

**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
-ADDITIONAL ITEM AND REPORTS TO FOLLOW (2)**

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet both online and in-person, in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Friday, 20th March, 2026 at 9.30 am, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

2. **Restricted Items**

- (d) Belfast Stories Update (Pages 1 - 34)
- (g) City Innovation Programme Update (Pages 35 - 38)

3. **Governance**

- (a) Official Announcements during Council Meetings (Pages 39 - 40)

4. **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (c) European City of Sport (Pages 41 - 54)

5. **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

- (a) Physical Programme Update (Pages 55 - 66)
- (c) Update on Area Working Groups (Pages 67 - 126)

8. **Operational Issues**

- (b) Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes of Meeting of 10th March, 2026
(Pages 127 - 158)

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

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Subject:	Official Announcements during Council Meetings
Date:	20th March, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, 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	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To provide the Committee with options in relation to Official Announcements at Council meetings.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether it wishes to adopt options in relation to Official Announcements at Council meetings as set out a paragraph 3.3.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee on 23 rd May, 2024 in relation to the volume of Official Announcements being received during Council Meetings, Councillor McLaughlin requested that options be explored on how the purpose of Official Announcements could be better utilised.
3.2	The Committee agreed that a report be submitted to a future Committee to outline options in relation to a potential new procedure for raising Official Announcements during Council Meetings.
3.3	It is suggested that official announcements be limited to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and retirements of Belfast citizens or Belfast City Council employees; • Achievements by local groups/organisations and/or individuals; • Requests for the Lord Mayor to write to and/or host a group/organisation; • Be no longer than 1 minute on duration; • Cannot commit the Council to any position or action which should be properly brought before the relevant Committee in the first instance by way of a notice of motion or is otherwise governed by a Council Policy or existing process; and • The Lord Mayor may depart from this Standing Order where, due to the urgency of the matter, allow it to be discussed at the Council meeting rather than it being referred to a committee.
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.4	None.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.5	None associated with this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None



Subject:	European City of Sport 2026
Date:	20 March 2026
Reporting Officer:	Jim Girvan Director Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Cate Taggart, Neighbourhood Services Manager

Restricted Reports					
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 					
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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 provide Members with an update on the European City of Sport 2026 designation for the city including:

	<p>I. our related monitoring and progress reporting obligations to the awarding body ACES</p> <p>II. the request for non-recurrent additional resources to allow us to enhance programme delivery from April – December 2026, as well as ensuring adequate resource for communications activity.</p>
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Note the successful bid to ACES, note the planned programme of activity under the bid which is based on existing council and partner activity, note the programme monitoring and progress reporting obligations and consider the limitations for delivery in the absence of an approved budget to support additionality for collaborative impact.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>ACES Europe have confirmed that Belfast was successful in securing the designation of European City of Sport for 2026 (Jan-Dec). ACES is a non-profit association based in Brussels and award this accolade each year, recognising the best cities, towns and regions across Europe to take part in sport. The successful bid will give the city an opportunity to showcase the excellent sports and leisure facilities/services provided by Belfast City Council along with the rich sporting heritage of the city.</p>
3.2	<p>Following a successful community launch weekend in late January 2026 (see appendix 1), our focus has now moved from application to delivery and officers are continuing to work with relevant internal services and strategic partners to expand the outline programme of activities and branding opportunities into a robust detailed programme.</p> <p><u>City of Sport Planned Programme Delivery for 2026/7</u></p>
3.3	<p>Our programme reflects ACES’ manifesto pledges – enjoyment in exercise, willingness to achieve, sense of community, learning to play and improvement in health – and focuses on five key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> investment made into sport in Belfast over the last 10 years support provided to elite athletes contribution of our leisure centre staff, local clubs, coaches and volunteers ensuring everyone feels welcome and included, and how sport is delivering better health outcomes for our residents.
3.4	<p>2026 will see lots of great sports events delivered across the city, as well as more work to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> promote use of our leisure centres showcase the variety of sports available in our city celebrate the contribution of sports clubs and athletes, and highlight how everyone can get involved.

3.5	<p>Activities will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Phoenix Energy Belfast City Marathon and other sports events • our annual Belfast Primary Schools' Cross Country Championships • our try-it events in our community and leisure centres, and • activities celebrating the contribution of athletes, coaches and volunteers.
3.6	<p>In December 2026 we will conclude the year with an end of year event and in Jan 2027 we will present the end of year report to ACES.</p>
3.7	<p>The current programme is limited to activity already planned within existing council and GLL revenue budgets. It also includes the activities and events planned by the range of delivery partners who have committed to support the Belfast City of Sport 2026 programme.</p>
3.8	<p>In order to maximise the impact of already planned activity, it is critical that the Project Co-ordinator proactively works with partner organisations to ensure that their programmes come under the banner of the City of Sport with the relevant branding and comms requirements.</p>
3.9	<p>The project has to date been supported entirely as extra work by the Senior Manager of Campaigns, Press and Social. This was for the bid and launch, which was being carried out on top of management duties. However, given existing resource pressures within the CMEA department, this is unsustainable.</p>
3.10	<p>For City of Sport to be successful, a full planned and resourced programme of events and a fully planned and resourced communications programme is required. City of Sport has the potential to present risk to the organisation if the programme and required communications cannot be adequately delivered.</p>
3.11	<p>To maximise the impact of the existing activity programme, we are asking members to consider a non recurrent budget of £160,000 which will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £40,000 for MarComms support in the form of an additional temporary officer to support the extensive marketing and communications requirements involved in the year long programme. • £15,000 to build a stock of CoS support materials, for example, infographics, mesh banners, branded sport products, for council facilities and events and to gift to partner delivery bodies. • £85,000 for additional programme support which would include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ £25,000 to deliver targeted events/activities where gaps are identified in the programme particularly in relation to gender, disability, ethnic background, etc. This is in line with our commitment to removing barriers to physical activity to ensure we get more people playing sport, keeping fit and having fun. ○ offer up to £5k for up to 12 Sporting Organisations to deliver key events in the city linked to the themes outlined in the City of Sport Bid Document – Total £60,000. ● £20,000 for an end of year celebration and final report including evaluation.
3.12	<p>Officers are continuing to engage a range of strategic partners to explore how they can collaborate on the City of Sport status in order to maximise benefit and legacy for the city. Identified partners currently include DfC, Sport NI, PHA, BHSCT, UU, QUB, Tourism NI, etc. The intention is to further secure their strategic commitment, collaborative resourcing and legacy arrangements.</p>
3.13	<p>We have met with DfC and Sport NI to further interrogate their commitment to resource support the programme. DfC Sports Branch have agreed they will fully allocate their modest capital budget (circa £60k) in 2026 towards the City of Sport. While welcome, this is restricted support in that it is fully allocated to their hosting of Celebration of Sport events at locations throughout NI each year, bringing local school children together for taster sessions of a wide range of sports.</p>
3.14	<p>They have agreed to locate all events in 2026 in Belfast to celebrate the City of Sport. They propose to host 3 events March 2026:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NewForge Primary Schools 13th March ● Brook LC Primary Schools 20th March ● Girdwood Community Hub General Public 28th March
3.15	<p>They hope to allocate two further events in Sept/Oct subject to available funds. We will continue to work with DfC to ensure a citywide spread is achieved via the Autumn events. While DfC Sports Branch indicate they have no unrestricted budget to allocate, they have asked Sport NI about their potential input.</p>
3.16	<p>One of the core CoS themes is how sport is delivering better health outcomes for our residents, and we are working closely with colleagues in BHDU to brand any of their planned programme activity or campaigns in the 2026 calendar year. We are also exploring any additional resource support they, PHA or the Belfast Trust can commit in order to extend the programme.</p>

3.17	<p>Officers are continuing to work with council staff teams across Neighbourhood Services and Parks Outreach and Events to brand existing programme delivery including some of our external grant support where appropriate. We are keen to engage with other Departments to raise awareness of the European City of Sport 2026 programme and to identify collaborative opportunities to extend the programme and build the legacy.</p> <p>Obligations to ACES as a designated European City of Sport for 2026.</p>
3.18	<p>Belfast as a European City of Sport must comply with the general regulations as set out by ACES for successful cities these in summary include:</p>
3.19	<p>Quarterly reporting submission of reports to ACES commencing from 1 Apr 2026 and focusing on the noted requirements. Each report should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary of the activities carried out, • Photographic material, • Media coverage and press impact.
3.20	<p>These reports allow ACES to monitor the correct use and promotion of the title, ensure compliance with the Regulations, and coordinate actions and events in the most effective manner.</p>
3.21	<p>At the end of the year, a final report must be submitted. This report must include a dedicated Legacy section, outlining the positive impact of the award on Belfast and its long-term outlook.</p>
3.22	<p>We have agreed a performance framework for the CoS programme and a simple monitoring return to capture information from council and GLL activities and from our delivery partners. Our ability to report to ACES on the related measures and targets will depend on the further development of the programme and available resourcing.</p>
3.23	<p><u>Financial Implications</u></p> <p>The bid phase costs were estimated at £30,000 and this amount was agreed by People and Communities committee with funding provided on a 50/50 basis shared between BCC and GLL. The bid phase was delivered within budget.</p> <p>To deliver an enhanced programme and ensure we have sufficient comms support to capture current planned activity, we have outlined a growth bid of £160k as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Corporate Comms (towards temp officer role) £40,000 - Branding and support materials £15,000 - Programme support £85,000 - End of Year celebration event and programme report £20,000

	<p>Members are asked to consider a non-recurrent budget be allocated to city of sport for the 2026/27 financial year. CNS will ringfence any underspends over the 2067/27 year to cover the costs.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.24	<p>This will be considered throughout and any appropriate issues highlighted to Members. Any amendments to existing scheme or new scheme will be considered in the context of any equality/Good Relations and rural needs considerations.</p>
4.0	Appendices – Dcouments Attached
	Appendix 1 – City of Sport Launch



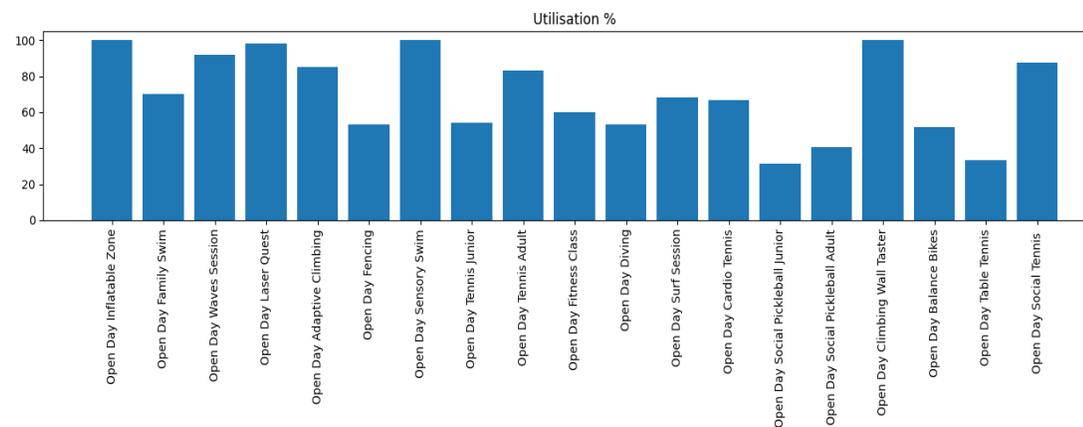
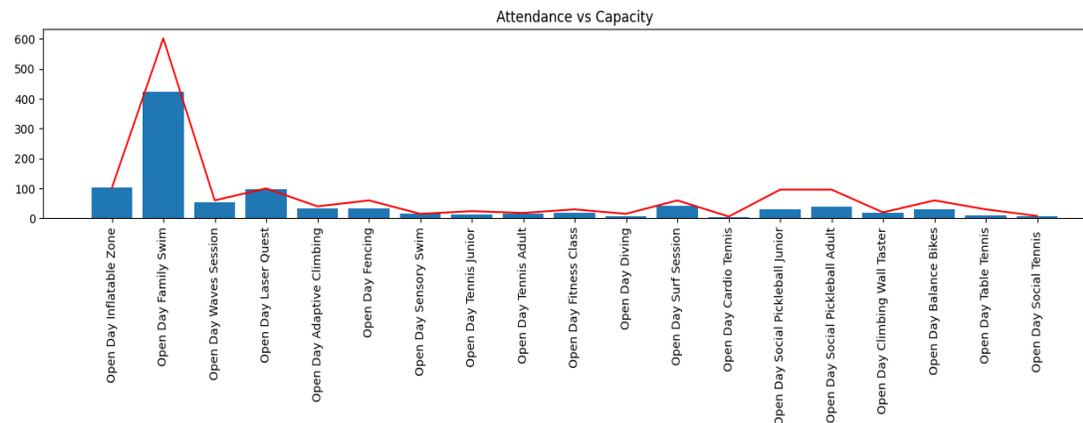








Activity	Attended	Capacity	% Utilisation
Open Day Inflatable Zone	102	102	100
Open Day Family Swim	422	602	70
Open Day Waves Session	55	60	92
Open Day Laser Quest	98	100	98
Open Day Adaptive Climbing	34	40	85
Open Day Fencing	32	60	53
Open Day Sensory Swim	15	15	100
Open Day Tennis Junior	13	24	54
Open Day Tennis Adult	15	18	83
Open Day Fitness Class	18	30	60
Open Day Diving	8	15	53
Open Day Surf Session	41	60	68
Open Day Cardio Tennis	4	6	67
Open Day Social Pickleball Junior	30	96	31
Open Day Social Pickleball Adult	39	96	41
Open Day Climbing Wall Taster	20	20	100
Open Day Balance Bikes	31	60	52
Open Day Table Tennis	10	30	33
Open Day Social Tennis	7	8	88
Total	987	1,434	69





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Subject:	Physical Programme Update including Capital Programme 2026/27
Date:	20 March 2026
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	David Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager Shauna Murtagh, Portfolio Manager

Restricted Reports					
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
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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 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 2026/27 Capital Programme and associated capital financing, as well as requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Programme Movements - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme – Agree that the Programme for improvements to Parks and Open Spaces for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> with a maximum allocation of up to £1.5million (£750k – Year 1 and £750k- Year 2) and note that a rolling allocation of £750k has been agreed going forwards. • Bridges Improvement Programme - Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> with a maximum allocation of up to £240,000 for Year 1 and agree the annual rolling programme of bridge improvements of £240,000 per year thereafter. • IT Programme — Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology - Note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £225,000 be allocated. • City Hall – Security Improvements - Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course. • Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites - Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> to allow a business case to be developed. • Procurement process for Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme, Bridges Programme, Pitches Programme and Leisure Programme - agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated for these Programmes as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. • Belfast Zoo/Old Zoo – agree that Member site visits are undertaken to a range of other Zoo locations to inform the ongoing work in respect of the Zoo

	<p>Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2026/27</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • note the update on Capital Financing as outlined in 3.10 below and the update on the Capital Programme for 2026/27 at 3.11 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 and linked to the ongoing Transformation and Efficiency agenda. 															
<p>3.0</p>	<p>Main report</p> <p><u>Key Issues</u></p>															
<p>3.1</p>	<p>Capital Programme</p> <p>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. The Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.</p>															
<p>3.2</p>	<p>Capital Programme Movements</p> <p>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 border="1" data-bbox="240 1350 1442 1890"> <thead> <tr> <th>Project</th> <th>Overview</th> <th>Stage movement</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme 2025/2026 and 2026/2027</td> <td>Programme of improvement works to Parks and Open Spaces across the Council estate</td> <td><i>Move to Stage 3- Committed</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bridges Improvement Programme</td> <td>Programme of remedial works on bridges across the Council estate.</td> <td><i>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>City Hall Security Improvements</td> <td>Capital works put forward to make City Hall a safer place for visitors, employees and elected Members.</td> <td><i>Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites</td> <td>Creation of lit spine and associated path/ access improvements to facilitate extended opening hours.</td> <td><i>Add as Stage 1 – Emerging</i></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Project	Overview	Stage movement	Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme 2025/2026 and 2026/2027	Programme of improvement works to Parks and Open Spaces across the Council estate	<i>Move to Stage 3- Committed</i>	Bridges Improvement Programme	Programme of remedial works on bridges across the Council estate.	<i>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</i>	City Hall Security Improvements	Capital works put forward to make City Hall a safer place for visitors, employees and elected Members.	<i>Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>	Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites	Creation of lit spine and associated path/ access improvements to facilitate extended opening hours.	<i>Add as Stage 1 – Emerging</i>
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<p>3.3</p>	<p>Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme</p> <p>In December 2025, SP&R Committee agreed that a rolling allocation of £750k be ring-fenced for improvements to parks and open spaces across the city. The proposed programme of works for the</p>															

2025/2026 and 2026/2027 Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme is outlined below utilising the ring-fenced allocations for each year delivering a £1.5m programme of improvements. The programme proposes a range of improvements across the city and a range of site-specific improvements.

LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
CITY WIDE	
Dog Run Areas	3 new dog run areas in West, East and Shankill (1 recently delivered in South and 1 in North at Grove)
Seating	Roll out of benches across parks citywide
Water Refill Points	Roll out of pilot to parks across the city. Proposed sites - Waterworks, Ballysillan, Falls, Pairc Nia Chollan, Paisley, Drumglass, Shaws Bridge, Cherryvale. Victoria, Orangefield/or Tullycarnet
NORTH	
Grove Park	New Pedestrian access / resurfacing to Dog Run area
Ligoniel Park	Pedestrian Entrance Improvements + gym equipment resurfacing
Marrowbone Park	New fencing at Jamaica Road
Cavehill Adventurous Playground	Removal of climbing ramp feature & construction of timber sleeper retaining edge
WEST	
Half Moon Lake	Range of environmental improvements
Springhill Park	Range of environmental improvements
Highfield CC Open Space	Range of environmental improvements
Woodvale Park	New toilet facilities including Changing Places provision
SOUTH	
Strangford Avenue Playing Fields	New path to connect to trim trail
Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Japanese Garden	Landscape Improvements and water aeration system
Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Rose Garden	Canopy frame structure replacement
Napier Park	Entrance gate improvements
Botanic Gardens	Herbaceous border- new trellis structures
Ormeau Park	New access gates
EAST	
Cherryvale Playing Fields	New pedestrian entrance at main gates
Tullycarnet Park	Entrance Safety Improvements for pedestrians
Wandsworth Road	New fencing
CS Lewis Square	New handrails and granite steps
Ballyhackamore Parklet	Environmental Improvements

Members are asked to agree that ‘Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme 2025/2026 and 2026/2027’ is moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum allocation of up to £1.5m a maximum allocation (£750k – 2025/2026 and £750k- 2026/2027) and note that a rolling allocation of £750k has been agreed going forwards for subsequent years and to agree the projects as outlined.

