total principal sums invested for longer than 364 days	£2m	£2m	£2m



Subject:	Contracts Update
Date:	22 nd March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer:	Noleen Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement Services

Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	<p>The purpose of this report is to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek approval from members for tenders and Single Tender Actions (STA) over £30,000

	<p>And to ask members to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note contract modifications to contract term and retrospective Single Tender Actions (STAs)
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approve the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1) Approve the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2) Approve the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3)
3.0	Competitive Tenders
3.1	Section 2.5 of the Scheme of Delegation states Chief Officers have delegated authority to authorise a contract for the procurement of goods, services or works over the statutory limit of £30,000 following a tender exercise where the council has approved the invitation to tender
3.2	Standing Order 60(a) states any contract that exceeds the statutory amount (currently £30,000) shall be made under the Corporate Seal. Under Standing Order 51(b) the Corporate Seal can only be affixed when there is a resolution of the Council.
3.3	Standing Order 54 states that every contract shall comply with the relevant requirements of national and European legislation.
3.4	The Committee is asked to approve the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1)
	Single Tender Actions (STAs)
3.5	The Council's current Single Tender Action (STA) process, which has been in place since 2020, provides assurance that the Council continues to comply with its obligations under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 'PCRs' and internal governance arrangements including required controls and approvals. It mirrors the PCRs setting out the exceptional and specific circumstances when a STA can be used (see STA/ Direct Award Reasons Table in Appendix 1).
3.6	To support Officers understanding and to build capability CPS also offer STA Process training on a regular basis.
3.7	In line with Standing Order 55 the following STAs are being submitted for approval:

3.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract for up to £35,000, for up to 36 months, awarded to Civica UK Ltd, for Modern.gov licences. We own the Modern.gov licences and Civica who are the supplier are the only company who provide maintenance and support for modern.gov. Contract for up to £40,000, for up to 36 months, awarded to Oracle Digital PLC for Oracle licences and technical support. Licencing and technical support by Oracle for systems with over 1,000 users. Proprietary licences and support provide directly by Oracle only. <p>Further details on these STAs is set out in Appendix 1 (Table 2) including the reason selected to support justification of each STA.</p>
	Modification to Contract
3.9	<p>The Committee is asked to approve the following modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Up to an additional 6 months, awarded to Now Group for the Bobbin Café Franchise contract. After lengthy pre-market engagement, permission is sought for an extension up to 6 months to help facilitate the re-tender exercise and ensure the Franchise represents best VFM option for the Council whilst testing the market as a Reserved Contract to social enterprises. Up to an additional 3 months and £7,000, awarded to Sustrans Ltd for an extension to the Operator for the Active Travel Hub at Cathedral Gardens contract. Extension of further 3 months to June 24 following additional external funding being made available to support. Up to an additional 6 months and £110k spend, awarded to Athletics NI for the facilities management service at Mary Peters Track contract. Contract extension required to allow sufficient time for Council to explore alternative management options for the site and time to re-tender, if required. Note – SP&R approved a 6-month extension in Oct 23. Total modification therefore 12 months beyond original expiry date. Up to an additional 3 months and £7500 spend, awarded to Dr N B Smith for the provision of a medical referee service contract for the Cemeteries/ Crematorium. A 3-month extension is required to facilitate a re-tendering exercise. Tender documents are being finalised and should be advertised to market in April 24. Delays experienced due to resourcing issues in the Department and additional work required to review and re-draft tender documents. Up to an additional 4 months and £7000 spend, awarded to 1st Klass Fire Protection for the supply, fitting and maintenance of fire extinguishers contract. 4 month

	<p>extension is required to allow more time for the Council to review its requirements and include necessary equipment upgrades to Specification in line with emerging legislation/best practice. It is expected this review will be completed in March/April 24.</p> <p>Further details on these contract modifications are set out in Appendix 1 (Table 3).</p>
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.10	The financial resources for these contracts are within approved corporate or departmental budgets
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.11	None
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1) • Approve the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2) • Approve the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3)

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Supply of waste collection sacks	Up to 4 years	£600,000	S Grimes	This is a recurring contract for the supply of recycled plastic and paper sacks to BCC stores to support operational teams/depts.
Supply of paints and sundries	Up to 4 years	£120,000	S Grimes	This is a recurring contract for the supply of paints and sundries to BCC stores to support operational teams/depts.
NIESS benchmarking tool	Up to 1 year	£40,000	J Greer	BCC is acting on behalf of the 11 NI councils to appoint a Contractor to deliver a benchmarking tool to support the new Entrepreneurship Support Service (NIESS) funded in part by the Department of Levelling Up and Housing and Communities' Shared Prosperity Fund.
Supply, fitting and maintenance of fire extinguishers	Up to 5 years	£150,000	S Grimes	Requirement to maintain existing fire extinguishers and provide and install any required new units, as required.
Small civil engineering works	Up to 4 years	£1,200,000	S Grimes	Contract to support Depts in maintaining assets including playgrounds.
Purchase of IT equipment	Up to 1 year	£500,000	S McNicholl	New devices to facilitate hybrid working and replacement devices as per regular business as usual replacement cycle
Manufacture, supply and installation of signage.	Up to 3 years	£210,000	D Sales	To supply replacement signage across BCC sites.

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason Code
Support for Modern.gov IT System	Up to 3 years	£35,000	P Gribben	We own the Modern.gov licences and Civica who are the supplier are the only company who provide maintenance and support for modern.gov.	Civica UK Ltd	3
Oracle licences and technical support	Up to 3 years	£40,000	P Gribben	Licencing and technical support by Oracle for systems with over 1,000 users. Proprietary licences and support provide directly by Oracle only.	Oracle Digital PLC	3

Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration	Modification required	SRO	Description	Supplier
Bobbin Café Franchise	Up to 30 months	A further 6 months (Income based contract)	N Largey	After lengthy pre-market engagement, permission is sought for an extension up to 6 months to help facilitate the re-tender exercise and ensure the Franchise represents best VFM option for the Council whilst testing the market as a Reserved Contract to social enterprises	Now Group
Operator for Travel Hub at Cathedral Gardens	Up to 18 months	Additional 3 months and additional £7000 spend	C Reynolds	Extension of further 3 months to June 24 following additional external funding being made available to support.	Sustrans Limited
Facilities management service at Mary Peters Track.	Up to 6 years	Additional 6 months and £110k spend	D Sales	Contract extension required to allow sufficient time for Council to explore alternative management options for the site and time to re-tender, if required. Note – SP&R approved a 6-month extension in Oct 23. Total modification therefore 12 months beyond original expiry date.	Athletics NI

Appendix 1

Provision of a medical referee service contract for the Cemeteries/ Crematorium	Up to 5 years	Additional 3 months and additional £7500 spend	D Sales	A 3-month extension is required to facilitate a re-tendering exercise. Tender documents are being finalised and should be advertised to market in April 24. Delays experienced due to resourcing issues in the Department and additional work required to review and re-draft tender documents.	Dr N B Smith
Supply, fitting and maintenance of fire extinguishers	Up to 3 years	Additional 4 months and additional £7000 spend	S Grimes	A 4-month extension is required to allow more time for the Council to review its requirements and include necessary equipment upgrades to Specification in line with emerging legislation/best practice. It is expected this review will be completed in March/April 24.	1 st Klass Fire Protection

STA/ Direct Award Reasons

Reason Code	Reasons in line with Public Contract Regulations
1	No response following advertised procurement exercise
2	Creation or acquisition of a unique work of art or artistic performance
3	Competition is absent for technical reasons (no reasonable substitute exists)
4	The protection of exclusive rights, including intellectual property rights
5	Extreme urgency brought about by events unforeseeable by BCC, the time limits for a procurement cannot be complied with.
6	Products manufactured purely for the purpose of research, experimentation, study or development
7	Additional deliveries which are intended either as a partial or extended replacement of supplies or installations where a change of supplier would result in supplies of different technical characteristics causing incompatibility or disproportionate technical difficulties in operation and maintenance
8	Supplies quoted and purchased on a commodity market
9	Supplies or services on particularly time-limited advantageous terms e.g. supplier winding up its business activities
10	New works and services consisting of the repetition of similar works or services, provided that the possibility of a direct award is disclosed during the original tender process
11	Other – Reason not in line with Public Contract Regulations (PCR 2015)

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Subject:	People and Communities Committee – funding requests
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officers:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officers:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
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Sometime in the future	<input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input style="width: 40px; height: 20px;" type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on two proposals for funding which were agreed at the People and Communities Committee meeting held on 6 th February 2024 relating to a request from the Belfast Advice Group and for summer schemes with children with additional needs.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the request to fund the Citywide Tribunal Service as detailed below; and Consider the request to provide funding for summer schemes for children with additional needs
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At the People and Communities Committee held on 6 th February 2024, it was agreed that two requests for funding would be brought forward to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval. The requests are outlined below.
3.2	<p><u>Belfast Advice Group</u></p> <p>Following a presentation from the Belfast Advice Group and the noting of a report outlining a range of information attached at Appendix 1, it was agreed that the Group's request to fund the Citywide Tribunal Service to the sum of £269,063 for 2024/25 and to build in a recurring additional annual cost of living uplift of 3% to the award for generalist advice provision including 23/24 would be brought forward to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for its consideration. Given the balance in existing reserves the request for BCTS equals £78,410 for 24/25 and the uplift requires £30,000. This means a total request of £108,410 in 24/25.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Summer schemes for children with additional needs</u></p> <p>Members also noted a report outlining a proposal for additional funding to procure specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, with a view to delivering the schemes in summer 2024, one in each area of the city, with discussion to take place with the relevant Area Working Groups and the Belfast City Youth Council in advance of any locations being agreed. The proposed cost to facilitate the four schemes is £80,000.</p>
3.4	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>As detailed above, the request to Belfast Advice Group's request to fund the Citywide Tribunal Service to the sum of £269,063, and the request to fund summer schemes for children with additional needs is £80,000.</p>

3.5	Members should note that for the 24/25 year there is no additional budget to enhance generalist advice service provision beyond the agreed level of £999,657. Therefore an additional £30,000 is required for 24/25.
3.6	The anticipated available budget for BCTS in 24/25 is £70,400 from DfC, but council is not yet in receipt of a Letter of Offer for 24/25. There is £120,253 in the Tribunal Service reserve, assuming that the £70,400 from DfC is allocated, an additional £78,410 is required from Council for 24/25 to fund the BCTS to the requested level.
3.7	The request for funding for the BCTS has been received annually since the service was established in 2012. The recently completed Review of Advice Services in Belfast presented to Members in December 2023, highlighted that a recurring award for the BCTS should be built into the budget. Officers will include a growth request as part of the 25/26 estimates process in relation to advice services to include a dedicated budget for BCTS and build in a recurring additional annual cost of living uplift to the award for generalist advice provision.
3.8	In relation to the request for generalist advice services, Members should also note that Council does not apply cost of living increases to other annual funding awards. The initial cost of living increase that was applied to generalist advice services by DfC in 21/22 was 7% and a 2% uplift was applied by DfC thereafter. DfC provided funding to enable maintenance of this uplifted salary payment in 22/23 and 23/24 and these awards have been/are being passed on to advice organisations. DfC have indicated that it is likely that this uplift will be maintained in the 24/25 CSP LoO, although there is no confirmation of this. However, members should note that no additional uplifts have been provided by DfC since 2021, funds are only available to maintain salaries at the 21/22 level.
3.9	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications</u></p> <p>Belfast City Council's agreement for the provision of this service will seek to ensure that the service is provided on an equal basis to all communities across the city, including section 75 groups and areas of rural need.</p> <p>The Review of Advice Services identified the need to develop a new funding model that more effectively targets need. This model will be developed in 24/26 and will be screened for equality and rural needs implications.</p> <p>Council does not have a policy on implementing annual inflationary increases to funding agreements. A decision to introduce an increase for one funding agreement is likely to set a precedent and have an impact on other funding programmes.</p>

4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	<p>Appendix 1 – Belfast Advice Group – February 24 report to People and Communities Committee</p> <p>Appendix 2 – Summer schemes for children with additional needs – February 24 report to People and Communities Committee</p>



Subject:	Funding Request from Belfast Advice Group
Date:	6 th February 2024
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City Services
Contact Officer:	Nicola Lane, Neighbourhood Services Manager Margaret Higgins, Lead Officer, Community Provision