3.4 **Bridges Improvement Programme**

	<p>In May 2025, SP&R Committee agreed that this project be moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>. The project aims to develop a multiyear approach to bridge improvements for 50+ bridges across the Council estate, following on from the initial surveys that have already been carried out. A programme of remedial work is now being finalised for the first phase which requires £240,000 for Year 1 and a rolling annual funding of up to a maximum of £240,000 per year to be reviewed thereafter. As per the three-stage approval process, the outline business case has been completed and the project can now progress to delivery stage. Members are asked to agree that ‘Bridges Improvement Programme’ is moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum allocation of up to £240,000 for Year 1 and agree on the annual rolling programme of bridge improvements of £240,000 per year thereafter.</p>
3.5	<p>IT Programme— Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology in the Council Chamber</p> <p>This project is part of the overall IT Programme/ Digital Strategy and will replace the current analogue AV rack-mounted controller hardware used in the Council chamber into digital AV solution. In January 2026, this project was moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return. An update was to be brought back to Committee along with the final budget allocation and confirmation that this is within the affordability limits of the Council. Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £225,000 be allocated.</p>
3.6	<p>City Hall Security Improvements</p> <p>In October 2025, Members agreed that ‘City Hall Security Improvements’ project was added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i>. The project aims to deliver the enhancements to City Hall that were in the recommendations review and security audit report produced by the TRIO Solutions Group. The report noted several vulnerabilities primarily relating to hostile vehicle mitigation (HVM), perimeter security, access control, surveillance coverage, staff training, emergency preparedness, and operational policies. A number of the areas identified in the report are operational, but the majority are physical/ systems based requirements or improvements. In addition, the project is also in line with the Martyn’s Law legislation which requires venues and public locations to implement security measures to protect against terrorism. Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.</p>
3.7	<p>Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites</p> <p>In September 2025, P&C Committee agreed to the parks and open spaces’ pilot opening hours scheme. The proposed project will look at the creation of lit spine and associated path/ access improvements to facilitate extended opening hours. The pilot sites initially agreed are</p>

	<p>Ormeau Park, Botanic Gardens, Belmont Park and Falls Park. The project will ensure park safety through artificial lighting and improvements to security, connections and accessibility.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that the project is added to Stage 1 – Emerging to allow the business case to be developed.</p>
3.8	<p>Approval to Procure – Parks and Open Space, Bridges, Pitches and Leisure Programmes</p> <p>In February 2026, Members agreed the next phase of Leisure Programme and the Pitches Programme and are being asked to approve the Parks and Open Space Programme and the Bridges Programme at today’s Committee. In order to progress these programmes now Members are further asked to agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated for these Programmes and any projects arising from them as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</p>
	<p>Belfast Zoo – Site Visits</p>
3.9	<p>Members will be aware that Belfast Zoo/Old Zoo has been identified as a key strategic priority for Members and that a Members Working Group has recently been established to focus on this. At the recent workshop the need to look at other Zoos was discussed to inform future development based on best practice elsewhere and to explore other attractions, particularly those where an animal element is much more widely integrated with other offerings allowing the opportunity to understand their journey, visitor experience and business/operating models. To inform this it is proposed that a two-day site visit is undertaken in the Spring to a range of other venues. Details of the final itinerary are currently being finalised. It is proposed that this will be for Party Group Leaders or their nominees. Members are asked to agree that best practice site visits are undertaken in Spring to other Zoo locations.</p>
	<p><u>Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2026/27</u></p>
3.10	<p>The Council incurs both capital expenditure and capital financing costs in the delivery of its Capital Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>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</p>

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.

3.11 The **SP&R Committee has approved a capital financing budget of £25,774,022 for 2026/27**. 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.

Table 1- Existing Capital Financing Budget 2026/27

Existing Capital Financing Budget		£25,774,022
<u>Less:</u> Physical Programme Commitments (capital programme and non-recurrent projects)	£23,487,611	
Existing BCC Loans	£1,407,552	
Lisburn/ Castlereagh Transferred Loans	£598,675	
Balance Remaining		£280,184

3.12 **The current Capital Programme**

Capital three-stage approval process

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 *Stage 1 – Emerging* where they are required to complete a Strategic Outline Case and then progress to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted*. Following production of an Outline Business Case, a project can move to *Stage 3 – Committed*. 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.

Schemes at Stage 3 – Committed

The Capital Programme already comprises 40+ 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. 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.

Schemes at Stage 2 – Uncommitted or Stage 1 – Emerging

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 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 Cemetery provision, 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. In addition, there are several other major enhancement projects on the Capital Programme (Stage 1 or Stage 2) with developmental work underway including greenway schemes, heritage assets, and others, see Appendix 1. Many of these schemes will be attractive to external funders and schemes are developed with this in mind.

3.13	<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.
3.14	<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 and to the ongoing work being taken forward under the Transformation and Efficiency agenda.</p>
3.15	<p>To inform this it is recommended that a series of Party Group Briefings are held in the first instance to update 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>
3.16	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>

	<p><i>Financial Implications –</i></p> <p>Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme - capital allocation of up to £750,000 already approved by Council. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p>Bridges Improvement Programme – capital allocation of up to £240,000 for Year 1 and additional £240,000 per year for the rolling programme thereafter. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p>IT Programme— Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology in the Council Chamber– a maximum of £225,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p><i>Resource Implications –</i> Officer time to deliver.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The legislation requirements have been met including screening.</p> <p>All physical projects are designed for people and are inherently inclusive and accessible.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Capital Programme & Capital Financing 2026/27</p>

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Appendix 1 - Capital Programme Report March 2026

Project	Gross Budget	External Funding	Capital Programme Net Budget	Other Council Funding	Forecast 2025/26	Forecast 2026/27	Forecast 2027/28	Forecast 2028/29	Forecast 2029/30 +
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Capital Programme									
Schemes at Stage 3 - Committed Projects									
Tier 3 - Schemes completed									
LTP - Lisnasharragh	20,000,000	-	20,000,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Blanchflower Playing Fields	2,174,000	650,000	1,524,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
LTP - Olympia Regeneration	21,750,000	2,750,000	19,000,000	-	90	-	-	-	-
LTP - Andersonstown Regeneration	25,000,000	-	25,000,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
LTP - Brook	15,000,000	-	15,000,000	-	138	-	-	-	-
LTP - Avoniel	8,450,000	450,000	8,000,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - Grants Management System	60,000	-	60,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Active Travel Enablers - Covered Cycle Stands	210,000	210,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tier 3 Total	92,644,000	4,060,000	88,584,000	-	228	-	-	-	-
Tier 2 - Schemes currently underway									
North Foreshore - Development Sites Infrastructure works	8,865,656	-	8,865,656	-	2,871,275	4,070,331	-	-	-
Finance Replacement System	650,000	-	650,000	-	8,665	-	-	-	-
Playground Refurbishment Programme 2024/25	870,000	290,000	580,000	-	168,287	-	-	-	-
Playground Refurbishment Programme 2025/26	580,000	-	580,000	-	369,382	210,618	-	-	-
Fleet Replacement Programme 2024/25	2,200,000	-	2,200,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fleet Replacement Programme 2025/26	2,270,000	-	2,270,000	-	2,270,000	-	-	-	-
Sporting Pitches Investment Programme 2024/25	620,000	120,000	500,000	-	260,711	-	-	-	-
Sporting Pitches Investment Programme 2025/26	500,000	-	500,000	-	55,000	445,000	-	-	-
Forth Meadow & Springfield Shared Spaces -Peace IV, DFC, DFI	5,334,591	5,334,591	-	-	7,977	-	-	-	-
Peace IV Contingency	300,000	-	300,000	-	-	244,608	-	-	-
City Cemetery - HLF - Including Relocation of Service Yard at Falls Park (Foxes Yard)	2,446,743	1,482,023	964,720	-	162,804	-	-	-	-
Belfast Zoo - Programme of Works, including Works at Large Cat enclosure & Aviary	1,710,000	-	1,710,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
LTP - Templemore	16,839,567	4,839,567	12,000,000	-	21,536	-	-	-	-
Innovation Factory Access Control System	100,000	-	100,000	-	10,000	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - Corporate HR/Payroll System	486,000	-	486,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - Building Control System Replacement	250,000	-	250,000	-	96,936	140,287	-	-	-
IT Programme - In Cab Technology & Routing System	653,000	-	653,000	-	87,664	147,000	154,914	-	-
Upsurge - Botanic Gardens	409,367	409,367	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DC - Knocknagoney Park	90,000	90,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DC - Belmont Park (Lands at Castlehill Manor)	39,550	39,550	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DC - Bikes - Titanic	24,814	24,814	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
DC - Suffolk MUGA & Lenadoon	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Waste Plan - Expansion of kerbside glass collection	1,570,000	768,000	802,000	-	256,757	222,474	200,000	-	-
HWRs and Civic Amenity Sites - Containers	670,450	-	670,450	-	355,050	-	-	-	-
Alleygating Phase 5	135,400	85,400	50,000	500,000	116,473	-	-	-	-
Paisley Park Refurbishment	1,358,600	1,358,600	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter	170,000	-	170,000	-	-	-	-	-	-
Floral Hall Health & Safety Works	1,315,000	-	1,315,000	-	1,203,242	-	-	-	-
Stained Glass Windows City Hall - Health Service & LGBT Community	70,000	-	70,000	-	55,960	-	-	-	-
Fleet Programme - Small Vehicles	470,000	-	470,000	-	-	470,000	-	-	-
Solar Powered Community Services (Donegall Pass CS)	38,900	38,900	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tier 2 Total	51,037,638	14,880,812	36,156,826	500,000	8,377,719	5,950,318	354,914	-	-
Tier 1 - Schemes at tender preparation stage									
New Crematorium at Roselawn	18,000,000	-	18,000,000	-	132,910	8,557,649	7,706,427	-	-
Tier 1 Total	18,000,000	-	18,000,000	-	132,910	8,557,649	7,706,427	-	-
Tier 0 - Schemes at risk									
Reservoir Safety	1,705,000	-	1,705,000	-	190,020	1,291,572	-	-	-
Peace Plus - Reconnected Belfast	9,752,104	9,752,104	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Peace Plus - Local Area Plan	1,868,572	1,868,572	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cathedral Gardens	5,000,000	-	5,000,000	-	1,587,382	3,125,562	-	-	-
Belfast Stories	35,525,000	25,000	35,500,000	1,800,000	903,639	2,987,000	10,517,000	13,328,000	7,481,493
Sporting Pitches Investment Programme 2026/27	500,000	-	500,000	-	-	500,000	-	-	-
IT Programme - CMS Case Management Solution	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - Complex Lives CMS	21,929	21,929	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - EDRMS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - Service Desk Management System Solution	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - Asset Management System - Integrated Work Management System	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology in the Council	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
IT Programme - HR/Payroll Cloud Migration	545,355	-	545,355	-	-	272,678	272,678	-	-
Fleet - Waste Collection Vehicles	-	-	-	6,200,000	-	-	3,000,000	3,200,000	-
Black Mountain Pathway/Greenway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Communication Boards	170,000	-	170,000	-	113,752	56,248	-	-	-
Historic Cemeteries - Clifton Street	241,000	10,000	231,000	-	178,737	52,263	-	-	-
Beacon Programme	103,250	-	103,250	-	103,230	-	-	-	-
Strangford PF Enabling Works	60,000	-	60,000	-	60,000	-	-	-	-
City Hall Christmas Tree	77,500	-	77,500	-	30,206	47,294	-	-	-
Cremated Remains Burial Plots project	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Zoo Improvement Works Phase 2	950,000	-	950,000	-	575,772	374,228	-	-	-
Cremated Remains Burial Plots project	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme	165,000	165,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Basketball Courts	-	-	-	550,000	-	550,000	-	-	-
Musgrave Park Sensory Garden	-	-	-	100,000	7,258	92,742	-	-	-
Girdwood H&S Works	-	-	-	310,000	50,000	260,000	-	-	-
EV Charging Network	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Greening & Growing	26,060	26,060	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2 Royal Avenue Landlord Capital Works	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
City Hall - Security Improvements	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Open Spaces & Streetscene (OSS) Machinery Replacement Programme 25/26	336,231	-	336,231	-	100,000	236,231	-	-	-
Workshop Plant Replacement Programme	120,000	-	120,000	-	120,000	-	-	-	-
Wilmont House	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fernhill House and Courtyard	-	-	-	948,064	50,000	550,000	348,064	-	-
Colin Greenway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sydenham Greenway	157,590	157,590	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EV Charging - BCC Depots	305,296	228,972	76,324	-	-	76,323	-	-	-
Waterfront Hall - Chiller Units	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Historic Tiled Street Signs	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Assembly Rooms Cluster Immediate H&S Works	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
St George's Market - New Stalls	433,840	-	433,840	-	100,000	333,840	-	-	-
Tier 0 Total	58,063,727	12,255,227	45,808,500	9,908,064	4,169,996	10,805,981	14,137,742	16,528,000	7,481,493
Stage 3 Total	219,745,365	31,196,039	188,549,326	10,408,064	12,680,853	25,313,948	22,199,083	16,528,000	7,481,493
Schemes at Stage 2 - Approved by Committee									
LTP - Girdwood	6,537,362	537,362	6,000,000	-	160,573	2,247,955	3,538,851	-	-
Waste Plan - New citywide kerbside collection system	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Relocation Dunbar Link	60,000	-	60,000	-	46,163	-	-	-	-
Fleet Replacement Programme 2026/27	2,200,000	-	2,200,000	-	-	2,203,962	-	-	-
Playground Refurbishment Programme 2026/27	290,000	-	290,000	-	-	290,000	-	-	-
Roselawn Extensions	-	-	-	-	2,891	-	-	-	-
Access to the Hills (Connections from Cavehill to Divis Mountain and Black Mountain)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black Mountain/Upper Whiterock Greenway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Glencairn Park/Ligoniel Park Greenway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Waste Transfer Station Upgrade	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fire Service Belfast Blitz project	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
EV Charging	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35-39 Royal Ave Health & Safety Works	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bridges Improvement Programme Phase 1	15,000	-	15,000	-	15,000	-	-	-	-
Under the Bridges	292,956	292,956	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Staff Cycle Racks Installation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Woodvale Park Sensory Garden	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Corporate Staff Accommodation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
New Cemetery	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Project	Gross Budget	External Funding	Capital Programme Net Budget	Other Council Funding	Forecast 2025/26	Forecast 2026/27	Forecast 2027/28	Forecast 2028/29	Forecast 2029/30 +
Stage 2 Total	9,395,318	830,318	8,565,000	-	224,627	4,742,557	3,538,851	-	-
Schemes at Stage 1 - Emerging Proposals									
Ballymacarrett area masterplan	825,978	606,732	219,246	-	-	-	219,246	-	-
Assembly Rooms Cluster	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Parks Improvement Programme	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gasworks Northern Fringe Infrastructure	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Falls Park Masterplan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Waste Plan Programme	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Waterfront Hall - Smoke Curtains	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Loughside Playing Fields	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pitches Programme - Phase 2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Berlin Wall - Installation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Connectivity - Access to Hills	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
35-39 Royal Avenue	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Duncrue Masterplan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Leisure Programme	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
City Hall Preservation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belfast Bikes eBikes	500,000	500,000	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Loughside Changing Facility	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mobile Changing Places	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Corporate Accommodation CWB and Duncrue Complex	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lenadoon Greenway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5G Hub Projects	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Public AED Replacement	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gary Moore Statue	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Blackstaff Greenway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Branial	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palm House, Botanic Gardens	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stage 1 Total	1,325,978	1,106,732	219,246	-	3,024,775	-	219,246	-	-
Capital Programme Total	230,466,661	33,133,089	197,333,572	10,408,064	15,930,255	30,056,505	25,957,180	16,528,000	7,481,493

Notes

Alleygating Phase 5 is funded by Council Reserves

External Funding includes non Council sources such as central government funding streams, EU funding, charitable bodies and developer contributions.



Subject:	Update on Area Working Groups
Date:	20 March 2026
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	David Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager 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	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
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1.1	To present to the Committee for approval the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Area Working Groups.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Committee is asked to approve the minutes of the meeting of South AWG – 23 February, North AWG – 25 February, West AWG – 26 February, and East AWG – 5 March 2026 as attached.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Area Working Group Minutes</u></p> <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 minutes of the most recent meeting, as attached.</p>
3.2	<p>Project Updates</p> <p>South AWG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Drumglass Park SuDs project</u> - the South Belfast AWG agreed that it was content with the project to proceed. <p>North AWG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>LIF underspend</u> – the North Belfast AWG agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the allocation of LIF underspend towards the cost of the Ardoyne Youth Club heating system and the acquisition of land from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service for the Westland Community Centre Hub, on the basis that both projects had previously been agreed as LIF projects. <p>West AWG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>The Mountainview Hotel</u> – the West Belfast AWG agreed that a recommendation be made to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the revised proposal be taken forward, focusing on additional works to be carried out at the Roddy McCorley Heritage Centre, subject to discussion with the Legal Services Department and subject to the Council’s due-diligence processes. <p>East AWG</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>LIF reallocation</u> – the East Belfast AWG agreed, in principle, to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ that, subject to due diligence, the £70,000 allocated to the Cycling Ireland project under the Local Investment Fund, be reallocated as follows: £40,000 to Clarawood Tenants Hall; and £30,000 to the Ballyhackamore Parklet Project.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ that, following completion of the relevant due diligence to ensure that projects met the funding criteria, a report be submitted to a future meeting on the proposed reallocation of the funding, and include also information on the potential for the Ballyhackamore Parklet project to be extended to other vacant Council land within that area; and • <u>Strand Arts Centre</u> - to write to the Minister for Communities to request an update in respect of the Department for Communities providing funding support to the redevelopment of the Strand Arts Centre. <p>Members are asked to note that, following further checks, the proposed Ballyhackamore Parklet project will not be eligible for funding under LIF as it is a council asset and there is no community group or long-term lease in place. The proposals for the Parklet have been included in the proposed Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme which is due to be considered by the Committee today as part of the Physical Programme. Members are asked to note that this means the allocation of £30k will go back to the East AWG at their next meeting for re-allocation.</p>
3.3	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None</p>
3.4	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None</p>
4.0	<p>Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 - Minutes – Meeting – South Belfast Area Working Group 23 February 2026</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Minutes – Meeting – North Belfast Area Working Group 25 February 2026</p> <p>Appendix 3 - Minutes – Meeting – West Belfast Area Working Group 26 February 2026</p> <p>Appendix 4 - Minutes – Meeting – East Belfast Area Working Group 5 March 2026</p>

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South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 23rd February, 2026

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillors Brennan, T. Brooks, Bunting, McKay, McKeown and Murray.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects; Ms. S. Rafter, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

(Councillor T. Brooks was elected as Chair for the meeting, given that apologies had been received from the Chairperson)

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairperson (Councillor Groogan) and the Lord Mayor (Councillor Kelly).

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 24th November were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in item 5, Request to present at a future meeting – Rosario Football Club, in that his child was a member of the club. He did not participate in the discussion relating to that item.

Drumglass Park

(Mr. N. Gowdy, Project Manager (Physical Programmes) was in attendance for this item.)

The Chairperson welcomed the Project Manager and Mr. M. Sefton and Mr. G. Heron from NI Water to the meeting.