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number	<input type="text" value="3"/>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues								
1.1	<p>The main purpose of this report is;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">To provide further detail in relation to the requests outlined in correspondence received from the Belfast Advice Group on 20th December '23 and the group's presentation to February committee.								
2.0	Recommendation								
2.1	<p>Members are asked;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">To note the detail of the report and the information provided by Belfast Advice Group at February committee andTo advise if they wish to refer this request to SP&R for consideration								
3.0	Main Report								
	Background information								
3.1	<p>Belfast Advice Group will deliver a presentation to the February committee meeting in support of their request and to outline the services that they provide.</p>								
3.2	<p>Members will be aware that Council provides significant funding for advice services through the Community Support Programme (CSP) (funded by Department for Communities - DfC) and through direct council funding. In the last financial year, over £1.5 million was provided to support the following services across Belfast.</p> <table><tr><td>Advice Grant</td><td>Welfare Reform Mitigation</td><td>Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service</td><td>Total Advice Payment</td></tr><tr><td>£999,657</td><td>£234,779</td><td>£349,715</td><td>£1,584,151</td></tr></table>	Advice Grant	Welfare Reform Mitigation	Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service	Total Advice Payment	£999,657	£234,779	£349,715	£1,584,151
Advice Grant	Welfare Reform Mitigation	Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service	Total Advice Payment						
£999,657	£234,779	£349,715	£1,584,151						
3.3	<p>Support is currently provided through funding agreements to five area consortiums to deliver generalist advice services across all geographies within the city.</p>								
3.4	<p>In November 2012, these groupings came together to establish the Belfast Advice Group (BAG) to develop specialist advice services. BAG submitted a proposal to Belfast City Council to support the Citywide Tribunal Service (BCTS) and that service has been supported primarily through Belfast City Council funding on an annual basis since 2012. As previously reported, this funding has been provided through in year awards drawn from underspends.</p>								
3.5	<p>The Belfast Advice Group wrote to Council on 20th December to request additional funding for generalist advice, provide an update on current financial support for the Citywide Tribunal Service and request funding for 24/25 for the service. A copy of the letter is provided in Appendix 1. Members were advised of the correspondence at the January Committee meeting and had asked for the group to deliver a presentation. In the interim, Officers have considered the implications of these requests and have outlined relevant information in relation to each below.</p> <p><u>Request from BAG - Generalist Advice Provision</u></p>								

3.6	<p>1. Council commit to covering the shortfall in funding to ensure that salary uplifts that were provided to staff can be maintained for 23/24 and going forward.</p> <p>These salary uplifts were provided to staff in 21/22 through an additional award in the CSP LoO. DfC provided funding to enable maintenance of this uplifted salary payment in 22/23 and 23/24 and these awards have been/are being passed on to advice organisations. DfC have indicated that it is likely that this uplift will be maintained in the 24/25 CSP LoO, although there is no confirmation of this. It is recommended that Council agree to the request to ensure the uplift is maintained since it is likely that this cost will be covered through CSP funding from DfC. However, members should note that no additional uplifts have been provided by DfC since 2021, funds are only available to maintain salaries at the 21/22 level.</p>
3.7	<p>2. Council build annual cost of living increases into funding awards for advice services</p> <p>Members should note that for the 24/25 year there is no additional budget to enhance generalist advice service provision and that Council does not apply cost of living increases to other annual funding awards. The initial cost of living increase that was applied by DfC in 21/22 was 7% and a 2% uplift was applied thereafter.</p> <p>BAG has indicated that they will seek an overall annual increase of 2-3% for all areas of costs, including those listed in point 3 below. This uplift will relate to the £999,657 provided for generalist advice, which would be a cost of between £19,993 and £29,989 per annum for all costs.</p>
3.8	<p>3. Council increase the Generalist advice grant to enhance support for management costs, running costs and overheads on an annual basis, going forward.</p> <p>The comments detailed above in relation to the overall request to increase awards on an annual basis by 2/3% also apply to this request.</p> <p>Members will recall that council recently completed an independent review of Advice Services. This report outlined some actions to ensure the provision of consistent, quality advice across the city. Some of these recommendations have associated cost considerations, for example, increased responsibilities placed on lead partners and enhanced requirements for relevant software licences. These are additional costs that are not covered within current funding awards.</p>
3.9	<p><u>Request from BAG - Citywide Tribunal Service</u></p> <p>4. Council fund the service at the sum of £269,063 for 24/25</p> <p>Council receives an annual request for funding of the BCTS. DfC have advised that it is likely that they will make an allocation of £70,400 from CSP in 24/25, this would mean a BCC contribution of £198,663.</p> <p>Members have also asked that officers arrange a further meeting with DfC and other relevant government departments including DoH and TEO. Officers are arranging this meeting but it is worth noting that;</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DfC are nearing completion of a regional review of advice services and aim to have proposals ready for public consultation by late Spring 24, this will include a position on appeals services. DfC have reiterated on several occasions that they will not provide additional funding for Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service. Appeals services are delivered as part of the overall advice funding programme in all other council areas and the DfC position is the same for Belfast. <p>5. That the underspend in relation to the 23/24 award for BCTS is carried over into 24/25 thus reducing the 'ask' for 24/25 from £269,063 to £156,516.</p> <p>Members should note that underspends are considered within year, so this request cannot be facilitated.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>Members should note that for the 24/25 year there is no additional budget to enhance generalist advice service provision beyond the agreed level of £999,657. The anticipated available budget for BCTS is £70,400 from DfC, but council is not yet in receipt of a Letter of Offer for 24/25. Any additional funding awards for 24/25 and future years will have to be brought to SP&R for consideration.</p> <p>In relation to the request for 24/25 funding to the BCTS, traditionally, this has been requested on an annual basis by BAG and is awarded from underspends within year. The request from BAG amounts to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual 2/3% uplift (approx. £20,000 - £30,000) Annual funding for BCTS - £198,663 Council contribution for 24/25 <p>Members may wish to consider the requests for funding from BAG, separately as above or in totality.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>Belfast City Council's agreement for the provision of this service will seek to ensure that the service is provided on an equal basis to all communities across the city, including section 75 groups and areas of rural need.</p> <p>The Review of Advice Services identified the need to develop a new funding model that more effectively targets need. This model will be developed in 24/26 and will be screened for equality and rural needs implications.</p> <p>Council does not have a policy on implementing annual inflationary increases to funding agreements. A decision to introduce an increase for one funding agreement is likely to set a precedent and have an impact on other funding programmes.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
4.1	Appendix 1 - Correspondence from G Tubritt on behalf of Belfast Advice Group



Subject:	Proposal for summer schemes for children with additional needs
Date:	6 th February 2024
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Cormac McCann, Lead Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐
☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the current provision of summer schemes for children with additional needs in the Belfast area, and to outline a proposal to provide funding for additional schemes.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Members are asked to consider the contents of the report if agreeable, request funding for support additional summer schemes from Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.
3.0	Main Report
	Background information
3.1	Members will recall that a report was presented to the November 2023 meeting of the People and Communities Committee which provided an overview of 2023 leisure centre holiday recreation schemes delivered by GLL. This report noted that the holiday schemes had developed steadily throughout 2023 and that participation had grown steadily, as well as noting that it was anticipated that the 2024 schemes would be further expanded and that participant numbers would continue to grow. Members were provided with an overview of activities and participant numbers at each centre.
3.2	During discussion of the report, a Member highlighted that children with special needs were often not able to avail of these schemes due to their high support needs. It was agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting which would consider the inclusion of children with special needs in the holiday scheme programme.
	<u>Current provision</u>
3.3	It is recognised that provision for children with complex needs is very challenging due to the diversity of the specific participant needs, the need for one-to-one carer support and general difficulties in integrating those with complex needs into the broader scheme activities which, whilst are highly desirable, are often undeliverable due to the broad range of considerations when aligned with available resources.
3.4	Council's community centre and play centre schemes and GLL's leisure centre schemes aim to be inclusive. Support needs are identified through the registration process. The varied nature of the identified need means that we can upskill staff and offer places without requiring additional support staff, we can also offer places with the additional support of parent/carers. Places are not offered where the additional support cannot be reasonably met by centre staff. In 2023, 850 children were registered on our community centre and play schemes including 124 with additional needs. Leisure centre growth in demand was reported previously to committee and GLL will continue to work with sporting organisations to develop inclusive or specific schemes e.g. the current autism swimming offer, wheelchair basketball, powerchair football and learning disability football with IFA.
3.5	In addition to direct provision council funds community summer schemes through grant provision. Applications for 2024 summer scheme are being assessed currently, with 102

	applications received and 14 of these applications referring to supporting children with special needs within their aims and priorities.
3.6	Through engagement with Family Support Hubs and meetings with partners including the Education Authority (EA), officers are aware that there are a growing number of young people presenting with additional needs and a lack of provision to support their participation in activities. Youth workers and community organisations report that they are struggling with these issues and the associated impacts on their insurance, health and safety, risks and their staff not being adequately trained in working with these young people. It is important to recognise that EA provides funding for voluntary summer scheme provision with around 450 applications from primary, post-primary, special schools and EOTAS settings.
3.7	A number of organisations including Kids Together, Sólás, the Cedar Foundation, Mencap NI, NI Autism Centre, Autonomy and the NOW Group deliver summer schemes for children and young people with additional needs. Mitchell House, Fleming Fulton and Harberton special schools provide summer schemes. <u>Proposed pilot</u>
3.8	In order to contribute to addressing this gap in provision, it is proposed that a request is made to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for funding for specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, one each in North, South, East and West Belfast at a total cost of £80,000 (maximum £20,000 per scheme), which would allow increased numbers of children to participate in summer schemes which are suitable for their needs.
3.9	If funding is agreed, officers will undertake initial engagement with the relevant organisations to scope the potential to procure provision of four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs in summer 2024. <u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.10	It is proposed that a request for £80,000 is made to deliver four summer schemes for children with additional needs – one each in North, South, East and West Belfast. <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.11	This decision will impact positively on access to summer scheme provision for children with additional needs.
4.0	Appendices
4.1	None

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Subject:	Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes of Meeting of 5 March 2024
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer:	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 40px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
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1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the key issues that were considered and discussed by the Audit & Risk Panel at its March 2024 meeting and present the minutes of the last meeting of the Panel for approval.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	That Strategic Policy and Resources Committee notes the key issues arising at the meeting and approves the minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel of 5 March 2024 at appendix A.
3.0	Main Report
	Key Issues <u>Key reports</u>
3.1	The Panel noted the progress being made against the annual internal audit plan and received summaries of the recently completed internal audits of Payroll Data Analytics, Leisure Management Contract (GLL), Resilience Strategy and Cyber Security – Computer Use Policy. The audit of the Resilience Strategy received an assurance opinion of major improvement required, and the Panel requested an update from management for their next meeting. The Panel also noted the broad range of advisory work undertaken.
3.2	The Panel considered the corporate risk dashboard which provided an analysis and update on the progress being made to manage the 24 risks that are considered to present the greatest threat to the delivery of corporate priorities and / or compliance with key statutory requirements. These corporate risks are being considered in the development of the new corporate plan for 2024 – 28. As management have re-set the target implementation dates for all of the corporate risk actions, the Panel requested that Strategic Directors are reminded once again of the importance of implementing corporate risk actions in a timely way and that progress towards implementation will be monitored quarterly by the Panel.
3.3	The Panel agreed the Audit Strategy & Plan for 24/25 which sets out the role of AGRS as an assurance provider and advisory service which directly assists the Council in meeting relevant statutory obligations in relation to internal control, risk management and good governance.
3.4	The Panel noted the quarterly assurances provided by Directors regarding compliance with risk management and internal control processes. Formal departmental risk management processes are to be re-introduced from 1 April 2024.
3.5	The Panel noted the work that was underway to exercise, review and update business continuity management (BCM) plans for the critical services by the year-end. Each critical service has been asked to focus their BCM exercise on a cyber-attack scenario; to review whether their BCM plans have sufficiently documented the learning from the pandemic response and; to review winter preparedness arrangements.
3.6	The Panel received quarter 3 reports on corporate health and safety and absence management .
3.7	Regarding health and safety the Panel expressed concern at the delays in implementing some actions . Regarding the actions that have been open for over a year, the Panel requested additional information for their next meeting on the revised target dates for implementing these actions and the officers responsible for implementation.
3.8	Regarding absence management the Panel pointed out that Strategic Directors have been reminded about the requirement to have Departmental Improvement Plans and

	Absence Management Dashboard ; and that they may be requested to attend the Panel in relation to these matters.
3.9	<p>Following the training session for the Audit and Risk Panel on 30 January 2024, the Panel agreed the assessments of the Panel against CIPFA best practice, with no improvement actions arising.</p> <p><u>Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)</u></p>
3.10	The Panel received an update on the key messages contained in the Local Government Auditors Report 2023 , which sets out their observations on financial performance, governance issues and challenges and opportunities facing councils in NI, based on audits relating to 2020-21 and 2021-22.
3.11	The Panel received the Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2023-24 , in which the LGA has provided an unqualified audit opinion regarding how the Council has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties. In terms of the improvement assessment the LGA has provided an opinion, that the Council is unlikely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2023-24 as it has not been able to demonstrate a track record of improvement.
3.12	The LGA report sets out how management have highlighted that the objectives and measures set within the performance plan do not fully capture the scale and scope of the work that the Council undertook during 2022-23, or of the quantifiable improvements in performance that the Council considers it made across this wider programme of activities.
3.13	The Panel also heard how the LGA now considers it appropriate to consider the overall effectiveness of Part 12 of the Local Government Act and the NIAO's intention to work with councils and the Department to take this forward.
3.14	The Panel received an update report from management on the next steps for the indicators used in the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24, which will be brought to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for agreement and the Panel underlined the importance of a continuing focus on outcomes.
3.15	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.16	None known at this time.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix A - Minutes of Audit & Risk Panel 5 March 2024

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Audit and Risk Panel

Tuesday, 5th March, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF AUDIT AND RISK PANEL

HELD IN THE BOARDROOM AND REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor R. McLaughlin (Chairperson);
Councillors Hanvey and Verner; and
Mr. D. Wilson (External Member).