The Project Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the Drumglass Park project, which was part of a broader initiative to implement sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) which aligned with the city's Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan and the Department for Infrastructure's "Living With Water" Strategy.

The Working Group was advised that Drumglass Park had a history of surface water drainage issues due to an underground culvert which connected to the combined

sewer system. During heavy rainfall, the culvert increased pressure on the sewer network, leading to flooding and pollution risks.

The project proposed a nature-based solution, creating a permanent pond to manage surface water, improve ecological diversity, and provide educational and recreational benefits to the community.

The NI Water representatives explained that the pond would be situated in a naturally low-lying area of the park and was designed to store water during heavy rainfall, reducing pressure on the sewer system. It would have a depth of 70 cm, rising to a maximum of 120 cm during storm events, with a storage capacity of 300 m³.

The initiative was expected to set a precedent for future sustainable drainage projects in Belfast, treating water as a valuable resource rather than a hidden issue. Construction was anticipated to begin in late 2026, following consultations, detailed design development, and statutory approvals.

In response to a Member's suggestion that the project could request input from local schools, including Victoria College which was adjacent to the Park, the Director and NI Water representatives confirmed that they would be happy to engage with the schools nearby.

The Director advised that, along with the City and Neighbourhood Services Department, they were working well with NI Water to advance the project.

The Working Group agreed that it was content with the project to proceed.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Director of Property and Projects presented the following report:

“1 Introduction

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital programme with a budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The NRF Programme is currently at *Stage 3 – Delivery Stage*. It is an outcomes focused programme aligned to three key themes of social economy, environmental sustainability and neighbourhood tourism. Members are updated on a quarterly basis on the headline status of the NRF projects via Area Working Groups as part of the Physical Programmes Update report. This report provides more detailed information on the Fund and the status of projects in South Belfast.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- **Note the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund update for South Belfast.**

- Consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.

3. NRF Allocation Model and Allocations

The allocation model per area for NRF as agreed by Members is based on 50% proportion of population per quadrant of the city and 50% proportion of the population that is in the top 20% area of multiple deprivation. Members agreed the allocations of the total programme budget of £10,280,000 as shown below.

NRF – Area budgets and agreed allocations

Area	Total budget allocation	Allocated to projects in principle	Contingency	Unallocated
North	£2,503,158	£2,434,979	£68,179	0
South	£1,978,637	£1,978,637	0	0
East	£2,351,551	£2,350,000	0	£1,551
West	£3,446,654	£3,426,875	£19,762 (Shankill)	£17

In South Belfast the financial position to date is shown below:

Total budget allocation	Total Net Spend to date	Balance Remaining
£1,978,637	£594,673 (30%)	£1,383,964 (70%)

4. NRF Process

Members agreed a 3 Stage process for the NRF projects:

- Stage 1 - Application (Emerging project)
- Stage 2- Development (Uncommitted project)
- Stage 3 - Delivery (Committed project)

A total of 20 projects are at *Stage 3 – Delivery* and received in-principle allocations. A total of three projects remain at *Stage 2 – Development* which means business cases were completed, but allocations were not made; and a total of 23 applicants remain at Stage 1 which means the applications passed threshold. Projects at Stages 1 and 2 form the reserve list which comprises 26 projects.

5. Current Overall Status

Offers In Principle - Letters of Offer in Principle have been issued to all 20 projects - South, North, West (24 Jan 2024), East (11 Jul 2024) which initiated the full Due Diligence process.

Design stage - Design consultant teams are in place for 16 of the 20 projects and have completed or are working up detailed designs and costings.

Planning process – Planning approval has been secured for eight projects, a decision is awaited on five lodged applications. Planning permission is not necessary for two projects.

Partnership funding – Match funding of approximately £14m has been secured in principle across 14 projects.

Project Funding Agreements – as under LIF and BIF, NRF funding agreements are issued to groups after Due Diligence and tender stage. These agreements confirm the funding offer once the contract amount is known. Four agreements have been issued to groups under NRF.

Projects underway – Five projects are currently on site – Belfast Orange Hall, Michael Davitt’s Community Heritage Centre, Sólás new build project, Act Initiative Community Hub & Visitor Centre and Ardoyne Youth Enterprise (AYE) Community Hub. Two building purchases have completed – Act Initiative and Market Heritage Hub.

6. South Belfast NRF Update

In South Belfast there are five Stage 3 projects under NRF. One of the projects Sólás New Build is currently on site. Market Heritage Hub building purchase has been completed. Lagan Water Access Activity Hub is awaiting a decision on its planning application. Two of the projects, GVRT – Branching Out and Redevelopment of former School of Music have a funding shortfall. This was reported to AWG Members previously. For additional detailed information, please see the table below.

In South Belfast, there is one Stage 2 project and there are three Stage 1 (Reserve) projects. Current information on the Stage 2 project Riddel’s Warehouse can also be found below.

Stage 3 Projects				
Project Name & NRF Themes	Description	Cost Estimate	NRF allocation & match funding secured	Current status
Sólás New Build Project	Development of a new three-storey	£2,531,849		• Planning secured.

<p>Social Economy & Neighbourhood Tourism</p>	<p>building that will expand the capacity of Sólás to fully accommodate all core Special Needs' services and key activities.</p>		<p>NRF - £362,141 Clothworker's Foundation - £100,000 Wolfson Foundation - £100,000 Community Ownership Fund (COF) - £750,000 Goodman Foundation - £500,000 Gostling Foundation - £250,000 Sólás - £437,859</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Team appointed by Sólás. • Project started on site in October 2025 and is managed by Sólás. • NRF funding will be used towards fit-out in late 2026. • Funding agreement being prepared.
<p>GVRT - Branching Out project</p> <p>Social Economy</p>	<p>Refurbishment and extension of GVRT/TREE facility on the Donegall Road to ensure it is fit for purpose and can meet the demands for additional places and programmes.</p>	<p>£1,865,643</p>	<p>NRF - £500,000 DfC - £40,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning application approved. • DfC has provided funding to appoint a design team to bring the project up to contractor procurement. • Contractor appointment to take place late 2026. • Council in discussion with DfC and other funders about potential funding. Funding gap remaining of approximately £1.37m.
<p>Lagan Water Access Activity Hub</p> <p>Social Economy & Neighbourhood Tourism</p>	<p>Development of a water activity hub by LORAG at the McConnell's Lock on the River Lagan at Lower Ormeau to include construction of a footbridge across</p>	<p>£458,900</p>	<p>NRF- £308,248 DfC - £150,652</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Team appointed. • Planning application submitted. • Match funder DfC will deliver the

	the lock to the outer wall and the development of a floating pontoon.			pontoon and footbridge element.
<p>Redevelopment of former School of Music</p> <p><i>Social Economy</i></p>	<p>Redevelopment of the derelict listed former School of Music on Donegall Pass by Fitzroy Presbyterian Church to include a range of social economy, charitable and creative ventures.</p>	£2,308,248	<p>NRF - £308,248</p> <p>TEO (tbc) - £2,000,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design team appointed and working towards planning application. They have been liaising with DfC Historic Environment Division due to listed building status. • Structural surveys have been completed. • TEO Urban Villages is currently updating the Business Case. • Discussions ongoing regarding how best to take the project forward.
<p>Market Heritage Hub</p> <p><i>All</i></p>	<p>Regeneration of the old St Malachy's Convent School/Warehouse at Sussex Place by Market Development Association into a vibrant new community heritage hub and visitor attraction.</p>	£2,729,369	<p>NRF - £500,000</p> <p>COF - £300,000</p> <p>Architectural Heritage Fund - £250,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NRF and COF funding has been successfully expended on the building purchase. • Group is engaging with National Lottery Heritage Fund regarding building refurbishment. Discussion ongoing. • Funding gap of approximately £1.68m. • Design Team to be appointed and

				planning will be required.
Stage 2 Project				
Riddel's Warehouse <i>All</i>	Riddel's Warehouse is a building at risk that will be restored as a Grade B+ listed heritage asset and repurposed as a permanent, sustainable makerspace for creative and digital industries in Belfast city centre. The project will also provide a unique performance and exhibition space and will act as a landmark tourist destination.	£7.5m	NRF - £0 National Lottery Heritage Fund - £4.6m Ulster Garden Villages and others - £800k	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group is seeking support to unlock capital funding for restoration and fit out. • Preparatory and repair works have started. • Design Development at RIBA Stage 3. • Group applied for funding from National Lottery Heritage Fund for Delivery Stage. The decision will be made in June 2026. The success of the application would increase if additional partnership funding could be raised.

7. Next Steps

The Teams will continue to work with the groups to develop the NRF projects, taking them through Due Diligence, Design, Planning and contractor appointment stages as required, in line with the project pathway and best practice in construction.

Members will be aware as with all physical projects, challenges can emerge throughout the delivery stage such as planning and building consent approvals, or issues with title or land etc. This has been greatly minimised because of early Due Diligence that was carried out, as well as the business case process.

Furthermore, funding gaps remain a key challenge for a number of projects that were not allocated a full funding package via the NRF Programme. Officers will continue to work with the groups to find potential additional sources of

external funding. Escalating costs represent a significant challenge for all projects in the current economic climate.

Members will continue to be updated via the Physical Programme AWG Update reports each quarter.

Members are asked to note the update provided on projects under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund.

Members may wish to consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.”

The Director advised the Working Group that she would bring an update on the projects every six months, to ensure that they were all being kept under review.

In respect of the Market Heritage Hub, the Director advised the Working Group that the project had been in discussions with the Heritage Lottery Fund and that she would keep the Members updated in respect of any further progress.

The Working Group noted the update which had been provided.

Physical Programmes Update

The Director of 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 including the recently completed projects – Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub, Strangford Ave Playing Fields Enabling Works at Appendix 1.**
- Note that Waterfront Hall Smoke Curtains project can be removed from the Capital Programme.**

3. Local Investment Fund (LIF)

Members are reminded that 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 area; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation.

A summary is provided below.

LIF breakdown – South	LIF 1		LIF 2	
	No. Projects	Amount (£)	No. Projects	Amount/ (£)
Number of Projects Completed	13 (100%)	£1,083,600	11 (100%)	£796,000
Total Number of Approved Projects	13	£1,083,600	11	£796,000

The table below shows an overview of the recently completed project.

LIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
SLIF017	Finaghy Bridge	£30,000	Complete	Artwork on the bridge was completed. Further environmental improvements at the bridge with planters and artwork on several utility boxes being progressed. Quotes for planters obtained and identification of owners of the utility boxes ongoing.	Continue engagement with partners.

All 24 LIF projects in South Belfast have been completed.

4. Belfast Investment Fund (BIF)

Members are reminded that 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 an 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; Arts & Digital Hub - £584k; Coffee Culture - £286k Stage 2 - Sandy Row Open Space project- £479k
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Balmoral DEA	Stage 3 - Knockbreda Parish Church Hall - £250k; Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC - £250k
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Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF04	Lagan Gateway Phase 2	£1,428,650 <i>BIF- £579,324</i> <i>Dfl Greenways- £714,326</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	Planning Approval (green cert) expected early 2026, response from NIEA still outstanding. External match funding is in place from Dfl. Contractor procurement complete and letter of award issued to successful contractor. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring landowners regarding Right of Way and Land Agreements.	Continue engagement with the public, landowners and key stakeholders.
BIF07	Market Arches	£3.3m <i>BIF -£1.3m</i> <i>UV – £2m t</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Different options costed and OBC submitted to The Executive Office (TEO). Tender process for ICT to commence at the end of February 2026.	Officer engagement with TEO, DfC and Dfl as key funders.
BIF48	Sandy Row Arts	£1,456,155 <i>BIF-£584,167</i> <i>UV-£871,988</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Project completed. Official opening to	Continue engagement with the group.

	& Digital Hub			take place on Wednesday 18 February 2026. First artist in resident studio in Northern Ireland. <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	
BIF46	Coffee Culture	£1,317,679 <i>BIF-£286,519 SOF-£100,000 Cost Risks-£100,000 UV- £531,160 DFC-£300,000</i>	Stage 3- Committed	Contractor appointed. Works to commence February 2026. Sod cutting will take place on 18 February (photo call on site). <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects.</i>	Continue engagement with the group.
BIF33	Linfield FC/ Boys Brigade and Belvoir FC	£250,000	Stage 3- Committed	NIHE internal approval received to lease land to Belvoir FC and NIHE solicitor is drafting lease. ICT procurement process to be undertaken.	Continue engagement with the group and partners.
BIF47	Sandy Row Open Space project	£479,314*	Stage 2- Uncommitted <i>Part of Sandy Row Area projects</i>	Detailed design presented to Translink following further public consultation events. Reinstatement underway but queries raised from Translink in terms financial commitment. Ongoing issues with Translink in relation to progressing the scheme, taking account the requirements of their licence. <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 a £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 have 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
SOF02 Coffee Culture	£1,149,821 <i>SOF-£100,000 BIF-£286,519 UV- £463,302 DIC-£300,000</i>	Contractor appointed. Works to commence February 2026. Sod cutting will take place on 18 February (photo call on site).	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.

6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

See separate detailed report on NRF.

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
Strangford Ave Playing Fields Enabling Works	Project completed.
Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	<i>Stage 3 Committed.</i> Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. This includes works at Wedderburn Park, Falls Park, Marrowbone Millenium Park, Westlands Pitch and others. Perimeter fencing to enclose 2 existing grass pitches at Wedderburn Park. Planning application for Wedderburn submitted January 2026. Also, Planning approvals now obtained for Falls Park and Clarendon Playing Fields. Planning decision for Marrowbone Park expected in March 2026. Westlands fencing/ gates completed November 2025. Belfast Met Campus small-sided games pitches completed September 2025.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Works progressing. Progress made with the commencement of the installation for Phase 5a. 115 gates remain to be installed and works to be completed by March 2026.

City Hall – Installation of Stained Glass Windows – LGBT and NHS	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Unveiling of new LGBTQ+ window completed. NHS – Procurement concluded with a contractor appointed and they will attend a future meeting of Installations - City Hall/ City Hall Grounds Working Group to present the initial concept design for the new window.
City Hall External Christmas Tree provision	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Contractor has been appointed and tree order placed.
St George’s Market– New Stalls	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Stalls complete and ready for delivery to the market, date of installation being agreed in consultation with markets team.
Communications Boards	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Delivery of 94no. boards received in January 2026, citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
Musgrave Park Sensory Garden	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Upgrade to sensory garden. New equipment delivered, site works are now underway. Completion expected by end of March 2026.
Basketball Courts	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> The work includes creation or upgrade of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. Design team is currently working on outline designs and preparing tender pack.
Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Feature lighting to exterior of Ulster Hall. Design and delivery is to be fully funded by DfC and Linen Quarter BID. Procurement underway.
Electric Vehicle Charging Network	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Council agreed that officers begin the tender process based on a Concession Operating model. Specific locations agreed at SP&R Committee in January 2026.
Depot Charging Scheme	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Installing EV chargers at 5 Council depot sites – Duncrue, Ormeau, Mallusk, Blanchflower and Belfast Zoo. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3.
Staff Cycle Racks Installation	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Installation of new cycle racks in Cecil Ward Building, City Hall and other premises to improve provision.
Historic Cemeteries	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar’s Bush, Knock Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. Surveys underway and due to complete by Spring 2026.
Historic Tiled Street Signs	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3.

Waterfront Hall Chiller Units	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Detailed design of the new chiller/ heat pump system is continuing. In order to avoid potential cooling issues next season, a temporary chiller solution has been designed. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3 and allow tenders to be issued March 2026.
Waterfront Hall Smoke Curtains	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Modelling of the auditorium has been completed. Following this exercise, and with agreement from Building Control & the Fire Service, no major remedial works are required and the Fire Strategy is to be updated accordingly. AWG is asked to note that this project can be removed from the capital works programme.
Wilmont House H&S Works	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Remedial works to be carried out to ensure the building is made safe for further surveys to enable renovation works. Feasibility study currently underway.
Palm House, Botanic Gardens	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Consultants are continuing to work on the Conservation Management Plan. Draft structural and horticulturalist reports have been received and the full report will be finalised in Spring 2026.
City Hall Security Improvements	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Capital works put forward to make City Hall a safer place for visitors, employees and elected Members. Documents prepared to tender for consultancy team to review the Security Audit Report and deliver the project.
City Hall Preservation	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Programme of works to ensure the preservation of the City Hall building.
2 Royal Avenue – Landlord Capital works	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Capital works to the ground and first floor to meet its obligation to prospective occupiers and ensure the building is fully fit for purpose. Design team working on options for consideration and agreement.
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Market research and specification scoping is currently ongoing.
Wilmont House	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Redevelopment of Wilmont House.

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 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

The 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	Stalled on site due to NI Water issue. Option to resolve this issue agreed by project board. Amended Letter of Offer from TEO received. Expected to be back on-site February 2026.
Sandy Row Arts & Digital Hub	As above at BIF48. Project completed. Official opening to take place on Wednesday 18 February 2026. First artist in resident studio in Northern Ireland.
Coffee Culture	As above at BIF46. Contractor appointed. Works to commence February 2026. Sod cutting will take place on 18 February (photo call on site).
Market Arches	As above at BIF07. Different options costed and OBC submitted to The Executive Office (TEO). Tender process for ICT to commence at the end of February 2026.
Redevelopment of former School of Music	Business case being developed. Approval forecasted before March 2026.
Donegall Pass Good Relations Hub	Business case being developed. Approval forecasted by March 2026.

PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan - Capital Project

Members are asked to note the update on PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan capital project in South Belfast. The Letter of Offer has been accepted and returned to SEUPB.

Project	Status and update
Annadale Open Space	Part of the overall Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Development of a playpark, basketball hoop and a small men's shed. The council is actively seeking funding to develop a 5 aside pitch on the same site. The design team has been appointed, and design is underway, with the view to submitting a planning application in Spring 2026. Stakeholder meetings to include elected Members, will be held on a quarterly basis to provide status updates and to receive community feedback. The third stakeholder meeting will be held on 23 rd February 2026.

DfC funded projects

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

DfC – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
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Lower Ormeau Youth Hub – S John Vianney	Alterations to St John Vianney Youth Centre. Progressing.
Holylands Alleygating and Cleansing Project	Link to the citywide Alleygating Phase 5 project.

Dfl funded projects

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

Dfl – South Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Lagan Gateway Phase 2	As above as BIF04. Planning Approval (green cert) expected start of 2026, response from NIEA still outstanding. External match funding is in place from Dfl. Contractor procurement complete and letter of award has been issued to successful contractor. Ongoing discussions with neighbouring landowners regarding Right of Way and Land Agreements.”

At the suggestion of the Director, the Working Group agreed to undertake a site visit to the recently completed Sandy Row Arts and Digital Hub. At the request of a Member, it was agreed that the date would be circulated as soon as possible.

The Director also suggested that the Area Working Group could hold a future meeting at one of the projects.

In response to a Member’s query regarding the potential for a small playpark to be built within Strangford Avenue Playing Fields, the Director advised work was underway on the development of the new 10 year Capital Programme and that she would capture this as part of that work.