In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of
Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Ms. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk
Services;
Mr. L. Mulholland, Audit, Governance and Risk
Services Manager;
Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit, Governance and Risk
Services Manager; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Also attended: Mr. P. Barr, Northern Ireland Audit Office; and
Ms. F. Magowan, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Pre-Meeting

The Audit and Risk Panel met privately with the Director of the Northern Ireland Audit Office prior to the meeting commencing, to enable them to discuss any concerns around the work of the Council's risk, control and governance arrangements.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 5th December, 2023, were approved by the Panel.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Absence Rates Q/E December 2023

The Director of Human Resources presented the following report to the Panel:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Audit Panel of the Council’s performance in managing absence at the end of quarter three, April – December 2023.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Audit Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key corporate indicators:

At the end of quarter three:

- The Council’s average sickness absence rate stands at 12.43 days per FTE, a decrease of 0.33 days compared to absence for the same period last year (12.76).**
- A total of 26534.26 working days was lost due to sickness absence. This accounted for 7.37% of the total working days available.**
- The table below provides a summary of how departments are performing against the target. 3 departments did not meet the corporate target of 11.14 days for quarter three .**

It should be noted that the figures provided for the departmental structures have been manually configured pending the configuration of the departmental structures on the HR / Payroll system and therefore reflect the structures on resourcelink as of 31 December 2023. Please note that Human Resources’ figures are included in City and Organisational Strategy.

**Audit and Risk Panel,
Tuesday, 5th March, 2024**

End of year target:	14.85					
Q3 target:	11.14					
Department	Number of Employees (FTE)	Total days lost (FTE)	Actual absence per FTE	Variance	% of workforce	% of absence
City & Neighbourhood Services	1199.24	16667.89	13.90	2.76	56.19%	62.82%
City and Organisational Strategy	115.13	412.96	3.59	-7.55	5.39%	1.56%
Corporate Services	130.32	856.59	6.57	-4.57	6.11%	3.23%
External Affairs Comms & Marketing	24.04	221.26	9.20	-1.94	1.13%	0.83%
Finance	46.94	384.38	8.19	-2.95	2.20%	1.45%
Legal and Civic Services	159.81	2939.1	18.39	7.25	7.49%	11.08%
Place and Economy	335.52	2657.43	7.92	-3.22	15.72%	10.02%
Property and Projects	123.14	2394.65	19.45	8.31	5.77%	9.02%
Grand Total	2134.14	26534.26	12.43	1.29		

3.2 Additional Absence information:

- There has been an increase in the number of staff with no recorded absence this period (49.27%) compared to the same time last year (45.01%).
- There has been an increase in absence classified as long term (20+ days) this year (19530.90 days or 73.61% of total absence) compared to the same time last year (17613.50 days or 67.79% of the total absence).
- Council's average sickness absence rate further reduces to 11.8 days per FTE when COVID-19 related absences are deducted.
- The number of days lost per full time equivalent increased in quarter three (4.57 days) when compared to quarter two (4.03 days). This increase is illustrated in figure 1.
- Depression/anxiety/stress (34.85% of total days lost) and musculo-skeletal (26% of total days lost) continue to be the top two reasons for absence. Refer to figure 2 for further information.
- Between 1 October to 31 December 2023, 725 employees were off due to sickness absence (accounting for 9826.74 days). Discretion was applied to 97 of these employees (13%) and their absence accounted for 2268.23 days (approximately 23% of the total absence for quarter three). Refer to figure 3 for further information.

**Audit and Risk Panel,
Tuesday, 5th March, 2024**

- A total of 166 cases were identified as having compliance related issues. Refer to figure 4 for further information.
- Approximately 31% of absence (8242.91 days) is recorded as disability related, of which, 79% was managed as long term. Depression / Anxiety (30.64%), Chronic back pain (10.07%) and Cancer (8.6%) accounted for almost 50% of all disability related absence days. Refer to figure 5 for further information.
- Between April and December 2023, a total of 287 employees were recorded as absent due to COVID19 and accounted for 5% (or 1301.22 days) of the total absence in quarter three.
- 19 employees met the trigger for a Stage4/FAH in quarter three.
 - Discretion was applied to 8 of these cases not to progress to a FAH, whereby:
 - 3 employees returned to work at month six.
 - 2 employees were off due to disability related absence and returned to work shortly after month six.
 - 1 employee was off due to cancer related absence.
 - 1 employee availed of a career break.
 - 1 employee was off due to complex mental health reasons.
 - One employee resigned before the final absence hearing.
 - One case was non-compliant as the case review was not organised at month six or seven.
 - Four cases took place in December 2023 and 4 subsequent final absence hearings have been arranged for February 2024.
 - One hearing did take place however the employee was given a final opportunity to meet the standards of attendance.
 - Four employees were dismissed on the grounds of permanent ill health during quarter three.

3.3 Department Improvement Plans:

Audit Panel will be aware that there are now nine departments, and this has impacted on the quarter three departmental improvement plan updates and also with regards to how departments are updating DMTs.

Based on the previous departmental structure, five of the six departments returned improvement plan progress reports for quarter three. However, not all departments provided sufficient detail on what specific action(s) they had taken in quarter three to reduce sickness absence.

Property and Projects, again, did not return its improvement plan update for quarter three.

Corporate HR issued guidance to departments at the end of quarter 1 in relation to what should be included in the progress reports and met with individual departments to discuss their improvement plans.

It was noted that a number of departments did not return its improvement plan within the specified time frames.

CHR is establishing a HR Managers Forum, which will meet on a six weekly basis and the first meeting is scheduled for 28 February 2024. One of the key areas of focus will be absence management and the need to address compliance issues and develop appropriate improvement plans. These discussions will assist with development and monitoring of improvement plans for 2024/25.

3.4 Absence Dashboard update:

Audit Panel is aware that there are now nine departments, and this has impacted on previous DMT structures.

Based on the previous departmental structure, five of the six departments provided monthly dashboards for October, November and December.

Property and Projects did not provide an absence dashboard for October, November and December.

Departments have been reminded that the non-compliance issues raised, during the fortnightly compliance meetings, must be presented at their monthly DMTs in the format of the agreed absence dashboard.

3.5 Health and Wellbeing Strategy and initiatives:

A programme of health and wellbeing activity has been delivered in Quarter 3, covering a range of topics including: Stress Awareness for Managers, Positive Mental Health, Cancer Focus (Keeping Well Van at Duncrue), Sleep Better, Arthritis Awareness, Supporting Colleagues with Mental Health Issues, Menopause Awareness for Partners/Friends/Colleagues, Age Awareness Training, Mindfulness and Men's Mental Health. In addition, various active travel events were facilitated and promoted.

Consultation on the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan has concluded, and the Strategy and Action Plan was agreed by CMT on 31 January 2024.

The Strategy defines the type of organisation that the Council wants to be to support the health and wellbeing of our employees. That is, an organisation:

- Where individuals feel valued and recognised for their contribution
- With increased employee engagement/motivation
- Where employees feel that they have the opportunity to develop
- With reduced absenteeism
- With good employee retention
- Where employees are clear about their role
- Where employees feel supported by their line manager
- Where employees improve their physical and mental health

The revised strategy builds on our existing policies and initiatives to provide a series of actions aimed at producing a more cohesive, structured and corporate approach to health and wellbeing across the council and ensuring that activity meets the needs of the organisation and our employees. Corporate HR will work closely with Marcomms and departments to ensure that all employees are made fully aware of what health & wellbeing initiatives are available and provided with the opportunity to attend/engage in planned activities where possible.

4.0 Resource Implications

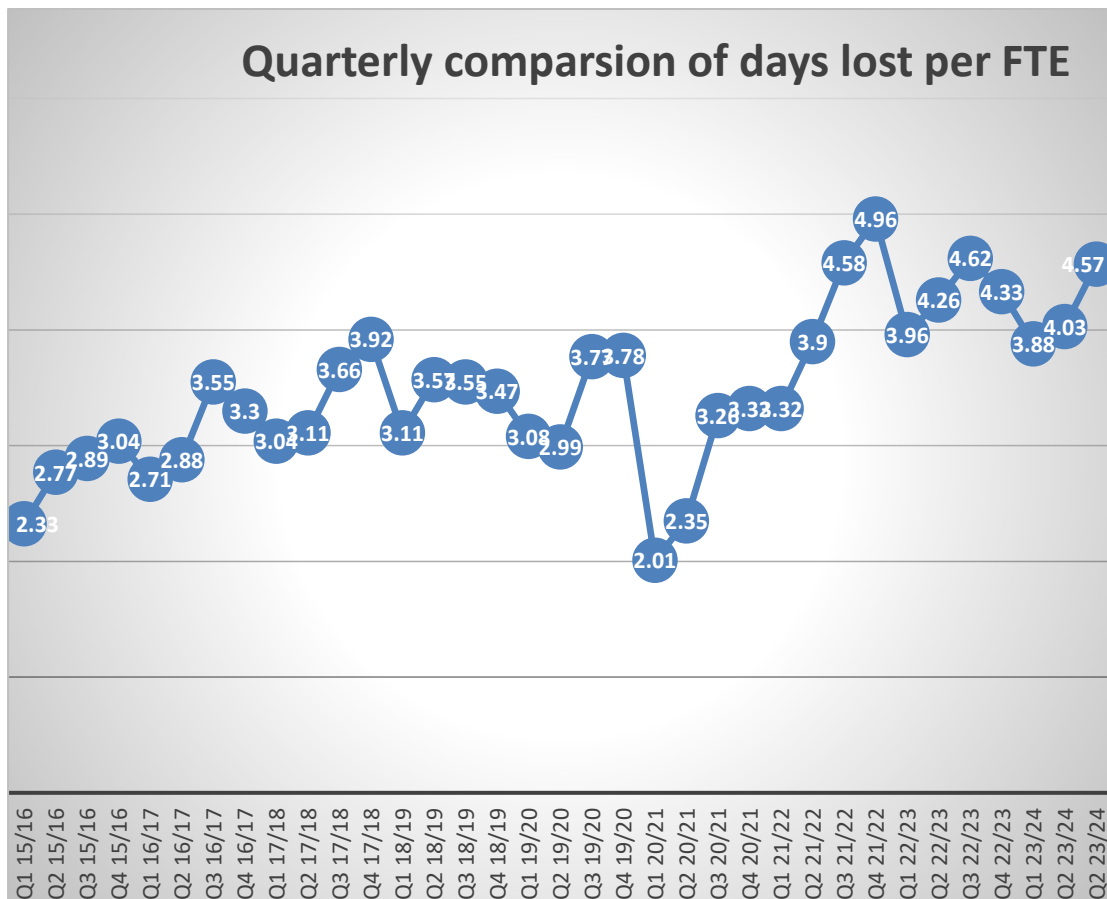
4.1 Directors are asked to ensure that:

- Resources are in place to ensure that adequate monitoring and review is in place at department level.

5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications

5.1 Approximately 31% of absence (8242.91 days) is recorded as disability related. The use of discretion and reasonable adjustments is considered in such cases.

Figure 1:



**Audit and Risk Panel,
Tuesday, 5th March, 2024**

Figure 2:

Reason for absence	Days lost (FTE)	% of absence
Stress. depression, anxiety	9246.16	34.85%
Musculo-skeletal	6899.77	26.00%
Stomach, digestive, etc	2483.74	9.36%
Infections, Covid19	1301.22	4.90%
Infections, inc colds & flu	1286.23	4.85%
Heart, blood press, circ, etc	1072.73	4.04%
Neurological, inc headaches	935.72	3.53%
Chest and respiratory	899.4	3.39%
Eye, ear, nose & mouth/dental	867.67	3.27%
Other	860.82	3.24%
Genito-urinary, inc menstrual	492.03	1.85%
Pregnancy related	184.85	0.70%
Indust/Infections (&colds/flu)	3.92	0.01%
Grand Total	26534.26	

Figure 3:

Reason for discretion	Total days	% of total
Unresolved ER issues	358.53	15.81%
Planned Surgery	334.67	14.75%
Bereavement	233.42	10.29%
UMC/ Disability related absence	196.81	8.68%
Emergency domestic responsibilities	193.49	8.53%
Mental Health	181.53	8.00%
Industrial Injury	148.17	6.53%
Broken Bone(s)	142.99	6.30%
Work related violence	99.19	4.37%
Significant personal stress	72.16	3.18%
Work related stress	137.02	6.04%
Hospitalised	61.2	2.70%
Pregnancy related	42.01	1.85%
Covid19	30	1.32%
Persistent absence after LTA	30	1.32%
Previous long service and clear record	7.04	0.31%
Total	2268.23	

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Total days lost in quarter three (October to December 2023)	9826.74	
% of total days lost where discretion applied in quarter three	23.08%	
Average days off per occurrence of discretion in quarter three	23.4	

Figure 4: Compliance issues

Department	Totals
City and Neighbourhood Services	69
City and Organisational Strategy	7
Finance and Resources	5
Legal and Civic Services	48
Property and Projects	26
Place & Economy	11
Totals	166

Figure 5:

Actual disability	Total days	% of total disability related absence
Depression / Anxiety / Mental health conditions	2525.92	30.64%
Chronic back condition	830.34	10.07%
Cancer	709.5	8.61%
Osteoarthritis	648.57	7.87%
Chronic heart condition	339.87	4.12%
Arthritis	329.97	4.00%
Diabetes	293.02	3.55%
Ulcerative Colitis	179.93	2.18%
Stroke	167.22	2.03%
Chronic leg condition	159.07	1.93%
Brain Aneurysm	157.43	1.91%
Long Covid	156.35	1.90%
Chronic gastrointestinal condition	146.96	1.78%
Myofascial pain syndrome	143.75	1.74%
Syncope	126.96	1.54%
Chronic Genito/Urinary condition.	120.92	1.47%
Diverticulitis	116.96	1.42%
Osteoarthritis	101.76	1.23%

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Hypertension	84.39	1.02%
Detached Retina	84	1.02%
Other*	820.02	9.95%
Total	8242.91	
Total absence end of quarter three	26534.26	
Disability related absence in quarter three	8242.91	
% if absence lost due to disability	31.07%	
% of disability related absence managed under LTA	79%	

***Other includes a total of 24 conditions that each individually account for less than 1% of total disability related absence."**

The Director of Human Resources highlighted to the Panel that the Deputy Chief Executive had written to all of the Directors in December, 2023, regarding absence management and highlighting the need to address compliance issues and the development of appropriate improvement plans. She explained that she had also written to each Director in February, 2024, reiterating the importance of the issue.

In response to a Member's question, the Director of Human Resources advised the Panel that, while there was a standard format for the Improvement Plans, each Department was unique in terms of its staff composition and workstyles. She highlighted the City and Neighbourhood Services (CNS) Department as an example, which had a large number of employees in manual roles compared to the other Departments, and where musculoskeletal disorders were a more common reason for absence.

The Panel was advised that the new HR and Payroll system was still being rolled out and that it was hoped that that would simplify and streamline the reporting process for all Departments.

In response to a Member's query as to how Covid related absence was being dealt with, the Director confirmed that the Council was continuing to follow Public Health Agency (PHA) guidance in that regard.

A further Member stated that it was concerning that the long term absence rate had increased. In response, the Director advised the Panel that the Council had an ageing workforce and the fact that musculoskeletal related absence was the second highest reason for absence was not unrelated in that regard.

In relation to the recently launched People Strategy and how its success would be measured, the Director advised the Panel that a number of targeted employee surveys and focus groups were scheduled to take place in the coming months and that Human Resources was working closely with the Trade Unions in respect of those.

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After further discussion, the Panel agreed that, if Departmental Improvement Plans and Absence Dashboards were not satisfactorily completed going forward, it would request the relevant Director to attend a future meeting of the Panel to discuss the issue.

The Panel noted the updated which had been provided.

Corporate Health and Safety Performance Report

(Ms. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Corporate Health and Safety Manager submitted for the Panel's consideration a report on the health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending on 31st December, 2023.

She provided, on a Departmental basis, information on the implementation of actions associated with the key performance indicators of health and safety and fire safety and pointed out that, at a corporate level, compliance rates had been 76% and 86% respectively.

In terms of accident/incident reporting, there had, in quarter three, been 32 employee accidents, 3 non-employee accidents, 18 RIDDOR accidents and 11 work related violence incidents.

She concluded by providing details of the information which had, during quarter three, been forwarded to the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in response to enquiries/correspondence.

In response to a Member's request regarding the outstanding Fire and Health and Safety actions which had been logged over twelve months ago, the Corporate Health and Safety Manager undertook to include additional information in future updates on how and when those actions would be actioned as well as an explanation from the relevant Department as to the reason for the delay.

At the request of a Member, it was also agreed that an update be submitted to the next meeting on the evacuation procedures for functions within the City Hall. The City Solicitor reassured the Panel that, while the procedures did exist, they were being updated.

After discussion, the Panel noted the corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter.

AGRS Progress Report February 2024

The Audit Governance and Risk Manager provided an overview of the Service's activity for the period from December, 2023, to February, 2024. He advised the Members that 79% of planned activity in the Audit Plan 2023/2024 had either been completed or was underway.

The Panel was advised of the following Audits which were still in progress:

- Open Spaces and Streetscene (draft report)
- Culture Strategy (draft report)
- Community Asset Management Framework (draft report)
- BWUH Ltd (Finance, IT Security & Data Protection) – (draft report issued)
- Belfast Castle, Malone House, Zoo (draft report)
- Management of contracts / funding agreements with Belfast Waterfront & Ulster Hall Ltd, Innovation Factory, and Visit Belfast (draft report)
- Markets (draft report)
- Business Continuity Gap Analysis (draft report)
- Asset Management Gap Analysis (draft report)
- Accessibility Regulations 2018 (fieldwork ongoing)
- Planning – Intelligent Client Function (fieldwork ongoing)
- Belfast Stories – Corporate Risk Review (fieldwork ongoing)
- City Services – Dog Wardens (fieldwork ongoing)
- BRCD Digital Strand – Corporate Risk Review (fieldwork ongoing)
- Smart Belfast Urban Innovation Framework (fieldwork ongoing)
- New Crematorium (fieldwork ongoing)

In response to a Member's question, the AGRS Manager explained that he expected that the assignments marked as draft would likely be finalised by the next Panel meeting.

The Panel was advised of a number of investigations which were ongoing, including those under the National Fraud Initiative. The investigations included an alleged theft and three other concerns which had been raised by employees or agency staff. He outlined that officers would apprise the Panel of progress as appropriate.

The Members were advised that the investigation into matches arising from the 2022/2023 National Fraud Initiative (NFI) exercise had been completed. He outlined that Audit officers were liaising with Departments to ensure that pecuniary interest declarations, in particular, were adequately captured and reported.

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The AGRS Manager outlined that Audit officers continued to provide advice and consultancy services to management within the Council.

It was reported that “Managing Public Money Northern Ireland” (MPMNI), originally issued in June 2008, had been updated and published. The updated document and summary of the key updates had been communicated to relevant senior management.

In response to a request from the AGRS Manager, the Panel agreed to defer the following three planned audits from the current Audit Plan, to the Audit Plan for 2024/25, for the reasons outlined below:

- Climate – while a draft Climate Action Plan for the Council had been received, it had not yet been finalised. As such we propose that the planned internal audit of the arrangements in place to deliver and report on the Council’s Climate Action Plan and our commitment to becoming a carbon neutral organisation.
- People Strategy – The People Strategy was launched in October 2023 and covered a period of three years. To ensure that maximum value was derived from our internal audit, we are proposing that the internal audit of the arrangements in place to implement, monitor and oversee delivery of the People Strategy.
- Strategic Waste Management - Management had requested that the proposed audit of Waste Management be deferred due to the lack of progress regarding the development of a Regional Waste Management Strategy by DAERA. The absence of the regional strategy impacted on the ability of the Council to develop its own strategy and therefore management consider that there would be limited value in undertaking an audit at this time.

The Panel was advised that the following four internal audits had been finalised during the period:

- **Payroll – Data Analytics** (Assurance opinion: Substantial);
- **Cyber Security – Computer Use Policy** (Assurance opinion: Some improvement needed);
- **Leisure Management Contract (GLL)** (Assurance opinion: Some improvement needed); and
- **Corporate Risk Review – Management of City Risks (Resilience)** (Assurance opinion: Major improvement needed to the risk management processes)

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In relation to the Corporate Risk Review – Management of City Risks (Resilience), the AGRS Manager outlined that, while the risk was regularly reviewed and updated by management, a number of key controls intended to manage the risk had not been operating effectively in practice. The Panel was advised that that was likely to have contributed to the assessment of the corporate risk remaining unchanged since it was first added to the Corporate Risk Register in December, 2019.

The Panel was advised that the Director of City and Organisational Strategy, the Climate Commissioner and the Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti - Poverty Management had collectively emphasised that the Resilience Strategy was a City strategy rather than a Council strategy, to be delivered in partnership with external partners. It had become clear that the management of the corporate risk had been impacted by a number of factors since the Resilience Strategy was launched in 2020, including the departure of the Resilience Commissioner in 2020 and the appointment of a Climate Commissioner and Climate Team, resulting in a corporate change in focus to climate related activity at both a Council and City level.

Having taken that into account, management was now of the opinion that the management of city risks was no longer a corporate risk. However, as at February 2024, the Panel was advised that there were no assurances that the 30 programmes in the Resilience Strategy Delivery Plan had been integrated into alternative delivery plans, including the Belfast Agenda or information on the existing processes for monitoring the shocks and stresses that represented risks to the city.

Accordingly, the following next steps had been agreed:

- The Climate Commissioner had undertaken a detailed assessment of the current status of each of the 30 transformational programmes in the Resilience Ambitions document. To provide assurance that those programmes had been integrated into the refresh of the Belfast Agenda, where appropriate, it was imperative that a mapping exercise would be undertaken.
- The original Strategy contained a commitment to review the Resilience Assessment, that is., the *'shocks and stresses that could make the city more vulnerable and could weaken our capacity to resist and to recover from future challenges'* every two years. At the time of audit, a formal review of the 2020 Resilience Assessment had not yet been undertaken. In the absence of a formal review and to provide assurance that there were mechanisms in place to alert key stakeholders to any changes to those shocks and stresses, it was important that management would undertake an exercise to determine the existing processes for reviewing and monitoring the 16 shocks and stresses.

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- The outcome of the above exercises should be reported to CMT for a decision on whether the alternative arrangements provided them with sufficient assurance to close the current corporate risk.

The Panel was advised that, should the Resilience Strategy remain a standalone corporate risk, AGRS' report had set out detailed audit findings on how the risk action plan should be updated.

After discussion, the Panel agreed that the Resilience Strategy should remain on the Corporate Risk Register, with a report from management to be submitted to the next quarterly Panel meeting to provide it with the necessary assurance regarding the transfer of the associated programmes and the processes for reviewing and monitoring the shocks and stresses as outlined.

The Panel noted the update which had been provided.

Corporate Risk Management

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services submitted for the Panel's consideration the Corporate Risk Dashboard which summarised the key updates from the risk review for the quarter-ending December, 2023.

The report updated the Panel also on compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements, which had been completed by senior management, the Action Plan to implement the recommendations from the external review of Risk Management arrangements in the Council and an update on business continuity management arrangements.

A Member stated that it was important to note that each of the risks had been re-baselined and that the Corporate Management Team be reminded of that and the expectation that actions were implemented in a timely manner.

After discussion, the Panel:

- a) noted the corporate risk management dashboard for quarter-end December 2023, and agreed the new wording for the corporate risks on Climate and Data;
- b) noted the assurances from senior management regarding compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for quarter-end December 2023;
- c) noted the progress which had been made to re-establish formal departmental risk management arrangements by 31st March, 2024; and

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- d) noted the current position regarding review and update of business continuity plans and completion of the annual BCM exercise for each of the critical services.

Draft Audit Plan for 2024/2025

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager submitted for the Panel's approval the Internal Audit Plan for 2024/2025. The Plan set out the role of Audit, Governance and Risk Services as an assurance provider and advisory service which directly assisted the Council in meeting relevant statutory obligations in relation to internal control, risk management and good governance.

The detailed Plan listed the areas which Audit, Governance and Risk Services was planning to audit during 2024/25 and was based on an assessment of audit need, taking into account of a number of risk factors, with the aim being to audit key areas on a cyclical basis. The Plan had been discussed with each Department at quarterly risk and audit meetings.

In addition to specific assignments, it also provided for support to the Council in terms of advisory work, project assurance, fraud prevention, detection and investigation, including a continued focus on the corporate fraud risk assessment and participation in the National Fraud Initiative, as well as raising concerns, risk management, business continuity management and corporate governance.

The Panel was advised that the Plan was aligned to the draft Corporate Plan and priorities and would be flexed to meet the assurance and advisory needs of Members and management as required.

The Panel noted and approved the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2024/2025.

Local Government Auditors Report 2023

(The Director of City and Organisational Strategy attended in connection with the following 3 items.)

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services presented the following report to the Panel:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To update the Panel on the key messages contained in the Local Government Auditors Report 2023, which sets out their observations on financial performance, governance issues and challenges and opportunities facing councils in NI, based on audits relating to 2020-21 and 2021-22.**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That the Panel note the report.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Just before Christmas the Local Government Auditor issued a report on her observations on financial performance, governance issues and challenges and opportunities facing councils in NI, based on audits relating to 2020-21 and 2021-22. The full report is at Appendix A.

3.2 Below is a summary of the observations made by the LGA that may be of interest. The summary below and the full report has been circulated to senior management in BCC for noting and or action.