A Member queried whether one or two football pitches were required at Wedderburn Park Playing Fields, having recently spoken with some of the players which used the site, and the Director advised that she would engage with her colleagues in City and Neighbourhood Services and revert to the Member.

The Working Group noted the updates provided.

Update on the South Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Momentum Area Project - Oral update

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the project details for South Belfast.

She explained that a training programme had been developed for those working in the hair, beauty and other frontline industries, providing them with the tools to recognise unhealthy relationships and to help signpost those in need to access the available help and resources. The Training would be delivered by Women’s Aid.

In response to a Member's query regarding extending the programme to the Balmoral/Finaghy area, she stated that she had been engaging with a community outreach worker in the Finaghy area and that officers would be happy for Members to suggest any other areas or groups which might wish to avail of the programme.

Noted.

**Request to Present at a Future Meeting –
Rosario Football Club and Youth Club**

The Working Group agreed to receive a presentation from Rosario representatives at a future meeting.

Chairperson

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North Belfast Area Working Group

Tuesday, 25th February, 2026

NORTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Bradley (Chairperson);
Alderman McCullough; and
Councillors Anglin, Doran,
Meenehan, Murphy, O'Neill and Whyte.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. M. Wilson, Neighbourhood Services Integration
Manager; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 25th November, 2025, were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Doran declared an interest in relation to the item under the heading "Physical Programmes Update" in that he was employed by Westland Community Group.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund Update

The Director of Property and Projects presented the following report:

"1. Introduction

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital programme with a budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The NRF Programme is currently at *Stage 3 – Delivery Stage*. It is an outcomes focused programme aligned to three key themes of social economy, environmental sustainability and neighbourhood tourism. Members are updated on a quarterly basis on the headline status of the NRF projects via Area Working Groups as part of the Physical Programmes Update report. This report provides more detailed information on the Fund and the status of projects in North Belfast.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund update for North Belfast.
- Consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.

3. NRF Allocation Model and Allocations

The allocation model per area for NRF as agreed by Members is based on 50% proportion of population per quadrant of the city and 50% proportion of the population that is in the top 20% area of multiple deprivation. Members agreed the allocations of the total programme budget of £10,280,000 as shown below.

NRF – Area budgets and agreed allocations

Area	Total budget allocation	Allocated to projects in principle	Contingency	Unallocated
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In North Belfast the financial position to date is shown below:

Total budget allocation	Total Net Spend to date	Balance Remaining
£2,503,158	£141,748 (6%)	£2,361,410 (94%)

4. NRF Process

Members agreed a 3 Stage process for the NRF projects:

- Stage 1 - Application (Emerging project)
- Stage 2- Development (Uncommitted project)
- Stage 3 - Delivery (Committed project)

A total of 20 projects are at *Stage 3 – Delivery* and received in-principle allocations. A total of three projects remain at *Stage 2 – Development* which means business cases were completed, but allocations were not made; and a total of 23 applicants remain at *Stage 1* which means the applications passed threshold. Projects at Stages 1 and 2 form the reserve list which comprises 26 projects.

5. Current Overall Status

Offers In Principle - Letters of Offer in Principle have been issued to all 20 projects - South, North, West (24 Jan 2024), East (11 Jul 2024) which initiated the full Due Diligence process.

Design stage - Design consultant teams are in place for 14 of the 20 projects and have completed or are working up detailed designs and costings.

Planning process – Planning approval has been secured for eight projects, a decision is awaited on five lodged applications. Planning permission is not necessary for two projects.

Partnership funding – Match funding of approximately £14m has been secured across 14 projects.

Project Funding Agreements – as under LIF and BIF, NRF funding agreements are issued to groups after Due Diligence and tender stage. These agreements confirm the funding offer once the contract amount is known. Four agreements have been issued to groups under NRF.

Projects underway – Five projects are currently on site – Belfast Orange Hall, Michael Davitt’s Community Heritage Centre, Sólás new build project, Act Initiative Community Hub & Visitor Centre and Ardoyne Youth Enterprise (AYE) Community Hub. Two building purchases have completed – Act Initiative and Market Heritage Hub.

6. North Belfast NRF Update

In North Belfast there are five Stage 3 projects under NRF. Two of the North Belfast projects, Belfast Orange Hall and St Joseph’s Restoration, reduced their scope of works due to a funding shortfall. This was reported to AWG Members previously. Two of the projects are currently on site – Belfast Orange Hall is due to complete soon, and work commenced on AYE Community Hub on 16 February 2026. USEL’s Green Growth & Circular Economy project is at funding agreement stage and should start on site in Spring 2026. Delays have been experienced with Cliftonville Community Enterprise because of a land boundary issue; it is anticipated this will be resolved by Spring 2026. For additional detailed information, please see table below.

In North Belfast there are no Stage 2 projects and there are 9 Stage 1 (Reserve) projects.

Project Name & NRF Themes	Description	Cost Estimate	NRF allocation & match funding secured	Current status
Green Growth & The Circular Economy <i>Environmental Sustainability & Social Economy</i>	Extension of USEL’s site through construction of a purpose-built processing unit with storage for recycled and unrecycled materials.	£518,191	NRF - £518,191	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning secured. • Contractor procurement process completed. • Funding Agreement being finalised with DfC as USEL is a subsidiary of DfC. • Appointment of contractor will commence once

Project Name & NRF Themes	Description	Cost Estimate	NRF allocation & match funding secured	Current status
				Funding Agreement is in place. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget very restricted due to inflation.
Cliftonville Community Enterprise <i>Social Economy</i>	Development of a brand new social enterprise by Cliftonville Community Regeneration Forum on Cliftonpark Avenue with a two storey childcare facility and eight enterprise units.	£1,452,700	NRF - £1,452,700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning secured Design Team appointed. Land boundary issue identified and being addressed. DfC vesting process progressing and due to complete in Spring 26. They will work through the Right of Way issue in conjunction with the land transfer to the organisation. Cost estimate is from 2022 so there is likely to be a shortfall. DfC interested in match funding the project.
St Joseph's Restoration project <i>All</i>	Stabilising and reopening the Parochial House, a Grade B+ listed Italianate red brick building. Work to the Grade B+ listed Church space to assist with remaining water ingress and developing its potential for wider use.	£2,520,359	NRF - £154,696 Architectural Heritage Fund - £40,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NRF funding will be used to do enabling works to help move the overall project forward. Design Team appointed. Planning application submitted. Listed building consent received. Building control approval received. Structural surveys finalised. Group is exploring other funding opportunities.
AYE Community Hub <i>All</i>	Creation of a Community Youth Hub by Ardoyne Youth Enterprise	£3,602,863	NRF - £154,696 TEO - £2,013,607	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning secured. Group successful in obtaining other funding to

Project Name & NRF Themes	Description	Cost Estimate	NRF allocation & match funding secured	Current status
	comprising three main zones – (i) a fully shared and inclusive Community Youth Hub; (ii) a Creative Learning Centre; and (iii) Office space and meeting rooms.		DfC - £1,000,000 Clothworkers - £100,000 Garfield Weston - £100,000 BCC Cost risks - £50,000	allow the project to proceed. • Amended Letter of Offer received from The Executive Office in December 2025. • Due Diligence approved in December 2025. • Tender documents for procurement of contractor returned. • Project started on site on 16 February 2026.
Belfast Orange Hall Refurbishment <i>Neighbourhood Tourism & Environmental Sustainability</i>	Refurbishment works to the Belfast Orange Hall, a Grade B listed building, to ensure it is fit for purpose.	£280,000	NRF - £154,696	• A reduced scope of work to suit NRF funding allocation was agreed. • Project on site and expected to complete by Spring 2026.

7. Next Steps

The Teams will continue to work with the groups to develop the NRF projects, taking them through Due Diligence, Design, Planning and contractor appointment stages as required, in line with the project pathway and best practice in construction.

Members will be aware as with all physical projects, challenges can emerge throughout the delivery stage such as planning and building consent approvals, or issues with title or land etc. This has been greatly minimised because of early Due Diligence that was carried out as well as the business case process.

In addition, funding gaps remain a key challenge for a number of projects that were not allocated a full funding package via the NRF Programme. Officers will continue to work with the groups to find potential additional sources of external funding. Escalating costs represent a significant challenge for all projects in the current economic climate.

Members will continue to be updated via the Physical Programme AWG Update reports each quarter.

Members are asked to note the update provided on projects under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund.

Members may wish to consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.”

The Working Group noted the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund update for North Belfast.

Physical Programmes Update

The Director of 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 North Belfast including the recently completed project – ABC Trust Health & Leisure Hub and Greening and Growing Project at Appendix 1.

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 38 have been completed; 3 are at delivery stage; and 1 is at pre-construction stage.

LIF breakdown – North	LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description	Projects	Value (£)	Projects	Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	23 (92%)	£996,500	16 (89%)	£708,201
Number of Projects On-going Delivery	1 (4%)	£66,000	2 (6%)	£90,000
Number of Projects in Pre-construction	1 (4%)	£65,000		

Number of Projects in Initial Stage (Due Diligence)				
Total Number of Approved Projects	25*	£1,127,500	17**	£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 provides 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	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
NLIF057	Ardoyne Holy Cross Boxing Club (UV – ABC Trust Hub)	£7,317,000 <i>UV- £4,751,000 DfC- £1,300,000 FT - £1,200,000 LIF- £66,000</i>	On Ground	Partnership project with DfC, DfI, Flax Trust, and UV. UV project completed. Legal issues to be addressed prior to purchase of gym equipment.	Continue engagement with group.
NLIF014	Westland Community Centre - new building	£1,084,172 <i>UV- £1,019,172 LIF- £65,000</i>	Design stage	Partnership project with UV. First Project Board meeting took place in January 2026. The designer presented updated plans which the group are happy with. The group have had an informal PAD meeting with the planners. Aim to submit the planning application at the end of February 2026.	Continue engagement with Group and TEO
NLIF2-22	Sailortown, St. Joseph's Church Refurbishment	£75,000	On Ground	On ground. Construction works on the gallery paused due to resourcing issues with the contractor. BCC officers are assisting the group to resolve this issue. Exploring other items from funding agreement that can be delivered immediately.	Continue engagement with group and HED.
NLIF2-23	Ardoyne Youth Club and Benview Community Centre	£15,000	On Ground	Benview Community Centre – works complete. Ardoyne Youth Club – quotation received with works to be undertaken.	Continue engagement with Groups.

4. Belfast Investment Fund

Members are reminded that 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 - Cavehill Tennis Club- £71k, 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
BIF15	Malgrove	£1,758,607	Stage 3 - Committed	Received approval at June 2025 Planning Committee. Issue of Planning Green Form was subject to NIEA and SES responses. BCC considers that all information NIEA have requested has been issued. Unsatisfactory response from NIEA/ NED on 11 th February 2026 has resulted in a request for an urgent meeting with NIEA/ NED. Procurement of contractor underway – PQQ complete and ITT to be issued imminently.	Continue to request an urgent meeting with NIEA/ NED.
BIF43	Cultural Community Hub	£498,000 <i>BIF- £350,000</i> <i>DfC- £74,000</i> <i>Cost Risks- £74,000</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	On Ground. Contractor has been appointed. Works due to start on 16 th February 2026. Completion planned by end of December 2026.	Continue engagement with group.

5. **Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**

See separate detailed report on NRF.

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
North Foreshore - Development Sites Infrastructure Works	On ground. Stage 3 Committed. The construction contract for the installation of the next phase of the gas abstraction infrastructure (the gas ring main) was commenced in September 2025 and is due to complete in March 2026. Foul Pumping Station contractor appointed. NIE upgrade connections to fully service the site development have started (with completion anticipated at end of 2027).
Floral Hall Health & Safety Works	On ground. Stage 3 Committed. First phase of Health & Safety works completed. Options now being considered and discussions ongoing with other funders. Works to a temporary roof agreed to make the building watertight.
Belfast Zoo Improvement Works Phase 2	On ground. Stage 3 Committed. Progressing.
Cathedral Gardens (including Belfast Blitz)	On ground. Stage 3 Committed. Works ongoing. Expected to reopen in spring 2027.
Girdwood Hub Health & Safety Works	Stage 3 – Committed. Urgent works to the roof of the Girdwood Community Hub building. Works are planned to commence in week commencing 16 February 2026, anticipated to last around 20 weeks (July 2026).
LTP - Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility	Stage 3 – Committed. Business case stage. Restricted SP&R paper on 6 February 2026 ratified by Council on 9 February project was moved to Stage 3- Committed. Design team continues to develop designs to Planning stage. Discussions ongoing with DfC.
Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	Stage 3 Committed. Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. This includes works at Wedderburn Park, Falls Park, Marrowbone Millenium Park, Westlands Pitch and others. Planning decision for Marrowbone Park expected in March 2026. Westlands fencing/ gates completed November 2025. Also, Planning approvals now obtained for Falls Park and Clarendon Playing Fields. Planning application for Wedderburn submitted January 2026. Belfast Met Campus small-sided games pitches completed September 2025.
Reservoir Safety Programme (links to PEACEPLUS)	Stage 3 Committed. Reservoir improvements at Waterworks and Alexandra Park. SEUPB PEACEPLUS funding of €13.5m to enhance shared space and connectivity. Planning application submitted.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	Stage 3 – Committed. Works progressing. Progress made with the commencement of the installation for Phase 5a. 115 gates remain to be installed and works to be completed by March 2026.
Communications Boards	Stage 3 – Committed. Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Delivery of 94no. boards received in January

Project	Status and update
	2026, citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
Basketball Courts	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> The work includes creation or upgrade of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. Design team is currently working up outline design and preparing tender pack.
Greening and Growing Project	Project completed. Biodiversity improvement and sustainable food growing development funded through Shared Island programme at the Waterworks. Launch/ demonstration scheduled to take place 24 February 2026.
Electric Vehicle Charging Network	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Council agreed that officers begin the tender process based on a Concession Operating model. Specific locations agreed at SP&R Committee in January 2026.
Depot Charging Scheme	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Installing EV chargers at 5 Council depot sites – Duncrue, Ormeau, Mallusk, Blanchflower and Belfast Zoo. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3.
Historic Cemeteries	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar’s Bush, Knock Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. Consultants appointed to undertake surveys for the Phase 2 works. Successful application to DfC Historic Environment Fund (HEF) Revival Stream fund for a contribution towards design fees for Phase 2.
Historic Tiled Street Signs	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Outline business case prepared. Further engagement with Members being considered.
Relocation of Dunbar Link Cleansing Depot	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. RIBA Stage 2 Concept Design complete. However, further discussions ongoing with C&NS to review the service provision.
Waste Plan – Waste Transfer Station Upgrade	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Link to Duncrue Masterplan and citywide kerbside scheme.
Access to the Hills - Glencairn Park/ Ligoniel Park	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan to develop connections to the Hills at Ligoniel, Glencairn and Cavehill. Design team procured. Project steering group and stakeholder engagement ongoing.
Access to the Hills – connections from Cavehill to Divis Mountain and Black Mtn	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Complementary scheme to developing further connections to the Hills at Ligoniel, Glencairn and Cavehill.
Assembly Rooms Cluster	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Redevelopment of Assembly Rooms Cluster.
Loughside Playing Fields Changing Facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Creation of a modular changing and flexible space facility. The project is now being looked at in conjunction with the next phase of leisure at this site. Request at February SP&R to move to Stage 2.
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Market research and specification scoping on this project is currently ongoing. Colleagues from P&P and CNS continue to progress this project.

Project	Status and update
Duncrue Masterplan	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Redevelopment of the whole Duncrue site which aims to improve the efficiency of the site. Strategic outline case being worked up.
North Foreshore - Giant's Park	A complex development agreement is in place with Giant's Park Belfast Limited (GPBL). This agreement commits GPBL to deliver over 250 acres of phased development over a number of years in four distinct hubs: Adventure Hub, Welcome Hub, Pit Stop Hub, Distributions and Logistics Hub. Adventure Hub - Members have approved at Council in November 2025, changes reflecting market conditions and planning advice. Under the MDA programme the first stage is an Adventure Hub which is currently in the planning process. The next stage of the programme is for a Distribution and Logistics Hub and a Pitstop Hub which comprises commercial uses including food and beverage uses and a hotel.
Belfast Bikes Expansion	New provider/ operator has been appointed. New scheme was launched in September 2025.
Little York Street/ Little Patrick Street Public Realm Improvements	This work is under S76 Developer Contributions. Procurement stage. The PQQ for an IST was published in early February with a closing date on 27 February 2026. We are having to go back for some NMC approvals to the Planning Approval as Roads asked for further changes.

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 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
ABC Trust Health & Leisure Hub <i>(links to LIF programme)</i>	Project completed. Partnership project with DfC, DfI, Flax Trust, and UV. The works are now complete on site and handed over in December 2025.
Ballysillan Playing Fields	On ground. Partnership project with UV, DfC and DfI. Works continue to progress well on site. Pitch, Pump Track and Pavillon design progressing. Stakeholder engagement still ongoing.
Ardoyne Youth Enterprises (AYE) Social Enterprise Project <i>(links to NRF programme)</i>	Revised Letter of Offer received, signed & returned. Pre-contract meeting scheduled for w/c 26 January 2026. To start on site mid-February 2026.

Sunningdale Community Centre <i>(links to BIF programme)</i>	Business case stage. Site for development identified. Group to submit possessory title application in consultation with their solicitor. Project cannot progress until outcome of site ownership is concluded.
Westland Community Centre <i>(links to LIF programme)</i>	First Project Board meeting took place in January 2026. The designer attended the start of the meeting and presented updated plans which the group are happy with. The group have had an informal PAD meeting with the planners in anticipation of submitting a planning application in the next few months.

PEACEPLUS – Capital Projects

Members are asked to note updates on capital projects under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

North Belfast – Capital Projects overview

Project	Status and update
Reconnected Belfast - Waterworks and Alexandra Park €13.5m SEUPB PEACEPLUS	Enhancements to shared space and connectivity within and between Waterworks and Alexandra Park. Planning ongoing. Integrated Consultancy Team has been appointed for detailed design stage. PQQ for IST procurement has been issued.
Access to the Hills – Glencairn/ Ligoniel <i>Link to Capital Programme</i>	Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Plan to develop connections to the Hills at Ligoniel, Glencairn and Cavehill. Design Team has been appointed. Next stage is submission to Planning. Project steering group and stakeholder engagement ongoing.

Dfl funded projects

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

Dfl – North Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Under The Bridges Public Realm	Consultants have been appointed to undertake design works. Planning application submitted in November 2025. Statutory consultations are ongoing.
Sailortown/ Titanic Quarter Bridge	Consultants have been appointed to undertake RIBA Stage 1 & 2 design services for a proposed new cross harbour pedestrian and cycle bridge. Stage 1 report now complete.
Giant's Park Greenway	Develop a Greenway around the Giant's Park at North Foreshore connecting from the Giant's Park onto the North Foreshore Path/ National Cycle Route 93. Letter of Offer received. "

The Working Group noted the Physical Programme update for North Belfast and agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the

allocation of LIF underspend towards the cost of the Ardoyne Youth Club heating system and the acquisition of land from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service for the Westland Community Centre Hub, on the basis that both projects had previously been agreed as LIF projects.

North Ending Violence against Women and Girls Momentum Area Project Update

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the project details for North Belfast.

She explained that, as part of the programme and in collaboration with local community groups, the One Step Louder event was due to take place in Girdwood Community Hub on International Women's Day, 8th March, and she encouraged the Working Group Members to attend and support the event.

Chairperson

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West Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 26th February, 2026

HYBRID MEETING OF THE WEST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor McCann (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);
Alderman McCoubrey; and
Councillors Black, Canavan, Carson, M. Donnelly,
R-M. Donnelly, Duffy, Garrett, McCallin, McDowell,
R. McLaughlin, Verner and Walsh.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. F. Dennison, Neighbourhood Integration Manager;
Mr. J. Currie, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were received.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 27th November, 2025 were approved and adopted.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Duffy declared an interest in the 'Physical Programmes Update' report in that he was a Board Member of the Lagmore Youth Project. Since the matter did not become subject to debate or discussion, he was not required to retire from the meeting whilst the matter was under consideration.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

1. Introduction

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital programme with a budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The NRF Programme is currently at *Stage 3 – Delivery Stage*. It is an outcomes focused programme aligned to three key themes of social economy, environmental sustainability and neighbourhood tourism. Members are updated on a quarterly basis on the headline status of the NRF projects via Area Working Groups as part of the Physical Programmes Update report. This

report provides more detailed information on the Fund and the status of projects in West Belfast.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund update for West Belfast; and consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.

3. NRF Allocation Model and Allocations

The allocation model per area for NRF as agreed by Members is based on 50% proportion of population per quadrant of the city and 50% proportion of the population that is in the top 20% area of multiple deprivation. Members agreed the allocations of the total programme budget of £10,280,000 as shown below.

NRF – Area budgets and agreed allocations

Area	Total budget allocation	Allocated to projects in principle	Contingency	Unallocated
North	£2,503,158	£2,434,979	£68,179	0
South	£1,978,637	£1,978,637	0	0
East	£2,351,551	£2,350,000	0	£1,551
West	£3,446,654	£3,426,875	£19,762 (Shankill)	£17

In West Belfast the financial position to date is shown below:

Total budget allocation	Total Net Spend to date	Balance Remaining
£3,446,654	£799,195 (23%)	£2,647,459 (77%)

4. NRF Process

Members agreed a 3 Stage process for the NRF projects:

- *Stage 1 - Application* (Emerging project)
- *Stage 2- Development* (Uncommitted project)
- *Stage 3 - Delivery* (Committed project)

A total of 20 projects are at *Stage 3 – Delivery* and received in-principle allocations. A total of three projects remain at *Stage 2 – Development* which means business cases were completed, but allocations were not made; and a total of 23 applicants remain at *Stage 1* which means the applications passed threshold. Projects at *Stages 1 and 2* form the reserve list which comprises 26 projects.

5. **Current Overall Status**

Offers In Principle - Letters of Offer in Principle have been issued to all 20 projects - South, North, West (24 Jan 2024), East (11 Jul 2024) which initiated the full Due Diligence process.

Design stage - Design consultant teams are in place for 14 of the 20 projects and have completed or are working up detailed designs and costings.

Planning process – Planning approval has been secured for eight projects, a decision is awaited on five lodged applications. Planning permission is not necessary for two projects.

Partnership funding – Match funding of approximately £14m has been secured across 14 projects.

Project Funding Agreements – as under LIF and BIF, NRF funding agreements are issued to groups after Due Diligence and tender stage. These agreements confirm the funding offer once the contract amount is known. Four agreements have been issued to groups under NRF.

Projects underway – Five projects are currently on site – Belfast Orange Hall, Michael Davitt’s Community Heritage Centre, Sólás new build project, Act Initiative Community Hub & Visitor Centre and Ardoyne Youth Enterprise (AYE) Community Hub. Two building purchases have completed – Act Initiative and Market Heritage Hub.

6. **West Belfast NRF Update**

In West Belfast there are six Stage 3 projects under NRF. Three of the West Belfast projects - Croí na Carraige - ‘The Heart of the Rock’, The Mountainview Hotel, and The Road have a funding shortfall. This was reported to AWG Members previously. Two of the projects - Michael Davitt’s Community Heritage Centre and The ACT Initiative Community Hub & Visitor Centre are currently on site and will complete this year. Glencairn Community Project Hub is awaiting a decision on its planning application. For additional detailed information, please see table below.

In West Belfast there are no Stage 2 projects and there are 10 Stage 1 (Reserve) projects.

Project Name & NRF Themes	Description	Cost Estimate	NRF allocation & match funding secured	Current status
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<p>Michael Davitt's Community Heritage Centre</p> <p><i>All</i></p>	<p>Transformation of a large redundant site adjacent to Páirc Mac Daibhéid located in Beechmount, West Belfast by Michael Davitt's GAC into a newbuild museum/exhibition space, multipurpose hall and supporting ancillary services.</p>	<p>£1,147,548</p>	<p>NRF - £684,058</p> <p>Davitt's GAC - £463,490</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction work commenced in Summer 2025. Awaiting construction completion date, which is forecast to be March 2026. • The heritage fit-out element is currently being procured by the club's design team, with the fit-out anticipated in summer 2026.
<p>Croí na Carraige - 'The Heart of the Rock' - Phase 1</p> <p><i>Social Economy & Neighbourhood Tourism</i></p>	<p>Development of a flagship multi-purpose youth, community, family and heritage hub by Glór na Móna on the derelict land adjacent to their current community hub Gael-Ionad Mhic Goill in the Upper Springfield Area of West Belfast.</p>	<p>£2,053,915</p>	<p>NRF - £537,058</p> <p>An Ciste - £250,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Team appointed. • Planning secured. • Funding gap of approximately £1.3m. • Group has secured funding from An Ciste and is exploring other funding opportunities.
<p>The Mountainview Hotel</p> <p><i>All</i></p>	<p>Creation of a socially owned environmentally friendly 65-bedroom hotel by Fáilte Feirste Thiar.</p>	<p>£25.6m</p>	<p>NRF - £1.5m</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project has stalled. • Clarification on the status of the project and alternative site location is required. • Planning approval will be required. • Funding gap of over £24m
<p>The ACT Initiative Community Hub & Visitor Centre</p> <p><i>Social Economy & Neighbourhood Tourism</i></p>	<p>Purchase and development of ACT's central office and Community Hub to include a Visitor Centre that features a historical exhibition.</p>	<p>£295,000</p>	<p>NRF - £295,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project underway. Building purchase & heating work complete. • NRF Funding to be used for the digital exhibition • Group secured additional funding from the Heritage Fund for the fit-out of visitor centre exhibition. • Estimated completion date is April 2026.

Glencairn Community Project Hub <i>Social Economy</i>	Development of a purpose-built community and youth facility within the Glencairn estate by Glencairn Community Project (GCP) to meet both the needs of the community and provide statutory youth provision within the area.	£1,329,150	NRF - £200,000 BIF - £700,000 DfC - £430,000 (Awaiting Letter of Offer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Team appointed. • Planning application submitted. Awaiting response from NI Water on foul disposal solution which is currently a key risk. • Due diligence ongoing. Sustainability of the group has been highlighted as a risk. • Land transfer process has commenced between GCP and NIHE.
The Road <i>Social Economy & Neighbourhood Tourism</i>	Development of a capital tourism project by Lower Shankill Community Association based around the shared history of the Shankill Road and its contribution to Belfast.	£2,121,036	NRF - £210,759	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning permission expired and a planning renewal was granted in November 2025. • Design Team to be appointed. • Funding gap of approximately £1.9m. Group is exploring funding opportunities.

7. Next Steps

The Teams will continue to work with the groups to develop the NRF projects, taking them through Due Diligence, Design, Planning and contractor appointment stages as required, in line with the project pathway and best practice in construction.

Members will be aware as with all physical projects, challenges can emerge throughout the delivery stage such as planning and building consent approvals, or issues with title or land etc. This has been greatly minimised because of early Due Diligence that was carried out as well as the business case process.

In addition, funding gaps remain a key challenge for a number of projects that were not allocated a full funding package via the NRF Programme. Officers will continue to work with the groups to find potential additional sources of external funding. Escalating costs represent a significant challenge for all projects in the current economic climate.

Members will continue to be updated via the Physical Programme AWG Update reports each quarter.

Members are asked to note the update provided on projects under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund.

Members may wish to consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.

Discussion ensued on a number of projects, particularly regarding the Mountainview Hotel, in respect of which £1.5m of Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund money had been allocated. The Director noted that the original project had not progressed for a number of reasons, and the project's promoter had submitted a revised proposal to the Council focusing on additional works to be carried out at the Roddy McCorley Heritage Centre. The Working Group agreed that a recommendation be made to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the revised proposal be taken forward, subject to discussion with the Legal Services Department and subject to the Council's due-diligence processes.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided and agreed that the above-mentioned recommendation be submitted for approval by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Physical Programme Update

The Committee considered 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 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 West Belfast including the recently completed project - Playground Improvement Programme 25/26- Lagmore Activity Park (White Rise).

3. Belfast Investment Fund

Members are reminded that 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. The table below provides a summary of BIF allocated projects.

Summary of BIF allocated projects

West	<p>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, Glencairn Community Project— £700k</p> <p>Stage 2— St Mary's CBS— no commitment</p> <p>Stage 1— An Sportslann; Suffolk Community Forum; Belfast Hills-Black Mountain Access—no commitment</p>
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The table below shows an overview of the remaining BIF project -

BIF Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF09	Glencairn Community Project	£900,000 BIF- £700,000; NRF- £200,000	Committed; Due Diligence	<i>Link to NRF project.</i> Planning application submitted. Awaiting response from NI Water on foul disposal solution, currently a key risk. Due diligence ongoing. Sustainability of GCP also highlighted as a risk. Land transfer process has commenced between GCP and NIHE, completion is dependent on Planning Approval in place.	Continue engagement with the group and partners.

4. **Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**

See separate detailed report on NRF.

5. **Capital Programme**

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building/buying new ones. The table below provides an update on current live projects on the Council's Capital Programme in the West Belfast area. Members are asked to note status and update.

West Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
Playground Improvement Programme 25/26	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Agreed at P&C Committee in May 2025. Playgrounds selected for refurbishment are White Rise, Ohio Street, Roddens Crescent, and Finvoy Street playgrounds. Lagmore Activity Park (White Rise) playground refurbishment complete 17th February 2026.
Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	<i>Stage 3 Committed.</i> Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. This includes works at Wedderburn Park, Falls Park, Marrowbone Millenium Park, Westlands Pitch and others. Planning approvals now obtained for Falls Park and Clarendon Playing Fields. Falls Park soccer pitch improvements, start date programmed for end of March 2026. Also, Planning application for Wedderburn submitted January 2026. Planning decision for Marrowbone Park expected in March 2026. Westlands fencing/ gates completed November 2025. Belfast Met Campus small-sided games pitches completed September 2025.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Works progressing. Progress made with the commencement of the installation for Phase 5a. 115 gates remain to be installed and works to be completed by March 2026.
Access to Hills - Black Mountain/ Upper Whiterock Pathway	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Tender preparation stage. Planning ongoing. The procurement for the design team to take the project through to construction is ongoing, with the PQQ stage completed and ITT to complete in February 2026. Match funding opportunities are still being explored for this project.
Fernhill House H&S works	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Tender preparation stage.
Communications Boards in playgrounds	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Delivery of 94no. boards received in January 2026, citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
Basketball Courts	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> The work includes creation or upgrade of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. Design team is currently working up outline design and preparing tender pack.
Colin Active Travel – Phase 1	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Meetings are continuing between the Council and key stakeholders DfI, DfC and NIHE on the Colin Active Travel Plan. Officers working on a Business Case to submit to DfI Active Travel to fund routes within the Colin area. Aim to submit funding application by start of March 2026.
Electric Vehicle Charging Network	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Council agreed that officers begin the tender process based on a Concession Operating model. Specific locations agreed at SP&R Committee in January 2026.
Depot Charging Scheme	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Installing EV chargers at 5 Council depot sites – Duncrue, Ormeau, Mallusk, Blanchflower and Belfast Zoo. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3.

Historic Cemeteries	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar’s Bush, Knock Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. Consultants appointed to undertake surveys for the Phase 2 works. Successful application to DfC Historic Environment Fund (HEF) Revival Stream fund for a contribution towards design fees for Phase 2.
Historic Tiled Street Signs	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3.
Woodvale Park Sensory Garden	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> New sensory facility. Design team appointed to take scheme to tender stage with a view to appointing a contractor to take works forward. Concept design has now been completed with a view to sign off in advance of tender package being prepared to appoint a contractor.
Access to the Hills - connections from Cavehill to Divis Mountain and Black Mountain	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Complementary scheme to developing further connections to the Hills at Ligoniel, Glencairn and Cavehill. Part of this is included in the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Plan to develop connections to the Hills at Ligoniel, Glencairn and Cavehill and connecting to the National Trust developments at Divis Mountains.
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Market research and specification scoping on this project is currently ongoing. Colleagues from P&P and CNS continue to progress this project.
Lenadoon Greenway	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Consultants have now been appointed to undertake a Feasibility Study of the Greenway.
Fernhill House and Courtyard	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Consultant appointed for feasibility study following agreement at Committee in November 2024 to explore options.
Lidl, Stewartstown Road Suffolk 3G Pitch and Lenadoon Park Pitch Improvements	This work is under S76 Developer Contributions for Open Space. <i>Suffolk pitch</i> - Planning application approved. Will require additional funding. <i>Lenadoon Park</i> – Grass soccer pitch improvement works complete. MUGA improvements completed in November 25.
Christ the Redeemer, Lagmore Drive Lagmore Youth Project proposal	This work is under S76 Developer Contributions. Approval is sought to allocate developer contributions to appoint an Integrated Consultancy Team to progress the detailed design and delivery of the new facility. Authority to Spend form prepared and request will be presented at February SP&R.

6. 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, PEACEPLUS, DfI, DfC, DoJ as well as schemes with IFI. 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	Business case stage. UV forecast completion of the business case spring 2026.

PEACEIV/ PEACEPLUS – Capital Projects

Members are asked to note updates on the capital projects that are related to the PEACE Programmes.

West Belfast – Capital Projects overview

Project	Status and update
Forth Meadow Community Greenway	Work progressing on the signage for FMCG. Overall signage package which includes information panels/interpretative panels/wayfinding signage and the beacons being issued with a return date of early March 2026.
Distillery Street Redevelopment Project	Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Design Team has been appointed. Regular meetings with stakeholder group and Design Team. Multiple land ownership in the area discussions ongoing with relevant partners. Community consultations ongoing. Aim to submit planning application early March 2026.

Other externally funded projects

Below is the status update on capital projects funded by other partners in West Belfast. ***Other external funders – West Belfast projects overview***

Project	Status and update
Black Mountain Shared Space Project – Phase 2	<i>Via IFI, DoJ, DfC</i> Project completed. Main building works completed and handed over to BMSS in Summer 2025. Fit-out of Boys and Girls Clubs units completed. Staff continue to engage with BMSS.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Future Meetings

The Working Group agreed that consideration be given to undertaking site visits to view several projects which were under development as part of the programme.

Chairperson

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East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 5th March, 2026

MEETING OF THE EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOETLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Alderman Lawlor (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland and Rodgers; and
Councillors Abernethy, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks,
D. Douglas, S. Douglas, de Faoite, P. Donnelly,
Ferguson, Flynn, Hanvey, Long, Maghie, McAteer,
McCormick and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 4th December, 2025 were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor P. Donnelly declared an interest in relation to the item 'Physical Programme Update' in that he was associated with a project referenced within the report. As the project did not become the subject of discussion, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor McCormick declared an interest within the same item in that he was a member of Clara Residents Association and left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion in relation to Clarawood Tenants Hall.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund Update

The Working Group noted the following report:

"1. Introduction

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital programme with a budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The NRF Programme is currently at *Stage 3 – Delivery Stage*. It is an outcomes

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focused programme aligned to three key themes of social economy, environmental sustainability and neighbourhood tourism. Members are updated on a quarterly basis on the headline status of the NRF projects via Area Working Groups as part of the Physical Programmes Update report. This report provides more detailed information on the Fund and the status of projects in East Belfast.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund update for East Belfast.
- Consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.

3. NRF Allocation Model and Allocations

The allocation model per area for NRF as agreed by Members is based on 50% proportion of population per quadrant of the city and 50% proportion of the population that is in the top 20% area of multiple deprivation. Members agreed the allocations of the total programme budget of £10,280,000 as shown below.

NRF – Area budgets and agreed allocations

Area	Total budget allocation	Allocated to projects in principle	Contingency	Unallocated
North	£2,503,158	£2,434,979	£68,179	0
South	£1,978,637	£1,978,637	0	0
East	£2,351,551	£2,350,000	0	£1,551
West	£3,446,654	£3,426,875	£19,762 (Shankill)	£17

In East Belfast the financial position to date is shown below:

Total budget allocation	Total Net Spend to date	Balance Remaining
£2,351,551	£22,909 (1%)	£2,328,642 (99%)

4. NRF Process

Members agreed a 3 Stage process for the NRF projects:

- Stage 1 - Application (Emerging project)
- Stage 2 - Development (Uncommitted project)
- Stage 3 - Delivery (Committed project)

A total of 20 projects are at *Stage 3 – Delivery* and received in-principle allocations. A total of three projects remain at *Stage 2 – Development* which means business cases were completed, but allocations were not made; and a total of 23 applicants remain at Stage 1 which means the applications passed threshold. Projects at Stages 1 and 2 form the reserve list which comprises 26 projects.

5. Current Overall Status

Offers In Principle - Letters of Offer in Principle have been issued to all 20 projects - South, North, West (24 Jan 2024), East (11 Jul 2024) which initiated the full Due Diligence process.

Design stage - Design consultant teams are in place for 16 of the 20 projects and have completed or are working up detailed designs and costings.

Planning process – Planning approval has been secured for eight projects, a decision is awaited on five lodged applications. Planning permission is not necessary for two projects.

Partnership funding – Match funding of approximately £14m has been secured in principle across 14 projects.

Project Funding Agreements – as under LIF and BIF, NRF funding agreements are issued to groups after Due Diligence and tender stage. These agreements confirm the funding offer once the contract amount is known. Four agreements have been issued to groups under NRF.

Projects underway – Five projects are currently on site – Belfast Orange Hall, Michael Davitt’s Community Heritage Centre, Sólás new build project, Act Initiative Community Hub & Visitor Centre and Ardoyne Youth Enterprise (AYE) Community Hub. Two building purchases have completed – Act Initiative and Market Heritage Hub.

6. East Belfast NRF Update

In East Belfast there are four Stage 3 projects under NRF. Two projects have funding shortfalls - EastSide Hotel & EastSide Visitor Centre and the Sporting Hub at Wilgar Park. Hosford Community Homes at 335 Newtownards Road recently bridged their funding gap with a successful application to the Wolfson Foundation. Portview Exchange is at final draft Business Case stage with TEO Urban Villages and has a funding offer in principle. For additional detailed information, please see the table below.