3.3 Financial Performance

- Staff costs have consistently accounted for just under 40% of total expenditure.
- The trend of annual expenditure consistently exceeding annual income was interrupted in 2020-21, due to the impact of the pandemic.
- There was a substantial decrease in capital expenditure during 2020-21 due to the impact of the pandemic and capital investment in 2021-22 was still substantially below pre-pandemic levels.
- Linked to this, the overall value of borrowing fell by £99.3 million (17%) over the last two years.
- The proportion of annual expenditure used to service debt ranges from 4% to 21% across all councils and where the % is high there is a risk that this commitment limits financial decision-making flexibility significantly in future years. The value of usable reserves held by councils has increased significantly. Managing reserves over the medium-term is one of CIPFA's key pillars of financial resilience in local government. In accordance with the Act, councils must ensure that they have clear and robust plans in place for using these reserves in a way that delivers maximum value for rate payers.

3.4 Governance Issues

- The LGA highlighted issues re lack of up to date policies and reminds councils of their duty to have proper arrangements in place for good governance.
- Given procurement issues identified and challenges regarding capacity and capability, the LGA encourages councils to consider whether there are issues relating to procurement that should be included in Annual Governance Statements -
- The requirement for councils to adhere to Performance Improvement legislation has been in place for seven years and the LGA now considers it appropriate to consider the overall effectiveness of this requirement and will work with councils and the Department to take this forward.
- Regarding the NIAO review of the planning system in NI (February 2022) which concluded that the planning system was not working efficiently or effectively, the LGA intends to review the progress being made to implement the recommendations in the subsequent PAC report.
- As councils are responsible for maintenance and management of a £2.5 billion asset base the LGA underlines how it is essential to have appropriate asset management practices in place and promotes 'A strategic approach to the use of public sector assets – A good practice guide for LG in NI' October 2021
- The value of fraud in 2020-21 was significantly higher than previous and following years and the LGA highlights how reporting of fraud has been inconsistent and recommends that councils continue to inform her of all suspected and actual frauds. It is critical that councils continue to be alert to ongoing risks to internal controls and effectively guard against fraud.
- The LGA points out how it is essential to have effective arrangements to support individuals raising concerns and encourages councils.
- Absence levels reduced during the pandemic to their lowest over five years, however post pandemic councils recorded their highest absence levels. LGA underlines the importance

of closely monitoring and actively managing sickness absence levels.

- Unlike central government, councils are not required to aim to pay at least 90% of valid invoices within ten days of receipt. Given the challenges faced by suppliers in the current economic climate, LGA advises councils should seek to improve their performance re the payment of invoices within 10 days.

3.5 Challenges and Opportunities

- Councils should seek to sustain the innovation and agility they have exhibited and commends the NIAO guide on Risk and Innovation (June 2023)
- Re the greater use of new technologies councils should ensure that they have access to appropriate expertise to enable them to effectively identify and manage any data security and fraud issues.
- LGA points out importance of member training and signposts to NILGA who deliver training and their councillor development charter (9 of 11 councils achieved the charter). LGA highlights importance of specific training for Audit & Risk Committees given their key role in council governance processes.
- There has been significant challenge in negotiating and agreeing pay settlements with staff, which resulted in industrial action and affected service delivery in some councils. Councils might benefit from working collaboratively on this to ensure a consistency of approach.
- Councils to ensure they use grants received over the last two years effectively and efficiently, in particular the £33m of previously allocated and unused funds which were no longer ring-fenced (announced by the Department in Oct 2022) and could be used more generally to support economic recovery.
- There is a strong sense that initial optimism around City Deals could be tempered by concerns about the viability of initial plans due to significant increases in forecast project costs. In June 2020 the Assembly Research and Information Service produced a briefing paper on City and Growth Deals and the factors impacting

on the success of Deals. The LGA will continue to observe how City and Growth deals progress from planning to delivery across NI.

- The draft report on the review of the efficiency savings from LGR in 2015 is being considered by the Department and SOLACE. The LGA will consider the report when it is published to decide if further analysis is required.
- The LGA refers to the review of job creation targets in 2018 and that DfE requested amendments to its performance indicators, as outlined in the 2015 order and there is consensus on the need to change. Prior to implementation, approval is required by the NI Assembly.
- LGA points out that it is likely that implementation of the Climate Change Act will have an impact on councils performance objectives and responsibilities in respect of sustainability, for example, the Act has established a target that 70% of all waste is recycled by 2030. The LGA notes that Audit Wales has published a paper which makes five 'calls for action' to assist public bodies plan for transition to net zero and recommends that councils review this paper. The LGA also notes that the NIAO is due to publish a strategic review of waste management arrangements in NI. The LGA encourages councils to collaborate on sustainability and net zero goals and will continue to monitor and report on progress.

Financial and Resource Implications

None known at this time

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None known at this time."

A Member stated that, when it came to performance and improvement, it was important that the Council focused on outcomes, not output.

After discussion, the Panel noted the update.

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**Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) –
Audit and Assessment Report 2023-2024**

Mr. P. Barr, presented the Panel with the NIAO Report to the Council and the Department for Communities under Section 95 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014. The report summarised the work of the Local Government Auditor (LGA) on the 2023-24 Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment undertaken on Belfast City Council.

The LGA had certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. She certified that an improvement audit and improvement assessment had been conducted. The LGA also stated that, as a result, she believed that Belfast City Council had discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2022-23 and its 2023-24 Improvement Plan, and had acted in accordance with the Guidance. In her opinion, she had stated that the Council was unlikely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2023-2024, as it had not been able to demonstrate a track record of improvement.

With reference to the previous agenda item, Mr P Barr indicated that the LGA considered it appropriate to consider the overall effectiveness of Part 12 of the Act and would keep councils up to date with progress in that area.

The Panel was advised that, in response, the Council had highlighted that its performance plan and assessment focussed on a limited set of improvement objectives, some of which were outside the Council's control. During the year, the Council had advised it had been required to place a greater emphasis on focusing the City's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost of living crisis. The Council had also noted that the objectives and measures set within the performance plan did not fully capture the scale and scope of the work that the Council had undertaken during 2022-2023, or of the quantifiable improvements in performance that the Council considered it made across the wider programme of activities.

Noted.

Performance Improvement Update

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy presented the following report to the Panel:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To provide the Audit and Risk Panel with an update on the next steps for the indicators used in the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.**

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2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Audit and Risk Panel is asked to:

- **Note the next steps to refine the performance indicators within the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act requires Councils to agree improvement objectives on an annual basis and publish these in the form of an Improvement Plan. SP and R Committee approved the Improvement Plan 2023-24 in August 2023, which contains our commitment to securing continuous improvement as well as delivery of five improvement objectives. The Improvement Plan was then published on the council website on 30 September 2023 as required by the legislation.

3.2 The Audit and Risk Panel will be aware that the Improvement Plan does not include everything that The Council plans to do in 2023-24, but instead focuses on a smaller set of key improvement priorities as shown in the table below. The Panel will also be aware that the Performance Improvement Plan includes a number of performance indicators and milestones that demonstrates progress towards the targets that Council has identified within the plan.

3.3

Our services and facilities
Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.
Our communities
Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.
Our economy
Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.
Our environment
Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.
Our city
Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

3.4 Use of Residents Survey data

Officers recognise that the continued use of resident survey data is problematic in the context of demonstrating performance against the Council's specific objectives within the Performance Improvement Plan. With this in mind, Officers have engaged with CMT, NIAO and DfC to agree revisions to the measures within the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.

Officers plan to propose an improved set of indicators, which are drawn from KPIs that have been developed as part of the Council's overall improvements in service delivery and accountability. Officers are currently working with council departments and DfC to finalise a range of performance indicators that remain both ambitious and SMART in nature (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound).

Next steps

- As noted above, officers have engaged with CMT, NIAO and DfC to agree revisions to the measures within the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24. Following agreement on revised performance indicators with DfC and NIAO, officers will bring a report to SP and R Committee on 22 March 2024 recommending changes to the performance indicators within the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.
- Subject to approval by SP and R Committee, officers will publish the revised Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 on our website and submit a combined Q3 and Q4 update to the Audit and Risk Panel in June 2024. This combined Q3 and Q4 update will be based on the revised performance indicators.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

4.1 None.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

5.1 There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report."

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The Director of City and Organisational Strategy advised the Panel that officers were re-examining the indicators used in the Plan and that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. He confirmed that the Council could alter the indicators used, so long as it had the agreement of the Department for Communities and the NI Audit Office. He concurred with the Member who had previously emphasised that the focus should be on outcomes, rather than output. A further Member stated that the focus of the indicators should be on issues which were within the Council's control.

The Panel noted the next steps as outlined in the report.

Audit and Risk Panel Governance

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this paper is

- To present the Panel with an update on the annual review of the Terms of Reference for the Audit and Risk Panel, Audit Assurance Board and Audit, Governance and Risk Services along with the 2024 programme of business.
- To present members with an initial assessment of how the Panel complies with the CIPFA publication on ‘Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police’ was issued in October 2022 for the Panels review and approval.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That the Audit and Risk Panel notes that no significant changes were required to the terms of reference and approves the Audit and Risk Panel's indicative programme of business for 2024.

The Panel is also asked to consider the initial assessment against Audit Committee best practice at appendix E and F and indicate whether

- a) they are in agreement with it and
- b) whether there are any actions required to further improve the effectiveness of the Panel.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 In line with good practice, the terms of reference for the Audit & Risk Panel and the Audit Assurance Board are reviewed on an annual basis.**

Audit & Risk Panel Terms of Reference

- 3.2 The terms of reference of the Panel are important because they set out the role of the Panel in the context of the Council's governance structures. Following the update of the Terms of Reference in March 2023 to take account of the updated version of the 2018 CIPFA publication on 'Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police' and the CIPFA 'Audit Committees Position Statement' issued in October 2022, setting out guidance on the function and operation of audit committees and represents best practice, no changes are required this year. The terms of reference are at appendix A for information.**

Audit Assurance Board Terms of Reference

- 3.3 The Audit Assurance Board is chaired by the Chief Executive. The principal activity of the Audit Assurance Board over the years has been to review and consider reports from internal audit, external audit and management that are to be submitted to the Audit & Risk Panel - but from a top management / Accounting Officer perspective rather than a Member perspective. This process enables the Chief Executive and the Board to be assured (or otherwise) of current risk, control and governance arrangements and consider any issues that require management priority / attention / direction.**
- 3.4 Again, following the update of the terms of reference last year to align them with the updates made to the terms of reference for the Audit and Risk Panel, no changes are required this year. The terms of reference are at appendix B for information.**

Audit, Governance and Risk Services Terms of Reference

- 3.5 Following update of the AGRS Terms of Reference last year to implement a recommendation from the external quality assessment of AGRS, regarding the safeguards that are in place to help preserve our independent and**

objectivity, no updates are required this year. The terms of reference are at appendix C for information.

- 3.6 New Global Internal Audit (GIA) Standards were launched by the Institute of Internal Auditors in January 2024. CIPFA and the other standard setters behind the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) are currently reviewing the new GIA standards. The intention is to develop a new PSIAS that incorporates the new GIA standards and any additional guidance to support its application. CIPFA hope to issue a consultation in summer 2024. It is possible that when updated, the PSIAS may lead to changes to the AGRS Terms of Reference and we will bear this in mind for next year's review and update.

Audit & Risk Panel – Programme of Business 2024

- 3.7 In line with good practice the quarterly meetings of the Panel have been aligned with an indicative programme of business, designed to ensure that the Panel demonstrably addressed / discharges its roles and responsibilities as set out in its purpose statement / terms of reference. The indicative programme of business is attached at Appendix D.

Audit & Risk Panel training and self-assessment against good practice and effectiveness

- 3.8 Audit and Risk Panel training was delivered in a hybrid manner on 30 January in City Hall. The training was facilitated by Steve Mungavin and the purpose was to promote the role of the Audit & Risk Panel and discuss how to maximise its contribution to effective governance and accountability in the Council. No improvement actions were identified at the session. The session was attended by four members of the Panel and the slides were provided to all members afterwards.
- 3.9 The CIPFA publication 'Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police' dated October 2022 sets out guidance on the function and operation of audit committees and represents best practice. The guidance emphasises the importance of audit committees and recognises that they are a key component of governance.

- 3.10** The guidance states that the committee should evaluate its impact and identify areas for improvement. On behalf of Members, AGRS completed an initial assessment of:
- the Audit & Risk Panel effectiveness against CIPFA best practice,
 - the impact and effectiveness of the Audit & Risk Panel
- 3.11** These may be found at appendix E and F (these are templates provided with the CIPFA guidance). In line with previous years this initial assessment found the Panel to be broadly in compliance with best practice.
- 3.12** The Panel is asked to consider the initial assessment at appendix E and F and indicate whether:
- a) they are in agreement with it and
 - b) whether there are any actions required to further improve the effectiveness of the Panel.
- 3.13** We draw the Panels attention to two ‘Good Practice Questions’ in the CIPFA guidance (at appendix E) that do not currently apply to the Councils Panel :
- Good Practice Question 8 regarding the publication of the Annual Report of the Panel in line with the 2022 Guidance, this will be covered in the annual report from the Panel to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June 2024.
 - Good Practice Question 14 regarding how members of the Panel have been appointed. This question is not relevant because the Councils Panel comprises of one member from each of the eight main political parties with an external member to provide independence and expertise.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

None.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None known at this time.”

The Panel noted the update and agreed the submission of the self-assessment of good practice (available on mod.gov).