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In East Belfast, there are two Stage 2 projects and there are three Stage 1 (Reserve) projects.

Stage 3 Projects				
Project Name & NRF Themes	Description	Cost Estimate	NRF allocation & match funding secured	Current status
EastSide Hotel & EastSide Visitor Centre <i>Social Economy & Neighbourhood Tourism</i>	Construction of a new 10 bed hotel and extension of the current EastSide Visitor Centre by EastSide Partnership	£2,250,000	NRF - £950,000 SOF - £700,000 EastSide - £400,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer of land between Council and EastSide Partnership agreed. • Design Team appointed and value engineering has taken place. Options are still over budget at approximately £200,000. • Group is exploring funding opportunities to increase the overall budget. • Planning application to be submitted. • Contractor to be appointed.
Portview Exchange <i>Social Economy & Neighbourhood Tourism</i>	Development of a state-of-the-art studio on the Newtownards Road by BURC comprising significant additional artist studio space as well as private rooms, workshops, test labs, a kiln and a retail shop frontage.	£3,229,365	NRF - £600,000 TEO (tbc) - £2,604,090	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business case is being updated and is at final draft. • Design Team to be appointed. • Planning is required. • Match funding in principle from TEO Urban Villages.
Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road <i>Social Economy & Environmental Sustainability</i>	Demolition, alterations and refurbishment of building by East Belfast Mission into two apartments for the people who have been homeless and creation of a community/ commercial space on the ground floor.	£381,690	NRF - £300,000 Wolfson Foundation - £80,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning application submitted. • Wolfson Foundation has approved a grant towards the refurbishment costs of £80,000. • Design Team currently out for procurement and likely to be appointed in Spring 26.
Sporting Hub at Wilgar Park <i>Social Economy</i>	Construction of a state-of-the-art 3G community sports pitch by Dundela FC. The project will greatly enhance sporting and recreational facilities in the heart of East Belfast.	£881,394	NRF - £500,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design Team appointed. • Planning application submitted in December 2024 and is ongoing. Delayed by NI Water response. Water drainage assessment now underway.

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			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current funding gap anticipated is £381,000. • Group is actively exploring other funding opportunities. • Council has agreed that officers will work with Dundela FC to support a DCMS/IFA funding application.
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7. Next Steps

The Teams will continue to work with the groups to develop the NRF projects, taking them through Due Diligence, Design, Planning and contractor appointment stages as required, in line with the project pathway and best practice in construction.

Members will be aware as with all physical projects, challenges can emerge throughout the delivery stage such as planning and building consent approvals, or issues with title or land etc. This has been greatly minimised because of early Due Diligence that was carried out, as well as the business case process.

Furthermore, funding gaps remain a key challenge for a number of projects that were not allocated a full funding package via the NRF Programme. Officers will continue to work with the groups to find potential additional sources of external funding. Escalating costs represent a significant challenge for all projects in the current economic climate.

Members will continue to be updated via the Physical Programme AWG Update reports each quarter.

Members are asked to note the update provided on projects under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund.

Members may wish to consider if any projects are to be timebound to ensure progress across the programme.”

Physical Programme Update

The Working Group considered the following 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

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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.

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 area; 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, 19 have been completed, 1 project is at delivery stage and 1 project is 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	1(10%)	£30,000		
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects at Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	1 (10%)	£70,000		
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 Dundela FC, Tullycarnet, Cregagh	£65,000 (£30k plus £35k reallocation)	On Ground	Bloomfield FC, East Belfast FC, Tullycarnet FC, Cregagh Wanderers, Bredagh GAC Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Clonduff FC	Continue engagement with the groups.

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	Wanderers, Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Bredagh GAC – storage facilities			storage – completed. Dundela FC – remaining container to be delivered. The club want to wait until after the pitch is complete before they arrange delivery.	
ELIF29	Cycling Ireland	£70,000	Due Diligence	Cycling Ireland have not decided what they want to use this funding for. They have proposed/considered a number of developments but are still undecided. Council officers are waiting more feedback from the group.	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	Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£655k Stage 2— <i>Lagan Village Youth & Community—no commitment</i> Stage 1— <i>East Belfast Mission; Belmont Bowling Club; Bloomfield Presbyterian Church; St. John’s Orangefield, Church of Ireland, Tullycarnet Community Support Services—no commitment / on long list</i>
Outer East	Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh 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	£6,782,069 <i>LUF- £4,094,000 BIF- £1,550,000 HF- £255,000 (Development Grant), £768,069 (Delivery Grant) Several Trusts- £115,000</i>	On Ground	On Ground. Works began on site in early January 2025 and are progressing well, with completion due third quarter of 2026. Discussion ongoing with DfC regarding potential additional funding.	Continue engagement with the group and funders.
BIF13	Bloomfield Community Association	£715,009 <i>BIF - £655,000 LIF - £60,009</i>	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	New project location at Dixon Playing Fields agreed. Business Case Addendum being developed for submission to DfC. Designs being developed for planning. Updated costs to be provided by Design Team.	Continue engagement with the group and design team.

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	Action/ Recommendation
EastSide Hotel & Visitor Centre <i>(links to NRF project)</i>	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising: SOF- £700,000 NRF- £950,000 Group- £400k</i>	Transfer of land between Council and EastSide Partnership agreed. Design Team appointed and value engineering has taken place. Options are still over budget at approximately £200,000. Group is exploring funding opportunities to increase the overall budget. Planning application to be submitted once additional funding is sourced.	Continued engagement with the group.

6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

See separate detailed report on NRF.

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.

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East Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
New Crematorium	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Technical Design is complete. Procurement exercise for the main contractor has been completed. In September 2025, a dedicated Members workshop was held to inform a Strategic Analysis and Options Appraisal on the project. A report has been presented to SP&R Committee on 20 February 2026, which will go to Council on 2 March 2026.
Cremated Remains Burial Plots	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Investigatory surveys underway, anticipated the Planning submission will be March 2026.
Playground Improvement Programme 25/26	<i>Project underway.</i> Playgrounds agreed for refurbishment are White Rise, Ohio Street, Roddens Crescent, and Finvoy Street playgrounds. Refurbishment works programmed to start at Finvoy Street in March 2026, and at Roddens Crescent in April 2026. Lagmore Activity Park (White Rise) playground refurbishment complete 17 th February 2026.
Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	<i>Project underway.</i> Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. Belfast Met Campus (Montgomery Road) small-sided games pitches completed and now operational. Westlands fencing/ gates completed November 2025. Also, Planning approvals now obtained for Falls Park and Clarendon Playing Fields. Planning decision for Marrowbone Park expected in March 2026.
Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Works progressing. Progress made with the commencement of the installation for Phase 5a. 115 gates remain to be installed and works to be completed by March 2026.
Communications Boards in playgrounds	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Delivery of 94no. boards received in January 2026, citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
Basketball Courts	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> The work includes creation or upgrade of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. Design team is currently working on outline designs and preparing tender pack.
Sydenham Greenway	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> DfI Greenways Fund Letter of Offer (50% funding) received. Project progressing to procurement.
Historic Cemeteries	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar's Bush, Knock Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. Surveys underway and due to complete by Spring 2026.
Historic Tiled Street Signs	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Outline business case prepared. Further engagement with Members being considered.
Electric Vehicle Charging Network	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Council agreed that officers begin the tender process based on a Concession Operating model. Specific locations agreed at SP&R Committee in January 2026.
Depot Charging Scheme	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Business case stage. Installing EV chargers at 5 Council depot sites – Duncrue, Ormeau, Mallusk, Blanchflower and Belfast Zoo. Outline business case prepared and request at February SP&R to move to Stage 3.
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Market research and specification scoping is currently ongoing.
Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan. Education Authority (EA) is continuing to develop a business case for capital funding for youth provision at the council owned Ballymacarrett site.

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Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to the Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East project.
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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
Titanic People Exhibition	<i>Project underway.</i> Due to project delays, handover is expected to take place in Spring 2026.
Portview Exchange <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i>	<i>Business case stage.</i> UV forecast business case approval March 2026. Design team procurement prepared and ready to be issued on receipt of letter of offer.

PEACEPLUS – Capital Project

Members are asked to note updates on the capital project under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

East Belfast – PEACEPLUS LAP Capital Project overview

Project	Status and update
Sanctuary Theatre	Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Refurbishment of the Sanctuary Theatre at Castlereagh Street. Design Team has been appointed. Steering group and design team meeting held and project progressing.

Dfl funded project

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

Dfl – East Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Sailortown/ Titanic Quarter Bridge	Consultants have been appointed to undertake RIBA Stage 1 & 2 design services for a proposed new cross harbour pedestrian and cycle bridge. Stage 1 report now complete. “

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Proposal

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

“That the Working Group agrees, subject to due diligence, that the £70,000 allocated to the Cycling Ireland project under the Local Investment Fund (LIF) be reallocated as follows:

- £40,000 to Clarawood Tenants Hall; and
- £30,000 to the Ballyhackamore Parklet Project.”

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

During discussion, The Director of Property and Projects advised that, following completion of the relevant due diligence, a report would be submitted to the Working Group on the proposed reallocation of funds to ensure that the projects had met the funding criteria. A Member requested that the report include also information on the potential for the Ballyhackamore Parklet project to be extended to other vacant Council land within the area.

Further Proposal

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers, and

Resolved – That the Working Group agrees to write to the Minister for Communities to request an update in respect of the Department for Communities providing funding support to the redevelopment of the Strand Arts Centre.

Accordingly, the Working Group agreed:

- i. that, subject to due diligence, the £70,000 allocated to the Cycling Ireland project under the Local Investment Fund, be reallocated as follows:
 - £40,000 to Clarawood Tenants Hall; and
 - £30,000 to the Ballyhackamore Parklet Project;
- ii. that, following completion of the relevant due diligence to ensure that the projects had met the funding criteria, a report be submitted to a future meeting on the proposed reallocation of the funding, and include also information on the potential for the Ballyhackamore Parklet project to be extended to other vacant Council land within that area; and
- iii. to write to the Minister for Communities to request an update in respect of the Department for Communities providing funding support to the redevelopment of the Strand Arts Centre.

**East Belfast Area Working Group
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Knocknagoney Park Mural Project Update

The Working Group considered a request to support the 'Bridges of Voices' youth programme, which would include a large-scale positive community mural at the tunnel/bridge within Knocknagoney Linear Park.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that the youth programme would bring together young people from Knocknagoney, Garneville and Orchard Court areas with the aim to empower young people to take pride in their local area, promote positive mental health, foster environmental awareness and reduce anti-social behavior. It was reported that the programme would involve design workshops, graffiti art training, and hands-on mural painting, led by experienced community artists.

During discussion, a Member requested that a report be brought back to the next meeting of the Working Group to provide an update in respect of the legal graffiti walls pilot.

After discussion, the Working Group

- i. noted the programme of work;
- ii. approved the intent to install a piece of artwork within Knocknagoney Linear Park; and
- iii. agreed that a report be submitted to its next meeting to provide an update on the legal graffiti walls pilot.

**Ending Violence Against Women and Girls
Momentum Area Project (East) - Oral Update**

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the project details for East Belfast.

She advised that a workshop would be held in March, 2026, which would include delivery partners for the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy. It was reported that a further event was planned for April, 2026, which would focus on the feedback from the March workshop and planning going forward.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that further information in relation to the events would be circulated to Members when available.

Chairperson

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 2026 meeting and present the minutes of the last meeting of the Panel for approval.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	That the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee notes the key issues arising at the meeting and approves the minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel of 10 March 2026 at appendix A.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)</u>
3.1	The Statement of Accounts are a fundamental part of the councils overall corporate governance framework and provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position.
3.2	The Panel were informed that that the audit of the accounts for the year-end 31 March 2025 by Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) is completed and that the Local Government Auditor (LGA) has certified the 2024-25 statements for Belfast City Council with an unqualified opinion . The Panel considered the Report to Those Charged with Governance (which outlines the system / control issues arising from the NIAO audit) and the Annual Audit Letter.
3.3	The Panel received the Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26 , 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 a positive assessment, that the Council is likely to discharge its duties in respect of Part 12 of the Act during 2025-26.
3.4	In addition, the Panel considered the key messages from the Local Government Auditors Report 2025 , which includes the key findings from their 2023/24 audit work across all 11 councils in NI and; received an update on the current position regarding the council's implementation of the recommendations in the LGA's Annual Reports for 2023, 2024 and 2025.
3.5	The Audit and Risk Panel also considered the NIAO Audit Strategy for 2025-26 .

Key reports

- 3.6 The Panel noted the **progress being made against the annual audit plan**, with the following six assignments finalised in the period December 2025 – February 2026; internal audits of Belfast Agenda, Belfast 2024, PEACEPLUS, the Corporate Risk on the Physical Investment Programme, the H&S Actions Process and the Belfast Waterfront & Ulster Hall. The Panel also received a management update report on Agency.
- 3.7 The Audit & Risk Panel received an update on the implementation of agreed audit actions following the recent **Recommendations Monitoring** exercise.
- 3.8 The Panel agreed the **Internal Audit Strategy & Plan for 26/27** 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.
- 3.9 The Panel considered the **corporate risk dashboard** which provided an analysis and update on the progress being made to manage the risks that are considered to present the greatest threat to the delivery corporate priorities and / or compliance with key statutory requirements. The Panel agreed to remove eight risks from the corporate risk register and for these to be managed in departmental and / or programme risk registers. Given the scale and proximity, the Panel also agreed a new risk regarding delivery of the Fleadh.
- 3.10 The Panel noted the **quarterly assurances provided by directors** regarding the arrangements in place for the management of risk and the implementation of agreed audit actions.
- 3.11 Regarding **business continuity management**, the Panel received an update on the current position regarding the annual completion of the required tasks within the BCM policy.
- 3.12 The Panel noted the **quarter 3 reports on corporate health and safety and absence management and performance**.
- 3.13 The Panel considered the outcome of the detailed by AGRS assessment against the **Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector**, including the non-conformances. The Panel approved the updated **Audit and Risk Panel's purpose and terms of reference statement** and the Audit Governance and Risk Services terms of reference and for them to be made publicly available on the BCC website.

	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None known at this time.</p>
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix A - Minutes of Audit & Risk Panel 10 March 2026

Audit and Risk Panel

Tuesday, 10th March, 2026

MEETING OF AUDIT AND RISK PANEL

- Members present: Councillor R. McLaughlin (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers,
Councillors Groogan, Hanvey and Verner; and
Mr. D. Wilson (External Member).
- In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Ms. H. Lyons, Corporate Finance Manager;
Ms. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk
Services;
Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit, Governance and Risk
Services Manager;
Ms. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager;
Mr. J. Martin, Principal Auditor; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.
- Also attended: Mr. C. McGeown, Northern Ireland Audit Office;
Ms. S. McKeivitt, Northern Ireland Audit Office; and
Mr. D. Campbell, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Pre-Meeting

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

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 2nd December, 2025, were approved by the Panel.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

**Audit and Risk Panel,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

Absence Rates Q/E December 2025

(Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Human Resources provided the Panel with an overview of the following report:

“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 to December 2025.

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 11.37 days, an increase of 0.38 days compared to absence for the same period last year (10.99 days).**
- **A total of 26044.21 working days were lost due to sickness absence. This accounted for 6.74% of the total working days available.**
- **The table below provides a summary of how departments performed against the target. Three departments did not meet the corporate target of 10.94 days for quarter three.**

End of year target	14.58					
Q3 target	10.94					
Department	Total days lost (FTE)	Number of Employees (FTE)	Actual absence per FTE	Variance	% of workforce	% of absence
City and Neighbourhood Services	17726.54	1313.15	13.50	2.56	57.31%	68.06%
City and Organisational Strategy	767.02	97.13	7.90	-3.04	4.24%	2.95%
Corporate Services	812.32	134.31	6.05	-4.89	5.86%	3.12%
External Affairs, Marketing and Comms	77.28	26.53	2.91	-8.03	1.16%	0.30%
Finance	118.12	48.27	2.45	-8.49	2.11%	0.45%
Human Resources	56.41	34.11	1.65	-9.29	1.49%	0.22%
Legal and Civic Services	1921.68	165.13	11.64	0.70	7.21%	7.38%
Place and Economy	3192.73	355.5	8.98	-1.96	15.51%	12.26%
Property and Projects	1372.11	117.34	11.69	0.75	5.12%	5.27%
Totals	26044.21	2291.46	11.37	0.43		

3.2 Additional Absence information:

- There has been a slight increase (1.68%) in the number of staff with no recorded absence this period (51.12%) compared to the same time last year (49.44%).
- There has been an increase of 4.53% or 817.41 days in absence classified as long term (20+ days) this year (18057.51days) compared to the same time last year (17240.10 days).
- There was a slight increase in the number of days lost per FTE in quarter three (3.81 days) when compared to quarter two (3.79 days), see figure 1.
- Depression/anxiety/stress (34.57% of total days lost) and Musculo-skeletal (24.98% of total days lost) continue to be the top two reasons for absence. Refer to figure 2 for further information.
- From 1 October to 31 December 2025, 730 employees (846 spells) were off due to sickness absence (accounting for 8850.39 days). Of the cases where the use of discretion was recorded, it was applied to 100 employees (13.7%) and their absence accounted for 2040.96 (approximately 23.1% of the total absence for quarter three).
- Issues were identified in how absences were being managed in 174 cases. These were discussed in detail with departments during quarter three. Refer to figure 4 for further information.
- Approximately 12.7% of absence (3306.57) is recorded as disability related. Over two thirds (70.95%) of disability related absence were managed as long term. The use of discretion and reasonable adjustments is considered in such cases. Employees who reported absence with Depression / Anxiety / Mental Health (44.34%), accounted for almost half of all disability related absence. Refer to figure 5 for further information.
- A review of the number of employees who had reached a Stage four/final absence hearing (FAH) between October 2025 and December 2025 has been undertaken. in summary:
 - 17 employees met the trigger for a Stage four/FAH in quarter three.
 - Discretion was applied to five of these cases not to progress to a Stage four/FAH.
 - One employee was off due to cancer / treatment.
 - Two employee's required additional medical information.
 - One employee was off due to work related stressors.

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- One employee did not progress due to their absence being disability related.
- Three employees were dismissed via the Ill Health Retirement process.
- Five employees did not progress due to non-compliance reasons.
- Four employees progressed to a final stage meeting
 - Two employees were dismissed.
 - One employee was given a final opportunity to improve their attendance.
 - One employee required additional medical information before a decision could be reached.

3.3 Departmental improvement plans and Absence reporting to DMT:

CHR has reviewed all of the departmental improvement plans for quarter three. All departments provided a progress report for quarter three. In general, meaningful information and updates were provided by the departments.

CNS have advised of an issue with training new staff members to carry out an analysis of absences as required for the improvement plan.