**Audit and Risk Panel,
Tuesday, 5th March, 2024**

Review of Strategic Partnerships – Councillor Hanvey to raise

In response to a request from a Member, it was agreed that Mr. P. Barr, NIAO, would write to the City Solicitor, the Deputy Chief Executive and the Head of AGRS requesting the outstanding information which he required in relation to Strategic Partnerships. The information which was requested would then be circulated to all Members of the Panel for their information.

Date of Next Meeting

The Panel noted that the next meeting would take place on Tuesday, 4th June, 2024 at 12.30pm.

Chairperson



Subject:	World Athletics Road Race
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Greer, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager Culture, Tourism & Events

Restricted Reports													
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>												
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 													
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 60%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 5%;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td style="width: 35%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>		After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>		Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>		Never	<input type="checkbox"/>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>												
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>												
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>												
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>												

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

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to seek a direction from members pertaining to a funding request from the organisers of the Antrim Half Marathon for the staging of a 5km race and a 1 mile race in Belfast.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider approving officers recommendation to not accede to the funding request for £80,000 to the organisers of the June road racing event.
3.0	Main Report
	Background
3.1	The project promoter is hosting a 5km on Sunday June 9 th . The event will feature an appearance by Joshua Cheptigi the current Olympic 5000m champion. The event will also feature elite mile races for men and women.
3.2	The event is currently being supported by the Ulster University and we are aware that the organiser has made applications for funding support from Tourism NI, but that request is still being considered.
3.3	The event will be televised and is a paid for event with the following entry prices for participants, Adults £22, and Students £15.
3.4	The organiser has requested a contribution of £80,000 from Belfast City Council towards the organisation of the event.
3.5	The event promoter has suggested the economic impact would be in the region of £2.7m. Although we have not had an independent verification or test of this proposed level of return.
3.6	Members should be aware there is currently no budget or officer resource assigned to this activity.
3.7	Given the significant workload planned for the Events Team in delivering Belfast 2024, ongoing bidding and organising for Fleadh and Euro's 2028 as well as councils delivered events such as Christmas, Lord Mayor's Day, and the Maritime Festival the addition of this event would place significant unplanned work pressure on staff. As a result of this and the fact that funding for the event has not been planned for within current departmental budgets it is recommended that the committee does not accede to the funding request.
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.8	As referenced, there is currently no provision made within council budgets.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.9	None Identified
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None



Subject:	Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting on 11 th March 2024
Date:	22 nd March 2024
Reporting Officer:	David Sales, Strategic Director of City Operations
Contact Officer:	Jim Girvan, Neighbourhood Services Manager Godfrey McCartney, Good Relations Manager (6015)

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

Appendix 2 only is restricted

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

Insert number

3

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐
☒
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
-----	--

1.1	To report to committee on the key issues discussed at the Shared City Partnership meeting held on 11 th March 2024.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	That the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approve the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 11 th March 2024 including:
2.2	<u>Shared City Partnership Membership (Verbal Update)</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> That members note the verbal update provided by the Good Relations Manager.
2.3	<u>The Executive Office Asylum Dispersal Funding Update</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it approves that the remaining £70,000 of Asylum Dispersal Money be used to procure four further projects to support the localised community integration and inclusion of asylum seekers in Belfast.
2.4	<u>Segregation and the Environment Research Report</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that, following full Council approval, the research report is launched, published and that the recommendations within the report are progressed.
2.5	<u>Peace IV - Secretariat Update</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it note the contents of the report and the appendices.
2.6	<u>PEACEPLUS – Theme 1.1 - Local Action Plan Update</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Partnership agreed to recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u> The Shared City Partnership is a Working Group of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee which consists of Elected members and representatives from various sectors across the city. The minutes from the Partnership are brought before the Committee for approval on a monthly basis.
3.2	The key issues on the agenda at the 11 th March 2024 meeting were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verbal Update on SCP Membership The Executive Office Asylum Dispersal Funding Update Segregation and the Environment Report Peace IV – Secretariat Update Peaceplus – Theme 1.1 – Local Action Plan Update
3.3	More details regarding the above issues and recommendations are included in the minutes of the meeting attached in Appendix 1 and a copy of the Segregation and the Environment Report is attached in Appendix 2. <u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> All financial implications are covered through existing budgets. <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>

	The recommendations of the Partnership promote the work of the Council in promoting good relations and will enhance equality and good relations impacts.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Minutes of the Shared City Partnership 11 th March 2024 Appendix 2 – Segregation and the Environment Report

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SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP

Monday 11th March, 2024

MEETING OF SHARED CITY PARTNERSHIP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Duffy (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Lyons, McLaughlin and McMullan.

External Members: Mr. L. Gunn, Northern Ireland Housing Executive;
Ms. J. Irwin, Community Relations Council;
Ms. C. McMenamin, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust;
Ms. T. Mimna, Good Relations, TEO;
Mr. W. Naeem, Interfaith Forum; and
Ms. A. Roberts, Community and Voluntary Sector.

In attendance: Ms. D. McKinney, PEACE Programme Manager;
Mr. G. McCartney, Good Relations Manager;
Mr. D. Robinson, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer;
Mrs. L. Dolan, Acting Senior Good Relations Officer; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillor Smyth, Mr J Girvan, Neighbourhood Services Manager and Mrs. B. Arthurs, Mr. P. Anderson, Superintendent Henry, Mr. M. McBride, Mr. G. Walker and Ms. A M White.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 5th February, 2024, were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McMullan declared an interest in the item "The Executive Office Asylum Dispersal Funding Update", in that he was an individual member of Belfast City of Sanctuary, and he left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

Shared City Partnership Membership (Verbal Update)

The Good Relations Manager advised the Working Group that Mr. Liam Gunn had been appointed as the nominee from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the Chairperson welcomed him to his first meeting.

The Good Relations Manager also advised that Ms. Clare Guinness, Belfast Chamber of Commerce, had been appointed as the Business representative nominee and, although not at today's meeting, he hoped that she would be available to attend the next meeting of the Partnership.

Noted.

The Executive Office Asylum Dispersal Funding Update

(Councillor McMullan, having declared an interest in this item, left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.)

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer reminded the Members that, in March 2023, The Executive Office (TEO) had awarded the Council £406,228 of Asylum Dispersal Funding to support proposals to enhance or develop support for asylum seekers. She then provided the Working Group with an update on the projects which had been delivered over the past 9 months, noting that £70,000 of the overall funding awarded by TEO had been allocated to the provision of an Immigration Advice Project, however, following a procurement exercise, whereby no award had been made and following a further commissioning of Regional Immigration Advice Services by TEO, the Council was now proposing to reprofile this money into supporting four further projects.

She reported that, given the increase in the number of people seeking asylum, whom had been accommodated in new areas of Belfast and the growing use of community and voluntary organisations, across the city, it was proposed that the remainder of this funding be used to procure four projects to support the localised community integration and inclusion of asylum seekers in Belfast. This would be done through an open call, prioritising organisations that had not been recipients of this fund, while also inviting applications in areas where asylum seekers have not been traditionally accommodated.

The officer advised that the proposed approach was consistent with previous conversations raised at the Shared City Partnership in relation to supporting capacity within local communities to accommodate the integration and inclusion of asylum seekers.

Following a query regarding the fair distribution of the available funding, the officer encouraged the Members of the Partnership to make any organisations that they felt might be keen to avail of the funding aware of the fact that it would be going out for an open call and assured the Members that officers could provide advice to organisations that were interested in developing projects in relation to asylum seekers.

In regard to specific concerns raised regarding the lack of integration of asylum seekers into the community within the Shankill area, the Good Relations Manager undertook to liaise further with the Member directly.

Discussion ensued regarding the data around the housing of asylum seekers and following discussion it was agreed that a representative from Mears be invited to a future meeting of the Partnership to provide an overview of its role.

The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it approves that the remaining £70,000 of Asylum Dispersal Money be used to procure four further projects to support the localised community integration and inclusion of asylum seekers in Belfast.

Segregation and the Environment Research Report

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer reminded the Partnership that, as part of the Good Relations Action Plan for 2022/23, provision had been made for the development of a piece of research to identify the links between segregation within the city and its subsequent impact on the environment and the climate.

At its meeting in February 2023, Members of the Partnership: *“noted the report and the actions being taken to implement the recommendations in the research, including the provision already made within the previously agreed Good Relations Action Plan”*. Further, Members agreed *“to publish and disseminate the report, Segregation and the Environment, after further internal and external engagement has taken place”*.

The officer continued that, as part of the further internal and external engagement, the research had been considered by the Chief Officers Management Team (CMT), in February 2023 who had discussed the report and requested that further discussion on the research be undertaken. CMT had also requested that the author of the report would attend a future meeting of CMT to discuss its contents further with them. Mr. Peter Osborne had subsequently attended CMT in April 2023 to input into the conversation and to address queries that the senior management had had regarding the content, background and recommendations contained within the report.

Following this, two workshops had been held with a number of internal staff sections, to discuss the research and the recommendations further. Central to this was to look at how the recommendations could be taken forward by various relevant Council sections. In addition, officers had engaged through various meetings and events with external parties.

Once this process had been completed, CMT had considered a revised draft of the report, along with the revised recommendations. Following discussion, CMT had engaged with Party Group Leaders, who agreed that officers now progress the report through the Shared City Partnership and for onward agreement by Elected Members.

The Acting Senior Good Relations Officer then drew the Members' attention to Updated Research Report, including updated recommendations, that had been attached as an appendices to the report.

The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that, following full Council approval, the research report is launched, published and that the recommendations within the report are progressed.

Peace IV - Secretariat Update

The PEACE Programme Manager provided the Partnership with an update in respect of the activity associated with the closure of the PEACE IV Local Action Plan.

She reported that as PEACE IV progressed towards closure, officers had been reviewing the ongoing contractual obligations, this included future audit requirements and the retention all documentation associated with the delivery of the PEACE IV Local Action Plan.

She advised that all documentation associated with the delivery of the PEACE IV Local Action Plan were required to be retained for 5 years after the submission of the final claim, in line with the PEACE IV Programme Rules, therefore, the retention date was until 31st December 2028. In line with this, the contractual obligations, including the retention date, had been outlined to external delivery partners during the On the Spot Verification visit at project closure.

The Programme Manager advised that she had been liaising with relevant Council Departments, including Procurement Services, Human Resources and Finance to ensure compliance with PEACE IV retention requirements. Advice from Legal and Information Governance on the retention of records was being progressed and the archiving of all relevant information would be done in line with the Council's Records Retention Disposal Schedule and Policy.

In term of the reimbursement of PEACE IV claims the officer advised that this was progressing, with the Period 34 BPR claim for Council (£181K) and Period 34 CYP claim for NIHE (£62K) having now been paid. The value of outstanding claims remained as previously reported at £4.2m.

The Peace Programme Manager advised that community stakeholders continue to animate the Forth Meadow Community Greenway and are keen for the Partnership to continue to support the Greenway. . It was proposed that Partnership Members participate in a walk along part of the Greenway from Glencairn, to the Springfield Dam and finishing at the City Cemetery, followed by refreshments at St John's Parish.

The Members agreed that this would be valuable as it would enable them to see first hand the works that had been undertaken.

The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it note the contents of the report and the appendices.

Peace Plus Belfast City Council Local Action Plan Update

The Partnership considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to provide Shared City Partnership members with an update on the assessment of PEACE PLUS 1.1. Co-designed Belfast Local Community Peace Action Plan, and the proposed Capacity Building Programme.

2.0 Recommendations

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

3.0 Main report

As members are aware, planning for the mobilisation of the Local Action Plan is progressing.

Officers have received and responded to initial clarifications from SEUPB regarding the submitted appendices that support the formal application, which indicates that the assessment process has progressed. The time frame for assessment approval and mobilisation of the Local Action Plan is being closely monitored to enable a realistic delivery schedule, any proposed delays will be reported to members, as necessary.

To aid understanding of Council's obligations in rolling out the Local Action Plan, including the monitoring and evaluation requirements, a request was submitted to SEUPB seeking advice on the proposed training that will be provided for Councils. In response, SEUPB advised they 'have not decided on approach around this, whether in terms of written guidance or training session with councils,' and they 'will revert on any decision and provide collective information to all 17 local authorities.'

In the absence of training / guidance, the management of risk in preparing for mobilisation is critical.

The immediate priorities, as previously reported, include the recruitment of staff, the delivery of a procurement capacity building programme and preparing for procurement. Recruitment of a Lead Officer to support the development of systems and processes, commenced on 16 February, with further recruitment for project support administration to process in March 2024.

3.2 Capacity Building Programme

The content of the capacity building programme has been discussed with colleagues in Commercial and Procurement Services and Employability and Skills, as outlined below.

Training	Provider
PEACEPLUS Mobilisation Pre- Market Overview	PEACEPLUS Team
Introduction to Tendering	Commercial Procurement Services
Writing a Winning Bid	External Facilitator
Consortium Development	External Facilitator
Collaborative Bidding	External Facilitator
BCC Procurement System and Social Value Procurement Policy	Commercial Procurement Services
PEACEPLUS Monitoring and Evaluation	PEACEPLUS Team

Dates for delivery are to be confirmed, after which stakeholders will be informed and public advertising of the programme will be progressed. It is envisaged that subject to agreement delivery will commence mid-March to May 2024, which should align with the opening of tender calls.

3.3 Financial & Resource Implications

Expenditure associated with the LCAP is eligible from the submission date.

As such expenditure is within the existing budget which will be claimed retrospectively from SEUPB. Council is awaiting guidance on the drawdown of the £30K advance from SEUPB.

3.4 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Plan has been submitted for equality and good relations screening as well as rural needs assessment.”

A Member commended the work that was currently being undertaken by the Peace Programme Manager and welcomed the fact that the recruitment of a Lead Officer had now commenced and that further recruitment for project support

administration was due to commence later in the month. He added that it was disappointing that PEACE IV staff had not been able to be retained whilst transitioning to the new programme.

The Good Relations Manager concurred, he stated that due to the temporary nature of roles in a funded programme that staff had moved on to avail of new opportunities. He stated that 'future succession planning' was an issue that needed addressed to try and avoid such a loss of valuable officer experience and knowledge.

The Partnership agreed to recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Chairperson

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Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum Thursday 14th March 2024

Attendance

Members:

Councillor Jenna Maghie (*for Councillor Michael Long*)
Councillor Ronan McLaughlin (*for Councillor Ciaran Beattie*)
Councillor Christina Black
Councillor Brian Smyth
Councillor Sarah Bunting
Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive
Sharon McNicholl Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 1)
Wendy Langham, Programme Director, Belfast Stories (for Item 2)
Eimear Henry, Strategic Lead, Belfast Stories (for Item 2)
John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy (for Item 3)
Shauna Murtagh, Physical Programmes Portfolio Manager (for item 4)
John Greer, Director of Development (for item 5)
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Items 6, 7,8 & 10)
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 9)
Joanne Delaney, Portfolio and Programme Coordinator (secretariat)

1. Finance Update

The Director of Finance provided a summary of the Medium Term Financial Plan which will be considered by March SP&R Committee. Given the many challenges involved in securing the 2024/25 district rate he advised that consideration needed to be given to the future priorities and sustainable funding so that any budgetary gaps can be identified in a timely manner highlighting the need for a longer-term, forward-looking approach to rate setting. It was also imperative that any potential gaps are integrated with future efficiency and transformation plans going forward. In relation to a query raised on future income generation the Chief Executive provided clarity.

The Director also advised a report will go to March SP&R to update Members on the Capital Strategy for 2024/25 which incorporates the prudential indicators for the Council for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27, and the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25.

2. Belfast Stories Update

The Programme Director and Strategic Lead for Belfast Stories provided a detailed update for Members on the progress achieved to date on the project, including an overview of the story collection framework, stories audit and stories pilot that has commenced. The Director also outlined the governance arrangements which have been put in place in order to ensure the effective delivery of the project. Members noted the key programme milestones for the year ahead including an update on the timeline for the Outline Business Case and noted a financial request to allow for mobilisation costs which Members will be asked to consider at March SP&R Committee. It was also noted that agreement for a proposed study visit to be arranged for the Belfast Stories Members Working Group would be included in the report.

3. Belfast Agenda Refresh

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy updated the Forum on the Belfast Agenda strategic framework and supporting action plans for the period 2024-2028 which was recently considered at the February meeting of SP&R Committee. A copy of the Executive Summary had been circulated to Party Group Leaders in advance of the meeting and the Director asked that Members feedback any comments by close of play today in advance of the summary document going to print. A query was raised in relation to one of the performance measures included in the summary document and the Director agreed to consider alternatives. The Director also outlined the arrangements and timeline for a soft launch of the refreshed Belfast Agenda.

4. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Physical Programmes Portfolio Manager provided a briefing for Members on the recent decision made by the CG&R Committee to reallocate monies to the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) which had previously been ringfenced for the Belfast 2024 programme. She outlined the background to the NRF along with an update on the agreed funding allocation model previously agreed and the project pathway approval process. Members noted the proposal for reallocation of the additional monies within the existing funding allocation model and a report on the detail discussed will be brought to March SP&R Committee for consideration.

5. Funding Request

The Director of Economic Development advised that the Chief Executive had received correspondence in relation to the proposed staging of a 5km race in Belfast in June 2024. He outlined the details of the event including the request from the organisers for a financial contribution from the Council and highlighted that there was at present no budget or resource assigned to this request. Members discussed the request in light of unallocated resources and a report will go to SP&R for Members consideration.

6. Language Strategy Draft Action Plan

The City Solicitor provided an update on the draft Language Strategy Action Plan 2023-26 following public consultation. She highlighted some of the key findings from the consultation and advised that given the issues raised as part of the consultation process the updated action plan will be brought back to SP&R Committee in April. A query was raised by a Member in relation to the timeline for the Draft Irish Language Policy. The City Solicitor advised given the ongoing party group briefings taking place that it was the intention that it would also be brought in April.

7. Illuminate Requests

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

- **Darkness into Light Suicide awareness - 26th March 2024**

In relation to a request for illumination for Easter Celebration, the request was agreed in principle under the City Solicitors delegated authority, however the City Solicitor to follow up with PGL's on the preferred date and colour of illumination to mark the occasion. It was also noted that a report on the framework for illumination requests would be brought to a future meeting of SP&R Committee.

8. Planning Update

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in the coming months. A number of queries were raised in relation to NI Water and it was noted that the Chief Executive will follow up via correspondence to the Chief Executive of NI Water. In

relation to specific queries raised by Members the City Solicitor to follow up with those Members.

9. Elected Member Development Programme

The Director of Human Resources provided an update on the proposed changes to the current member development processes and budget arrangements, the detail of which was previously circulated for parties to further consider. She also updated Members on the upcoming political management development training for Council Officers which includes Members participation in some of the training sessions. Party Group Leaders were reminded to forward nominations to the Human Resources Manager.

10. AOB

Remote Meetings Regulations

The City Solicitor referred to correspondence received from the Department for Communities in relation to the regulations to give councils the flexibility to hold meetings by remote/hybrid means. A first draft of the regulations using the powers in the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (NI) 2021 was included in the correspondence for comment. Given the timeframes involved it was noted that the City Solicitor would make an Officer response to the consultation received under delegated authority and the response would then be brought to April SP&R Committee for notation.



Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality
Date:	22 March 2024
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Aisling Milliken, Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes ☐ No ☒

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

Insert number ☐

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision
After Council Decision
Sometime in the future
Never

☐
☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	This paper, together with the attached appendix, contains the recommended approach in respect of each of the requests by external organisations for access to the City Hall function rooms received up to 8 March 2024.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background Information</u></p> <p>The current criteria for use of the function rooms used to review external applications is Functions permitted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • functions which support other events in the city and which are of demonstrable economic benefit to Belfast whether organised by the council or not • functions which demonstrably enhance the city's image nationally or internationally as a desirable commercial, business or tourist destination • functions designed to celebrate or commemorate a notable achievement or significant anniversary (25, 50, 100 years) by an organisation or body with close links to the city or province • functions organised by recognised local community or voluntary sector groups for non-profit and non-political purposes
3.2	<p>Functions not permitted</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conferences, meetings, seminars, performances, wedding receptions, private parties or receptions and similar booking requests in the prestige function rooms • functions, which have as their principal purpose the generation of commercial gain for the organisers. Charity-fundraising functions are managed by the Lord Mayor's Office. • functions which have no compelling links to the council or the city specifically and which could instead use local private sector facilities • functions which have as their primary purpose the advancement of any political or religious cause or campaign or are otherwise potentially contentious or involve significant reputation risks for the council. • functions which involve exceptionally large or disruptive set-ups or pose a real and tangible risk to the fabric of the building or grounds
3.3	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The existing revised criteria and scale of charges have been applied to the various requests</p>

	received and the recommendations herein are offered to the Committee on this basis for approval.
3.4	The schedule attached at Appendix 1 covers 7 applications for functions scheduled for 2024 and 2025.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.5	None, any recommendations for hospitality will be met from existing budgets.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.6	None.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Schedule of function requests received up to 8 March 2024.

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MARCH 2024 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2024 EVENTS						
Diverse Youth NI	5 May 2024	Graduation and cultural event with food, speeches, and performance to celebrate students completing the first project phase of the Diverse Youth NI led Hi-M8 Mental Health Awareness campaign. Numbers attending – 150	C & D	No charge as voluntary organisation	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer</i>
NI Indian Nurses Organisation supported by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	12 May 2024	International Nurses' Day Celebration – cultural event with food, speeches, and performance. Numbers attending – 200	C & D	No charge as voluntary organisation	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer</i>
Now Group	4 June 2024	Now Graduation Ceremony - annual celebration of the work of trainees supported by the Now Group and completion of the training programme. Numbers attending – 300 - 500	D	No charge - Complimentary as Charity	No hospitality as annual event not one-off celebration	Approve No charge No hospitality
Belfast Exposed Photography Centre	6 June 2024	Now and Then – 40 years of Belfast Exposed – an evening of celebration with dinner and photography display to showcase creative art and culture. Numbers attending – 200	C & D	No charge as charity	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No Charge Wine Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
Ulster University School of Computing,	27 November 2024	Reception for the 16th International Conference on Ubiquitous	A & B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

MARCH 2024 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

		Computing and Ambient Intelligence for guests attending their 4-day conference taking place in Ulster University. Numbers attending – 150 - 175				
2025 EVENTS						
Irish Association of Dermatologists	9 May 2025	Reception and dinner for the 2024 EALTA Conference 2024. for guests attending their 3-day conference. Numbers attending - 100	A &B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
Ulster University	12 June 2025	Gala Conference Dinner for University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) for guests attending their 3-day conference taking place at Ulster University. Numbers attending - 250	A &B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

All-Party Working Group on the City Centre

Friday, 1st March, 2024

MEETING OF THE ALL-PARTY WORKING GROUP ON THE CITY CENTRE

Members present: Councillor de Faoite (Chairperson);
Aldermen Rodgers and McCullough; and
Councillors Groogan, Long and Maskey.

In attendance: Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of External Affairs, Communication
and Marketing;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business Research and Development
Manager;
Ms. D. Smith, Neighbourhood Integration Manager;
Ms. L.A. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were recorded.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 17th January, 2024 were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentation

Belfast Chamber of Trade and Commerce

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. G. Annan, President of Belfast Chamber, Ms. L. Barr, Castlecourt Centre Manager, Mr. T. Stokes, TSA Planning, Mr. A. Best, Lacuna Developments, and Ms. C. Guinness, CEO, Belfast Chamber, to the meeting.

Mr. Annan explained that Belfast Chamber had almost 600 members with a broad spectrum of representation. He stated that Belfast Chamber's vision was to make Belfast a global destination for growth and a better place to live, work, learn, visit and invest.

He stated that the purpose of the Chamber was to create the best economic environment for its members to flourish.

He outlined the following four strategic themes that Belfast Chamber would be undertaking over the following three years:

- Regeneration;
- Connectivity;
- Social value; and
- Sustainability.

Ms. Barr reported that Castlecourt supported over 3000 jobs in the city centre, both in the retail and leisure sector and within the offices on the second floor. She explained that over the past 18 months there had been around £14 million of investment.

She stated that it had been a challenge to restore footfall to pre-pandemic levels and that the Primark fire had also negatively affected footfall, however, the increase in student numbers in the city centre had boosted footfall.

She added that Castlecourt had ambition to contribute to revitalising the nighttime economy.

Mr. Stokes provided the Working Group with an update on city centre living and explained how the city centre was still evolving following the pandemic and how working, social and shopping habits had changed.

He reported that city centre living could provide solutions to the social housing deficit and highlighted that there were vast amounts of underutilised space within the city centre that could be converted into housing and contribute to the revitalisation of the city centre.

Mr. Best outlined how city centre spaces, the spaces between developments, provided linkage and green space and required development to increase fluidity in the city centre.

Ms. Guinness explained that sustainability was key and that there was an opportunity for the city to improve governance and that Belfast Chamber would like to see more efficient movement collectively to adapt to the changing market.

She added that culture and heritage must be preserved as it was a key selling point along with the fact that Belfast was one of the safest cities in the UK. She stated that dereliction and vacant spaces provided an opportunity to evolve as a city with a low carbon footprint and mindset.

The representatives answered several questions from the Members of the Working Group and the Chairperson thanked them for their presentation.

Noted.

Communication of City Centre Evidence (Verbal Report)

The Director of External Affairs, Communication and Marketing stated that messaging would be delivered through the Council's own channels, that would deliver positive messaging around the city centre, in a digestible format and that the provision of accessible information to the media would strengthen the messaging on an ongoing basis.

The Working Group noted the update.

FCC Dashboard and City Centre Messaging (Verbal Report)

The Business Research and Development Manager outlined the footfall data systems used to record the primary retail core footfall and highlighted the benefits and drawbacks of each of the providers and highlighted the following key elements:

- Regeneration and connectivity;
- Business and investment;
- Animation and distinctive offering;
- Green, clean, inclusive and safe; and
- Vulnerability.