3.4 Health and Wellbeing Strategy and initiatives:

CHR continue to focus on delivering the actions as set out in the Health & Wellbeing (H&WB) Strategy. Between 1 October 2025 – 31 December 2025, the H&WB programme delivered 16 events attended by 213 staff.

CHR was supported by the Internal Communications team to help promote and increase awareness to all staff including those at frontline locations. A quarterly Wellbeing and Development email is sent to all staff directly and a 'Wellbeing Wednesday' Interlink article promotes topics and events each week, which are also displayed on "big screens" across various council locations. Activities are also promoted via a team of Wellbeing Champions. The programme and wellbeing hub "Staywell" is also promoted via posters on staff noticeboards. Activities included:

Course Event

- Neurodiversity Awareness
- Healthier You - Mental Health Matters. Practical Tools for Busy People
- Mental Health and Menopause

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- 15 Minute Desk Yoga
- Alcohol, Drugs and Gambling Awareness for Managers
- Healthier You - Taking Charge: Empowering Men with Tools for Better Health
- Cancer Focus Keeping Well Van - Grove Park
- Breast Cancer Awareness
- Testicular and Prostate Cancer Awareness
- Grief and Loss
- Managing Staff Stress - The Line Managers Role

The Stop Smoking Awareness event supported by Cancer Focus in September 2025 had ten people sign up to a 12 week stop smoking programme. Cancer Focus reported in December 2025 that five employees had successfully quit on completion of the programme and two others were still working their way through the programme.

November 2025 was Men's Health Awareness Month and various awareness sessions to promote Men's Health were delivered both online and in person.

Our new EAP provider, Lena by Inspire promote a monthly webinar for employees concentrating on recognised Awareness Days/Weeks/Months. For example, National Grief Awareness week falls in December and staff were invited to attend a webinar on Grief and Loss.

CHR have continued to focus on addiction support and mental health in quarter three and promote Belfast Leading the Way and Active Travel events as we continue to work with Sustrans and partners to introduce active travel initiatives.

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 12.7% of absence (3306.57) is recorded as disability related. Approximately two thirds (65.15%) of disability related absence were managed as long term. The use of discretion and reasonable adjustments is considered in such cases.

Figure 1:

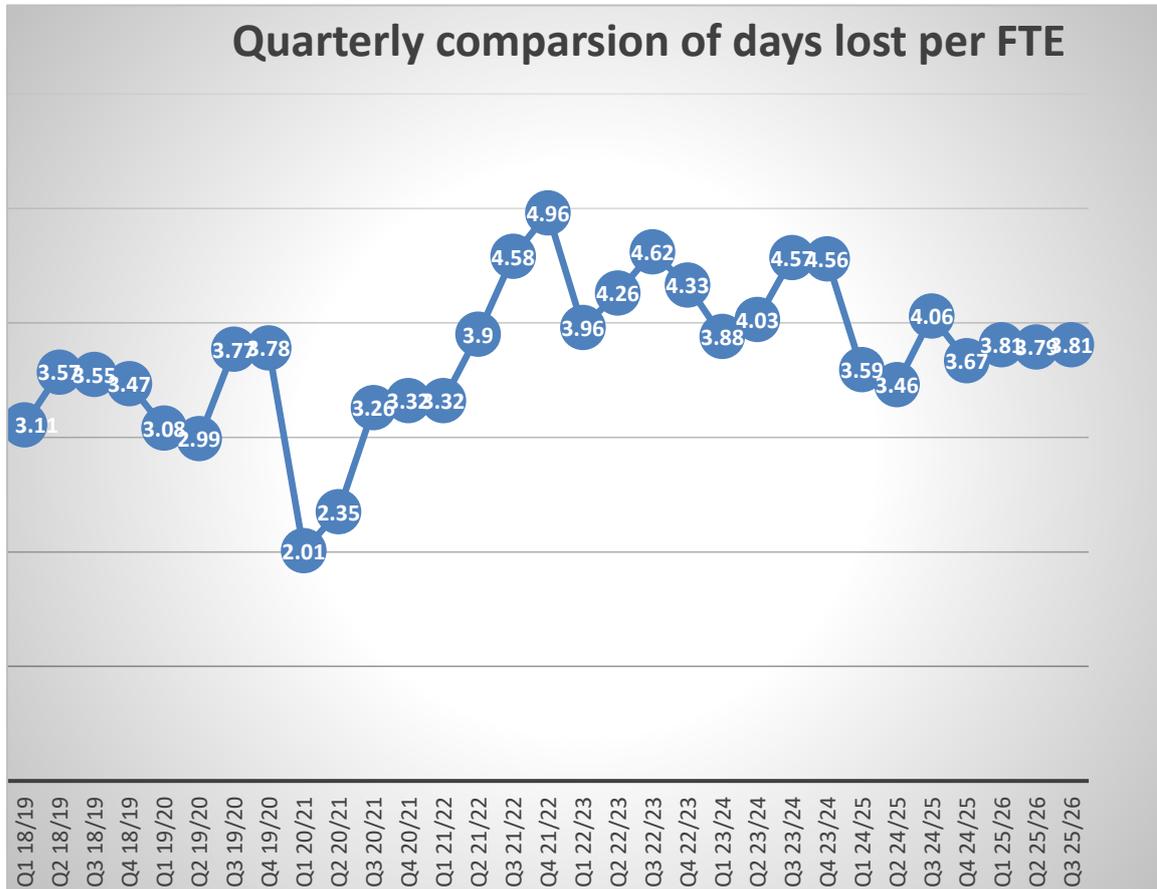


Figure 2:

Reason for Absence	Total Days	% of total days
Stress, depression, anxiety	9004.1	34.57%
Musculo-skeletal	6504.83	24.98%
Stomach, digestive, etc	2761.44	10.60%
Infections, inc colds & flu	2567.85	9.86%
Heart, blood press, circ, etc	969.69	3.72%
Chest and respiratory	965.44	3.71%
Neurological, inc headaches	944.97	3.63%
Other	745.73	2.86%
Genito-urinary, inc menstrual	694.34	2.67%
Eye, ear, nose & mouth/dental	597.74	2.30%
Infections, Covid19	180.87	0.69%
Pregnancy related	55.68	0.21%
Indust/Other	51.53	0.20%
Grand Total	26044.21	

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Figure 3:

Reason for Discretion	Total Days	% of Total
Underlying medical condition/disability	543.69	26.64%
Mental health cases	327.1	16.03%
Planned surgery	220.88	10.82%
Deferred pending OH report	202.71	9.93%
Hospitalisation	156.1	7.65%
Unresolved ER issues	99.32	4.87%
Bereavement	87.95	4.31%
Industrial injury	80.54	3.95%
Return to work agreed	71	3.48%
Previous long service and clear record	55	2.69%
Ill Health retired	38.99	1.91%
Prescribed medication, allowing time for this to take effect	35.07	1.72%
Emergency domestic responsibilities	32.63	1.60%
Perceived work-related stress	28.96	1.42%
Awaiting additional medical information	27.84	1.36%
Persistent absence: after a period of long-term absence where an underlying condition has been identified	25.95	1.27%
Infectious disease	7.23	0.35%
Total	2040.96	
total days lost in Q3	8850.39	
% of total days lost where discretion applied in Q3	23.1%	
average days off per occurrence in Q3	20.4	

Figure 4:

Department	Total
City and Neighbourhood Services	84
City and Organisational Strategy	3
Corporate Services	1
External Affairs Comms & Marketing	0
Human Resources	0
Finance	0
Legal and Civic Services	59
Place and Economy	4
Property and Projects	23
Totals	174

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Figure 5:

Actual disability	Total days	% of total disability related absence
Depression / Anxiety / Mental health conditions	1465.99	44.34%
Fibromyalgia	416	12.58%
Chronic back condition	406.7	12.30%
Chronic Heart Condition	218.68	6.61%
Cancer	192.85	5.83%
Polymyalgia rheumatic	85	2.57%
Parkinsons	82.77	2.50%
Osteoarthritis	82.68	2.50%
Chronic respiratory condition	59.58	1.80%
Chronic hip condition	56.96	1.72%
Epilepsy	49.5	1.50%
Chronic neurological condition	38	1.15%
Arthritis	33.78	1.02%
Other*	118.08	3.57%
Total disability related absence end of Q3	3306.57	
Total absence end of quarter three	26044.01	
% If absence lost due to disability	12.7%	
% of disability related absence managed as LTA	65.15%	

Other* includes thirteen other disabilities where each reason accounted for less than 1% of the total days lost due to disability related absence.”

The Panel noted the contents of the report and that the Directors were focused on managing absence.

Corporate Health and Safety Performance Report

The Corporate Health and Safety Manager provided the Panel with an update on the corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending 31st December, 2025.

She updated the Panel on progress against key performance indicators, agreed health and safety and fire safety recommendations implemented, employee and non-employee accidents and health and safety statutory agency enquiries and correspondence, she summarised the following health and safety data:

- Percentage compliance rates by department; and
- Employee and non-employee accidents.

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She reported that there had been six enquiries from the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland (HSENI) and none from the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Services (NIFRS) during quarter three 2025/26 and she summarised the content of the correspondence.

She outlined the outstanding health and safety and fire safety actions and confirmed all outstanding high priority actions had been completed since the end of quarter.

In response to a Member's question in relation to the reporting and movement of priority levels of the outstanding actions, the Corporate Health and Safety Manager explained that Departments were regularly reminded of any open actions and that overall compliance in emergency lighting was being met.

After discussion, the Panel noted the report and asked the Corporate Health and Safety Manager to record the reasons for the difference between the priority assessment by Corporate Health and Safety Unit and that by the Property Maintenance Unit.

AGRS Progress Report February 2026

The Audit, Governance and Risk Manager provided an overview of the Service's activity for the period from December 2025 to February 2026 and reported that the following six assurance assignments had been finalised and provided the Panel with a summary of each:

- Belfast Agenda
- Belfast 2024
- PEACEPLUS
- Internal Audit of the Corporate Risk on the Physical Investment Programme
- AGRS Review of the Health and Safety Actions Process
- Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall (tranche 1)

He explained that 63% of the planned activity within the delivery of the 2025/26 audit plan was either underway or completed and that the unit was continuing to provide advice and consultancy services to management and summarised work which had been undertaken by AGRS from December 2025 to February 2026. – The Panel noted the lessons learned from Belfast 2024 and highlighted the importance of these lessons being shared to prevent reoccurrence, in particular that the lessons learned are shared with Fleadh Cheoil

He provided the Panel with an update on ongoing fraud cases. He stated that all three concerns reported last quarter had been closed; two were not substantiated. He highlighted that two new concerns had been raised this quarter; both were not substantiated.

He advised that the investigation into matches arising from the 24/25 National Fraud Initiative (NFI) exercise was now complete. AGRS were liaising with departments to ensure that several declarations had been adequately captured and reported, as appropriate. He highlighted that the exercise identified seven errors and explained the recovery process.

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The Audit, Governance and Risk Manager reported that management had requested the deferral of two audits which were in the 2025/26 Audit Plan: Port Health – Review of the management of the corporate risk; and Residential Waste Collection. He highlighted that, since the report had been published, the Port Health Review would now be rolled into the 2026/27 plan.

He stated that AGRS proposed to defer the internal audits of:

- Accounts Receivable
- Travel and Subsistence
- Electronic Document and Records Management System

Following discussion, the Panel agreed to the requests by management to defer the aforementioned audits.

Recommendations Monitor Report

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager presented the Audit and Risk Panel with an update on the implementation of agreed audit actions following the recent Recommendations Monitoring exercise.

A full validation exercise was completed recently and included a review of all audit recommendations that were open as at the end of February 2026.

At the start of the exercise, there were 250 open audit actions across the Council. As a result of the exercise, it was reported that 97 of the actions could closed, namely fully implemented (81) or were no longer applicable (16). This represented an implementation rate of 39 per cent. The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager highlighted that this represented an increase on the previous exercise (implementation rate of 24 per cent) and was above average based on the implementation rates seen over previous years. At the conclusion of this exercise, 153 actions remained open, as compared to 188 at the same point in the last reporting period.

The Panel also received an update on the full implementation of actions in a number of areas across the Council, together with the implementation rates for each department.

During discussion, the Panel requested further detail on the outstanding actions and raised concern in relation to the period from which some of the actions had commenced. In response, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that the importance of expediting delivery was well-recognised amongst management and should form part of Departmental monthly discussions and that a programme of work was required out. She also highlighted that digital transformation had an impact on many of the actions.

In response to a Member's request to receive assurance that the level of risk associated with priority of actions levels was not increasing and that action as being taken by management, the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services stated that this could be included in the next progress report.

After discussion, the Panel noted the update on the progress made by management to implement audit recommendations, the areas where further action was

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required and agreed that future recommendations monitor exercises would take place annually, reporting to the March meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel.

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, 2025.

She advised that, in light of the new corporate plan 2025 – 28 that was launched in June 2025 and bearing in mind the majority of corporate risks (15 of the 23) had been on the corporate risk register since at least 2019, CMT reviewed the corporate risks to ensure that they reflected the principal risks that the Council was exposed to and was willing to take to achieve its objectives. Following this refresh exercise CMT were proposing that the following eight risks be removed from the corporate risk register and instead managed as part of the departmental risk registers and where appropriate, programme risk registers: People Strategy; Customer Focus Programme; Climate - Climate action plan; Belfast Agenda; Physical Investment Programme; Port Health; Failure to deliver Residential Waste Collection; and Failure to deliver Street Cleansing function of OSS.

She highlighted that, given the scale and proximity of the Fleadh Cheoil, it was proposed that this should be added to the register as a new corporate risk.

She reported that, in addition CMT had asked that consideration was given to combining the current two corporate risks on Information Governance and Strategic Approach to the Use of Data and links with the Electronic Data and Records Management project and that management were currently considering how these risks should be combined.

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services updated the Panel also on compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for the quarter ending December 2025 which had been completed by senior management.

The Panel was also provided with an update on business continuity management arrangements.

After discussion, the Panel:

- a) Noted the corporate risk management dashboard and agreed the updates for QE December 2025, including the proposal that eight risks would be removed from the corporate risk register and managed at departmental / programme level instead;
- b) Noted the assurances from senior management regarding compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for QE December 2025; and
- c) Noted the current position regarding review and update of business continuity plans for the critical services.

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Draft Internal Audit Strategy and Plan

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services submitted for the Panel's approval the Internal Audit Strategy and Plan for 2026/2027 including the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme and Performance Indicators. 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 2026/2027 and was based on an assessment of audit need, taking into account 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 flexible to meet the assurance and advisory needs of Members and management as required.

In relation to the Global Internal Audit Standards, Standard 8.2 – Resources, she confirmed that the internal audit resources were sufficient to fulfil the internal audit mandate and achieve the internal audit plan. She reported that AGRS had a support, coordination and oversight role in regard to the Council policies on Fraud and Bribery, Raising Concerns, Business Continuity Management and the Risk Management Strategy. To ensure that the Council was receiving assurance over those areas, the section undertook regular self-assessments against best practice for each area and commissioned periodic external reviews of them to provide management with independent assurance.

The Panel was advised that the completion of the periodic external reviews was subject to budget availability. She outlined that she planned to seek approval to commission an external review of the arrangements in place for Raising Concerns during 2026/27.

Furthermore, regarding Standard 8.3 - Quality, she drew the Panels attention to the AGRS Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme, including their Performance Indicators for 2026/27, and sought approval for those.

The Panel noted and approved the draft Internal Audit Strategy and Plan (including the Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme and Performance Indicators) for 2026/27.

Northern Ireland Audit Office - Report to Those Charged with Governance

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

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The Local Government Auditor has issued the Report to those charged with Governance for 2024/25. This report summarises any system/control issues arising during the Northern Ireland Audit Office’s (NIAO) 2024/25 audit and includes recommendations for management action.**

The purpose of this report is to appraise the Audit and Risk Panel of any issues raised in the Local Government Auditor’s Report for 2024/25 in relation to the Accounts of Belfast City Council.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Audit Panel is requested to note the Report to those charged with Governance Audit results for 2024/25 and agree the management responses.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

- 3.1 The Local Government Auditor has certified the 2024-25 statements for Belfast City Council with an unqualified opinion.**
- 3.2 The Local Government Auditor had identified in the Audit Strategy for 2024-25, the risk of financial resilience and management override of controls as having an impact on the audit approach.**

During audit fieldwork, no significant issues were identified in these areas.

- 3.3 The Local Government Auditor has identified ten areas and has made prioritised recommendations. The NIAO definition of the priority levels are:**

- i. significant issues for the attention of senior management which may have the potential to result in material weaknesses in internal control,**
- ii. important issues to be addressed by management in their areas of responsibility, and**
- iii. issues of a more minor nature which represents best practice.**

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In summarising the letter there are:

- 1 priority 1 areas,
- 6 priority 2 areas, and
- 3 priority 3 areas

3.4 The 1 priority 1 area is:

- **Bank reconciliations -incomplete at year end, recommendation to ensure all bank reconciliation properly completed, reviewed and sign off each month**

3.5 The 6 priority 2 areas are:

- **Working papers – to be provided at an acceptable standard for NIAO to support the figures in financial statements**
- **Car loans – processes in place to recover monies owed on outstanding loan balances prior to employee's departure**
- **Reserves- monitoring and review of Goods Received Notes (GRNs) with regular and timely matching of accrued amounts to invoices**
- **Assets Held for Sale- valuation reports prepared by LPS relating to Council's land and buildings to be supplied to both the LPS team preparing the capital asset valuations and internal finance teams**
- **Capital accruals – special accruals meeting (to confirm all known accrual amounts) will be held in March 2026 and again in April 2026 to ensure all amounts are fully accrued / provided for at year-end**
- **Bad debt provision- further supporting working papers to be provided for the bad debt provision to reflect status of customer debts and reasons for inclusion of specific debts in the bad debt provision**

3.6 The 3 priority 3 areas are:

- **Councillor Allowances – figures published on the Council website did not agree to those audited within financial statements, recommend appropriate checks made to ensure accurate figures are published in a timely manner**

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- **Inventories – several non conformance issues in recording of items taken from stock, leading to variances between stock count and stock management system, recommend management reissue inventory instructions regarding recording of stock issued within stock management system**
- **Financial Instruments and Related Parties Notes - did not fully comply with the Financial Instruments disclosure provided with proforma and incomplete disclosure of related party transactions, recommend comply as fully as possible with proforma issued by the Department and ensure related parties note is subject to a thorough quality review when drafting the disclosure**

3.7 A detailed response to the management letter is attached, identifying timescales.

In accordance with the process adopted in previous years, management will monitor the progress made in implementing recommendations and will report back to the Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel on the progress.

3.8 Financial & Resource Implications

None

3.9 Equality or Good relations/Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

Mr. Campbell, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), highlighted that the Council’s financial statements for the year ended 31st March, 2025 was now complete and the accounts were certified by the Local Government Auditor on 23rd January, 2026 with an unqualified audit opinion. He pointed out that the results of the audit were set out in the attached Report to those charged with Governance which included recommendations for action, together with management’s responses to those recommendations.

The Panel noted the report to those charged with Governance Audit results for 2024/25 and agreed the management responses.