He reported that there had been 106,616 average daily visitors to the city centre in January, 2024, which was a 12% increase from January, 2023. He informed the Working Group that the spend data received from Tourism NI was based on transactions processed by Visa and could be used to inform our understanding of visitor spend patterns. He stated that key metrics included the location and category of spend and the nationality of the cardholder.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development outlined the recent city centre market activity and highlighted key investment had been made along Donegal Place and Royal Avenue with the announcement of The Ivy at Clever House and a new River Island concept store along with the Council's investment in 2 Royal Avenue.

She stated that new brands, The White Company, Pret A Manger and Jamaica Blue had opened in the city centre along with local businesses opening new city centre locations.

She explained that there had been a significant step forward in city centre living with 778 new homes breaking ground at the Loft Lines development that brought the number of city centre homes under construction to 1000.

She reported that alongside the delivery of new build grade A office space, heritage conversions, such as Pearl Assurance House and Printworks were under development. She added that pockets of clustered development was creating a regenerative impact on the city centre.

The Working Group noted the update.

Complex Lives Update (Verbal Report)

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager updated the Working Group on the Belfast Complex Lives model to address the needs of the most vulnerable, particularly within the city centre.

She stated that the model was not a solution to chronic homelessness but had been designed to support the individual with a coordinated cross-agency support plan in place.

She reported that, over the previous months, the project had supported 119 individuals, 74 of whom were male and 45 females.

She stated that the model had been evolving in response to need and that feedback from partners and service users had been very positive.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager explained that a multi-disciplinary team was under development to address trends such as prison releases and support for homeless individuals returning to communities.

During discussion, the Working Group agreed to invite Extern to a future meeting to discuss complex lives and consider a walk-around the city centre with its representatives.

The Working Group noted the update.

Belfast 2024 Update (Verbal Report)

The Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism provided the Working Group with an update on the Belfast 2024 launch event that was held in 2 Royal Avenue.

She explained that collaborative work was being undertaken with Visit Belfast, Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland to promote the events of the programme and to promote Belfast as a culturally vibrant destination.

The Working Group noted the update.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Working Group was scheduled to take place on 12th April, 2024.

Chairperson

Disability Working Group

Wednesday, 13th March, 2024

DISABILITY WORKING GROUP HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McMullan (Chairperson); and
Councillors R. Brooks, G. McAteer and Smyth.

In attendance: Mrs. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Ms. J. Beck, Sign Language Interpreter;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman Copeland and Councillor Doherty.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 30th January, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Belfast 2024

(Ms. N. Kelly, Project Officer (Engagement), and Ms. C. Osborne, Partnership Officer, attended in connection with this item)

The officers presented the following report:

“University of Atypical Partnership

Belfast 2024 are working with partner University of Atypical which is disabled-led and the lead sectoral organisation for arts and disability.

Background:

Belfast City Council Culture Unit oversee a Partnership Agreement / MoU with University of Atypical which is renewed annually subject to an agreed work package. The focus in the past year and current year has been specifically focused on Belfast 2024. Belfast 2024 have

University of Atypical as a named partner and are including their logo on their website www.belfast2024.co.uk.

University of Atypical are devising a training programme for the Project Leads of the commissioned projects within the programme, to advise them on accessibility. This training uses a roadmap approach to providing arts organisations with information on how they can make their event more inclusive and accessible. This service provides tools and resource including an inclusive event planner/checklist.

University of Atypical have also been part of the Bank of Ideas design team to ensure that this participatory budgeting process takes into account accessibility for applicants. The process is open to all including individuals and non-constituted groups to come up with a creative idea and be in with the chance to get up to 2K to fund it. Decisions are being made at voting events where the public decide what they want to happen in their area.

University of Atypical have informed the process and are advising on creating accessible guidance notes and forms. The University of Atypical are proposing to also provide application support to disabled applicants, in line with service they provide to the likes of the Arts Council grant applications.

Belfast 2024 programme

Background:

We are delighted to have a homegrown celebration of culture and creativity throughout 2024.

Belfast 2024 is a programme of world-class spectacle events, performances, and activities across the city. We launched the programme on 29 February 2024.

The city is invited to get involved through innovative participation opportunities from January, with a calendar of exciting live events taking place across the city from May and running through to December 2024. Check out the programme on www.belfast2024.co.uk

Belfast 2024 Project Profile – Hear, Touch, Feel

"Touch, Hear, Feel" emerges as an immersive and multisensory installation crafted in collaboration with visually impaired communities. This ambitious project, produced by the Belfast International Arts Festival, delves into the realm of touch through original choreography, fabrics, audio, and video narratives.

A series of co-designed workshops, facilitated by Helen Hall in collaboration with the University of Atypical, Open Arts, and RNIB, span across Belfast, paving the way for an inclusive and transformative experience. As someone with sight loss Helen is

curious as to how her experience of interacting with the world around may differ from others.

The installation, located in public spaces, encompasses four interconnected areas, each separated by textural walls made from reclaimed materials. These spaces, dedicated to Words, Identity, Sound, and Smell, offer a free-standing promenade experience throughout the day.

Accompanying the sensory journey is an audio piece featuring discussions by members of the visually impaired community sharing their responses to touch. The spaces then undergo a metamorphosis, transforming into the stage for a new dance piece exploring the theme of touch. Choreographed by Helen and performed by herself and two other dancers, the audience embarks on a journey through space and narratives that explore touch without physical contact. The performance delves into the sound of touch and utilizes words to vividly describe textures and sensations.

In a pioneering move, creative audio description is seamlessly integrated, utilizing words that vividly describe texture and feeling—a departure from the traditional method of describing visual images, tailored specifically for audiences who have never had sight. Premiering as part of the Belfast 2024 program within the Belfast International Arts Festival (BIAF) in October 2024, "Touch, Hear, Feel" stands as a testament to the power of collaborative art in transcending physical boundaries and fostering inclusivity within the vibrant cultural tapestry of Belfast.

Belfast 2024 Outreach and Engagement

The NOW Group is supporting people with autism and learning disabilities – as part of a co-design pilot project in the run up to Belfast 2024 illustrator Elly Makem worked with the Fandom group to create their own comic book characters.

Gig Buddies is a project funded by the Culture Unit of Belfast City Council since 2017, that pairs adults with learning disabilities and/or autism with a volunteer, based on their shared interests, to build a friendship and attend monthly events together. Belfast 2024 Engagement Officer and Support Officer have delivered a 'Creative Me' session with the Gig Buddies group to promote events occurring in Belfast 2024.

- We produced an accessible version the creative citizens quiz, shortened and in simplified language, using dyslexie font, in large print with plain background, and got it embossed in braille through Open Arts.
- We had 10 info sessions including 7 people with visual impairments or blindness, one braille user; approx 40 adults with learning disabilities; 8 people with mobility impairments

or wheelchair users; and five people with hearing loss; 5 people with autism.

- **The launch event was held at a time of day when 2RA was accessible by taxi (note that the dept of infrastructure does not allow vehicular access to city centre in the middle of the day, even for disabled people). Public access from 2-7pm to include people with caring responsibilities, children etc.**
- **There was an Audio describer at the launch event for two visually impaired participants.**
- **We had captions on a large screen at the launch event, though this was difficult to see as the audience was standing. We developed a plan to make sure all audience members have line of sight to the captions screen or access captions on their phone.**
- **If possible we would like to ask people to sign up for events in advance, and share their access needs ahead so we can better accommodate them.**
- **We recorded the captions and audio description for the video and are passing these on to the media team to consider adding or provide alternate versions. We have requested that the media team include visual descriptions of all photos, and videos where possible, and that captions are added to all videos.”**

In response to a Member’s question, the Engagement Officer advised the Working Group that, if Members had any further suggestions of groups which the Team had not yet engaged with, to send their details onto her. The Partnership Officer confirmed that they were also working closely with the Health and Social Care Trust.

In relation to a Member’s question regarding isolated people who found reaching out hard, the officers advised the Working Group that the Council’s Corporate Communications Team would continue to promote the events as widely as possible on the Council website and its social media platforms. The City Solicitor agreed that officers would work with the Corporate Communications Team to determine the best ways of focusing on those people who were hard to reach and were not involved in community groups.

In response to a Member’s suggestion in relation to the Belfast 2024 website, the Engagement Officer agreed to look at having a dedicated section on the website outlining the accessible shows and events in one place.

In response to a further Member’s comment, the officers agreed that the Belfast 2024 Team would present its update to the Disability Advisory Panel.

The Working Group noted the update which had been provided.

Disability Champion

The Working Group was informed that the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC) for NI had written to the Council, in July 2023, requesting the appointment of Diversity Ambassadors within the Council as part of its on-going work to actively promote the equality and diversity agenda across Northern Ireland.

The Members were advised that both Members and senior Council officers had been nominated and appointed to champion other Section 75 groups. Those were as follows:

- Gender – Aine McCabe (Elected Member);
- LGBTQ+ - Micky Murray, Anthony Flynn and Séamas de Faoite (Elected Members) and Kate Bentley (Senior Officer); and
- Race – John Tully (Senior Officer).

The Working Group was advised that, at present, the Council did not have a Disability Ambassador and it was therefore being asked to make nominations.

The City Solicitor outlined that the role of a Diversity Ambassador would be to work within their Council and community to support and deliver the regional Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Strategy and to help to drive behavioural and cultural change across the local government sector.

It was reported that Diversity Ambassadors would receive regular training and support from the LGSC Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Group Secretariat, including:

- a guided review of the draft Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and Action Plan;
- information on equality reports such as the Equality Baseline and Impact Study;
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Training and updates; and
- cultural awareness and a positive attitude towards the provision of equitable services.

The Members were advised that a training programme had commenced, with the first workshop having already been completed. The second workshop, 'Delivering for the Community – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and Service Provision', would take place on Thursday, 21st March, 2024, 1pm - 5.30pm at Lagan Valley Island, Lisburn. The third and final workshop would take place on 19th June, 2024, 1pm - 5.30pm. There would also be a 'Best Practice' Event on 10th October, 2024, 1pm - 6pm. The City Solicitor explained that at present, at least two Council officers represented the Council at each workshop.

During discussion a Member stated that he felt it was important that senior Council officers be nominated to the role, given the lack of a strategic approach towards disability in the City, and suggested that the Language Officer, Mr. M. Johnston, from the Council's Equality and Diversity Unit and the City Solicitor be put forward as the Council's Disability Ambassadors.

A number of Members expressed enthusiasm about the role and stated that they felt it was important that Elected Members would participate in the role of Ambassador as well, in order to provide political direction.

After discussion, the Working Group agreed to nominate the following four persons to be Disability Ambassadors, on behalf of Belfast City Council:

- Councillor Ruth Brooks;
- Councillor Geraldine McAteer;
- Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor; and
- Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer.

Given the interest in the training programme, and at the suggestion of the City Solicitor, the Working Group also agreed that she would approach the LGSC to enquire if all 6 Elected Members of the Disability Working Group could avail of the LGSC training workshops.

Disability Action Plan 2022-25

The Language Officer advised the Working Group that, under Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995, the Council was required to submit a Disability Action Plan, showing how it proposed to fulfil the duties in relation to its functions, to the Equality Commission.

The Members were advised that Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006) required the Council, in carrying out its functions, to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life.

The Language Officer outlined that the Council's Disability Action Plan 2022-25 provided list of action measures under the aforementioned two functions. He highlighted that the Disability Action Plan would enter its final year in the next financial year (2024-25).

It was reported that a draft Annual Report for 2023-24 would be presented to the Disability Working Group in June 2024, with a view to the finalised Annual Report being submitted for approval by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in August/September 2024.

The Language Officer explained that an exercise would commence in September 2024 to draft and develop a new Disability Action Plan, covering 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2028. It was hoped that the draft Disability Action Plan for 2025-28 would go out for public consultation in early 2025.

Noted.

Changing Places Toilet Policy - Consultation Update

The Policy, Research and Compliance Officer provided the Working Group with an overview of the response to the Consultation on the Changing Places Toilet draft Policy.

The Members were advised that 85% of the 63 respondents to date either agreed or somewhat agreed with the contents of the policy.

The Policy, Research and Compliance Officer explained that only a few of the responses were from stakeholder groups and that they were seeking to contact those who organised large scale events in the City for their feedback.

In response to a Member's suggestion, he agreed to engage with the Council's Events Team regarding contacting the Belsonic organisers.

A further Member stated that they would contact those who used Boucher Playing Fields to host large events and would ask them to respond to the consultation. She further added that it would be useful to engage directly with the Waterfront Hall and St. Comgall's Multi-use Community Hub.

The Working Group noted the update which had been provided.

Youth Council Meeting Update

The Language Officer reported that the Youth Council had suggested meeting with the Disability Working Group on 8th April or 6th May, 2024. During discussion, it was agreed that, unfortunately, neither date suited the Members and that a date in September would be better.

It was further agreed that the meeting be combined with the Language Working Group, which was also keen to engage with the Youth Council. A mutually convenient date would be agreed with the Chairpersons of the Working Groups and circulated in due course.

'Not every disability is visible' signs - Cllr McMullan to raise

At the request of Councillor McMullan, the City Solicitor agreed to liaise with facilities to place "Not every disability is visible" signage on all accessible toilets throughout the Council estate. She further agreed to submit a report to a future meeting in respect of extending the signage beyond the Council estate.

Chairperson

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