Northern Ireland Audit Office - Annual Audit Letter

The Panel were reminded that, as an independent auditor of the Council, the Local Government Auditor sought to examine that the Council had managed its affairs having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and that public money was properly spent or in the case of income properly accounted for. The Annual Audit Letter was issued under Regulation 17 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit)

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Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. The Regulations required the Council to publish this Annual Audit Letter as soon as reasonably possible.

The Chief Local Government Auditor had noted a number of adjustments to the draft accounts as a result of their audit work and these were covered in a separate report. The bank reconciliation issue had been included in the Annual Audit Letter and the Annual Governance Statement within the published 2024/25 financial statements. The financial statements for 2024/25 were given an unqualified opinion.

It was reported that the Chief Local Government Auditor was required to satisfy themselves that proper arrangements had been made for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources. The Chief Local Government Auditor had confirmed that they are satisfied that the council has proper arrangements in place.

The Chief Local Government Auditor had indicated that the Annual Governance Statement reflected compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2024-25, it also complied with proper practices as specified by the Department for Communities, and it was not misleading or inconsistent with other information from the audit.

It was highlighted that the annual rate of absenteeism had shown a decrease of 2.42 days from 2023/24, mainly due to the steps taken by Council to reduce the level of absenteeism. The robust, fair and consistent management of attendance continued to be a key priority for Belfast City Council.

The Local Government Auditor's Annual Improvement Report for 2024-25 was published on 31st March, 2025 and concluded that the Council met its statutory duties in relation to publication of the 2023-24 self-assessment report and 2024-25 Annual Improvement Plan.

The Chief Local Government Auditor had highlighted that Councils had identified ongoing and future challenges regarding funding, increased cyber risk and climate change commitments all of which would require strong leadership and governance from Councils to ensure success.

Noted.

Performance Improvement Q3 Update

(Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy and Karen Anderson-Gillespie, Strategic Performance Manager, attended in connection with this item)

The Audit and Risk Panel considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the Panel with a quarter 3 2025-26 progress update on the actions and measures of success (performance indicators) contributing to the achievement of the performance improvement objectives**

contained within the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2025-26.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Panel is asked to:

- i. note the update provided within this report.
- ii. consider and approve the PIP (2025-26) quarter 3 Performance Dashboard Report as attached at Appendix 1.
- iii. agree the Performance Dashboard Report is submitted for noting at SP&R on 20 March 2026.

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1 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 PIP, to be published by 30 June. The Act also requires that progress is regularly monitored against the improvement objectives and reported in an annual Self-Assessment of Performance, to be published annually by 30 September. The PIP 2025-26 does not include everything that the Council plans to do that year but instead focused on a smaller set of performance improvement objectives and priorities.**

Q3 2025-26 Performance Improvement Dashboard Report

- 3.2 In the [2025-26 Performance Improvement Plan](#), agreed by SP&R on the 23 May 2025, we committed to presenting quarterly performance reports to the CMT, the Audit and Assurance Board and the Audit and Risk Panel, Committee, and the Full Council.**

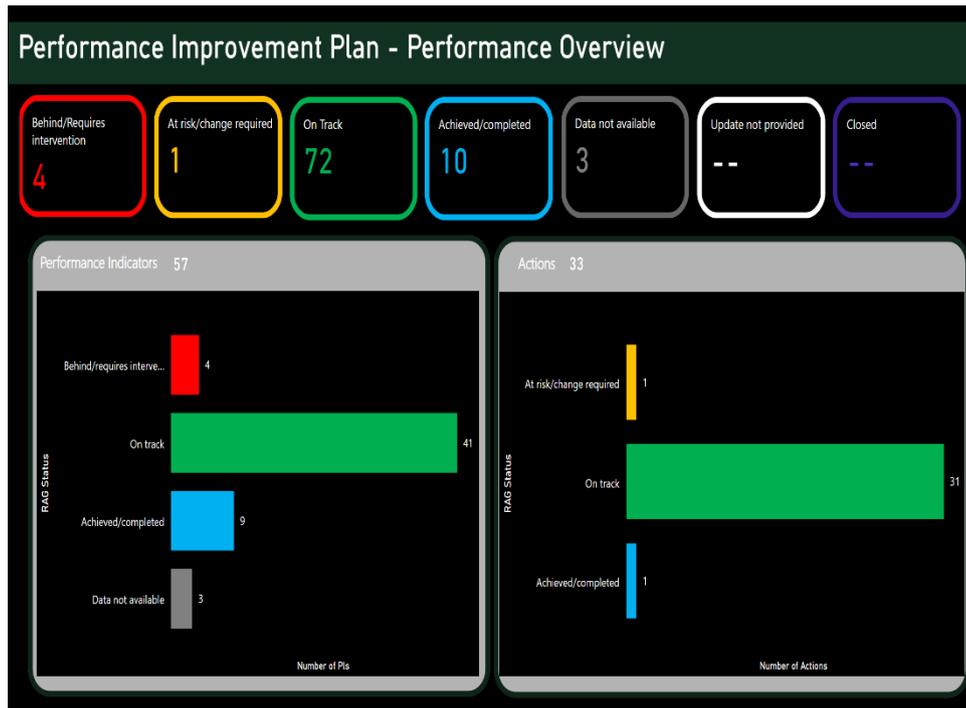
Year-to-date progress as at the end of quarter 3 2025-26 is detailed in Appendix 1 for the Board's consideration. In total there are 33 actions. The majority are on track to be achieved (31), 1 is at risk/change required and 1 is achieved/completed. In total there are 57 performance indicators – 7 statutory and 50 self-imposed indicators. The vast majority of these are either achieved/complete (9) or are on track to be achieved (41). Reflecting on the 2025-26 Learning City Festival programme evaluation, it was agreed that the following PI more accurately demonstrates the impact and reach of the Festival than the number of events delivered (reported in Q2):

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- % of participants who agreed they felt more aware of the learning providers and opportunities across the city following their attendance at a festival event

Appendix 1 has been updated to this effect.

The following performance dashboard provides an overall summary:



Given that 91.1% of performance indicators and actions are presently either on track to be delivered by year end, or, have already been achieved/completed, the Board is asked to note that the six improvement objectives are on track for achievement. .

Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26 Reporting Cycle

The Panel are asked to remind themselves of the following 2025-26 Performance Improvement Plan reporting cycle (circulated previously):

Reporting period	Report	ARP meeting
Q4 2025-26	Q4 Performance Report	9 June 2026
Q1-4 2025-26	2025-26 PIP year-end self-assessment	11 September 2026

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Next steps

34 A quarter 3 2025-26 progress report will be noted at SP&R on 20 March 2026.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

4.1 There are no financial or human Resource implications arising directly from this report.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

5.1 There are no equality/ good relations or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.”

The Panel agreed to the recommendations as outlined in the report.

NIAO Report on Performance Improvement Audit and Assessment 25-26

(Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy and Karen Anderson-Gillespie, Strategic Performance Manager, attended in connection with this item)

Mr. D. Campbell, Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO), provided an update to the Panel on the Council's compliance with the statutory performance duty of the 2025-26 NIAO Audit and Assessment Report.

He advised that, as part of the assessment process, the NIAO officials undertook detailed audit fieldwork between October to December 2025 when Council officers offered a series of site visits and meetings as well as collating and presenting a substantive amount of evidence to demonstrate the council's improvement journey.

Following this fieldwork, the Local Government Auditor completed and presented to Council a NIAO Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26. In this report, the Local Government Auditor had certified performance arrangements with an unqualified opinion and concluded that in relation to improvement planning and publication of improvement information, the Council:

- Complied with its duties in relation to both in accordance with section 92 of the Act; and
- Acted in accordance with the Department for Communities' guidance.

It was reported that the Local Government Auditor did not make any recommendations for improvement under section 95(2) of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014.

Mr. Campbell highlighted the other considerations which had been outlined in the Assessment report regarding Sustainability and Climate Change and Benchmarking in relation to the Council's wider continuous improvement arrangements.

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The Panel approved the NIAO Audit and Assessment Report 2025-26 as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report.

Local Government Auditors Report 2025

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 from the Local Government Auditors Report 2025, which includes the key findings from their 2023/24 audit work across all 11 councils in NI.

1.2 To update the Panel on the current position regarding the councils implementation of the recommendations included in the Local Government Auditor's Annual Report for 2025 as well as recommendations from their 2024 and 2023 reports.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 That the Panel note the report and the current position regarding the recommendations included in the Local Government Auditor's Annual Report

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Just before Christmas the Local Government Auditor issued their Annual Report which sets out their observations on financial performance, governance issues, and procurement in local councils, and is based on 2023/24 audit work across all 11 councils in NI. The full report is at Appendix A.

3.2 The annual report makes a number of general recommendations around fraud reporting, raising concerns, absence management, processing of planning applications and procurement and the LGA encourages Audit Committees to monitor progress on implementing these recommendations. In this regard AGRS have liaised with the relevant officers and have included in Appendix B details of the recommendations made and the current position regarding these recent recommendations. In addition, in February 2026 the NIAO requested an update on progress made by

Councils in implementing recommendations made in recent prior year Local Government Auditor's Reports, which are also included in Appendix B.

3.3 Below is a summary of the observations made by the LGA in their 2025 report and some BCC data 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.

3.4 Main references to BCC

- There are notable differences between councils in the proportion of staff costs spent on agency - BCC agency spend represents 7.2% of staff costs.
- BCC is just under the average number of days lost to sickness absence, ranking joint 6th.
- Capital expenditure has reduced significantly at four of the eleven councils, with one of these councils being Belfast (capital spend reducing from £23.2m to £16.4m) although BCC is top of the table in terms of our level of spend.

3.5 General LGA observations

- Income generation - in real terms the income generated by councils through charges and service fees increased by 6.8 per cent in 2023-24. Given the volatility of council income and expenditure over recent years, councils should consider exercising caution in allocating 2023-24 surpluses, prioritising long-term financial resilience over short-term spending.
- Absence levels have continued to rise in 2023-24 and absence rates in local government are notably higher than in central government.
- The value of usable reserves held by councils continues to be higher than pre-covid, which strengthens councils' financial resilience in the short term, however there is a need for clear strategies for their future use – while BCC has the highest level of usable reserves (£88m) BCC has one of the lowest % of usable reserves as a % of expenditure.

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- Regarding the Reform of Local Government Performance Improvement legislation, the Department has made a submission to the Minister on the need to review of the current legislation.
- Processing times for planning applications continue to be in excess of target timescales.
- The NIAO surveyed all councils about the Procurement Act and on the basis of these returns the NIAO has made four recommendations
- There is reference to a concern received regarding a BRCD project - the Mourne Mountains Gateway Project and how NMDC are currently considering further options to secure the BRCD funding.

3.6 Financial and Resource Implications

None known at this time

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

None known at this time.

Noted.

**Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector / Audit and Risk Panel
Governance Matters**

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 conformance with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector during 2025/26.

1.2 To present the Audit and Risk Panel with updated terms of reference for the Panel and for AGRS for review and approval.

1.3 To ask the Panel to consider if it would be appropriate for the Terms of Reference for both the Panel and AGRS to be made publicly available, including on the BCC website and; whether it would be beneficial to include the Panels Terms of Reference as a standing agenda item at every meeting for reference purposes.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Panel are asked to note the outcome of the detailed by AGRS assessment against the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector, including the non-conformances (appendix D) and the improvement action plan (appendix E).

2.2 The Panel are also asked to:

- Review and approve the updated Audit Governance and Risk Services terms of reference, including the safeguards in place to preserve the independence and objectivity of AGRS arising from their role in preparing the Annual Governance Statement (Appendix F).
- Review and approve the updated Audit and Risk Panel's purpose and terms of reference statement, which now include information on membership, meetings and information requirements (Appendix G).
- Consider if it would be appropriate for the Terms of Reference for the Panel and AGRS to be made publicly available, including on the BCC website.
- Consider whether it would be beneficial to include the Panels Terms of Reference as an agenda item at its June meeting for reference purposes.

3.0 Main Report

Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector

3.1 The Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 require BCC to *'undertake an adequate and effective internal audit of its accounting records and of its system of risk management, internal control and governance processes using internal auditing standards in force from time to time'*.

3.2 To this end AGRS complied with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) which were in force until the 31 March 2025. These were superseded by the new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) which cover five domains (including 15 Principles and 52 Standards) setting out standards in relation to:

- Purpose of Internal Auditing.
- Ethics and Professionalism.
- Governing the Internal Audit Function.
- Managing the Internal Audit Function.
- Performing Internal Audit Services.

3.3 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA) issued the UK Public Sector Application Note: Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector, applicable from 1 April 2025. Auditors working in the UK public sector

must follow the requirements of the GIAS subject to the interpretations and additional requirements set out in this Application Note. When expressing conformance with standards, auditors must be clear that they are conforming to the GIAS subject to the Application Note, and must refer to this as conformance with Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector.

- 3.4 A new Internal Audit Code of Practice which sets out fundamental principles for running a strong and effective internal audit function also became effective from January 2025. It is expected that the principles are applied proportionately, in line with the nature, scope and complexity of the organisation. Internal audit functions should apply the Code in the context of internal audit regulatory standards applicable to the organisation.
- 3.5 Alongside the new internal audit standards, CIPFA has also issued the Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in UK Local Government (the Code). The Code supports the Audit and Risk Panel and senior management in establishing their internal audit arrangements and providing oversight and support for internal audit. Self assessment against this was reported to the Panel in March 2025.
- 3.6 In addition, all internal audit functions must apply Topical Requirements in conformance with the Global Internal Audit Standards when providing assurance services on that topic. Topical requirements issued to date relate to cybersecurity, third-party and organisational behaviour. AGRS will ensure that these are applied to the relevant audits

Assessment of Conformance

- 3.7 The Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors - UK & Ireland developed a spreadsheet to enable internal audit functions to assess conformance with the Global Internal Audit Standards, the Internal Audit Code of Practice and the UK Public Sector Application Note.
- 3.8 Using this spreadsheet AGRS assessed conformance with the new standards and the outcome of this self-assessment indicates:
- AGRS generally conforms with all of the GIAS except:
 - standard 9.3 relating to methodologies, which AGRS partially conforms (detailed assessment at appendix A)
 - AGRS conforms with all of the CoP principles except:
 - principles 18, 19, 21 and 22, which all relate to the reporting line of the Head of AGRS

- principles 1, 31 and 32, which AGRS partially conforms.
(detailed assessment at appendix B)
 - AGRS generally conforms with all of the UK Public Sector Application Note Topics
 - (detailed assessment at appendix C)
- 3.9 When conformance is not possible, the Head of AGRS is required to document the reason and make appropriate disclosures. This information is set out at Appendix D. Four actions have been identified to improve conformance.
- 3.10 AGRS has identified 16 other improvement actions to more fully comply with the standards and these are set out at appendix E.

Audit and Risk Panel Governance Matters

Audit, Governance and Risk Services Terms of Reference

- 3.11 In May 2025 CIPFA Solace issued an Addendum to the Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework. The Addendum advised that ‘To avoid impairments to professional independence, the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) should not draft the Annual Governance Statement (AGS). Where the HIA drafts the AGS, this should be identified as a role beyond internal auditing. Under auditing standards, it must be included in the audit charter and safeguards agreed, such as alternative processes to gain assurance’.
- 3.12 In BCC the Head of AGRS coordinates the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement which involves contacting relevant officers for updates on the content of the AGS. The safeguards to avoid the impairment of the professional independence of the Head of AGRS, when undertaking this role include;
- ensuring that updates to the AGS are made on the basis of updates provided by management
 - the AGS sets out the various assurances that were relied on in performing the annual review of the effectiveness of the Councils governance arrangements
 - ensuring that the proposed updates to the AGS are presented to the Audit Assurance Board and the Audit & Risk Panel for review and approval, that they are aware that the Head of AGRS is not providing assurance over the content and that the Head of AGRS does not present this report.

- 3.13 Regarding the new Addendum, the AGRS Terms of Reference have been updated to refer to the role of AGRS in the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement and the associated safeguards. In line with this update, the Panel is asked to review the effectiveness of these safeguards. The updated terms of reference for AGRS are at appendix F.

The new GIAS and Code of Practice advise that ‘The purpose and mandate of internal audit should be articulated in an internal audit charter, which should be publicly available.’ The Panel is asked to consider whether the AGRS Terms of Reference should be made publicly available.

Audit & Risk Panel Terms of Reference

- 3.14 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. In line with good practice, the terms of reference for the Audit & Risk Panel are reviewed on an annual basis.
- 3.15 In line with the recommendations arising from the assessment of the Panel against the new NIAO Good Practice Guide for Effective Audit and Risk Assurance Committees, reported to the Panel in December 2025:
- The Terms of Reference for the Panel have been updated to include additional information on membership, meetings and information requirements. The updated terms of reference for the Audit & Risk Panel are at appendix G.
 - The Panel is asked to consider if it would be appropriate for their Terms of Reference to be made publicly available, including on the BCC website.
 - The Panel is asked to consider whether it would be beneficial to include the Panels Terms of Reference as a standing agenda item at every meeting for reference purposes.

Audit Assurance Board Terms of Reference

- 3.16 The Audit Assurance Board is chaired by the Chief Executive. The principal activity of the Audit Assurance Board is 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.

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- 3.17 In line with good practice, we have reviewed the terms of reference and concluded that no changes are required.**

Financial & Resource Implications

None.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None known at this time.”

During discussion, Mr. Wilson requested that the external member of the Panel should be referred to as ‘Independent Member’ rather than ‘Non-executive Member’ in the Terms of Reference.

After discussion, the Panel:

- Noted the outcome of the detailed by AGRS assessment against the Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK Public Sector, including the non-conformances (appendix D) and the improvement action plan (appendix E);
- Approved the updated Audit Governance and Risk Services terms of reference, including the safeguards in place to preserve the independence and objectivity of AGRS arising from their role in preparing the Annual Governance Statement (Appendix F);
- Approved the updated Audit and Risk Panel’s purpose and terms of reference statement, which now included information on membership, meetings and information requirements (Appendix G).
- Agreed that the Terms of Reference for the Panel and AGRS to be made publicly available, including on the Council’s website;
- Agreed to include the Panels Terms of Reference as an agenda item at each of the Audit and Risk Panel meetings for reference purposes; and
- Agreed that the external member of the Panel should be referred to as ‘Independent Member’ in future Terms of Reference documentation.

Management Update Report on Internal Audit of Agency

(Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources attended in connection with this item.)

The Panel were reminded that a recent internal audit report on the use of agency resources has indicated that major improvement was needed. It was noted that specific high-priority issues were identified in the following areas:

1. Resource Planning;
2. Contract Management;
3. Compliance with the agency framework; and
4. Authorisation of timesheets.

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The Director of Human Resources provided an update on Corporate HR activity which had been undertaken to address issues, which included:

- The creation and implementation of an agency dashboard profiling agency usage and compliance data to facilitate analysis and scrutiny at director level;
- Inclusion of progress updates on delivery of the CMT agency action plan on quarterly agency reports;
- Ongoing work to update the agency framework in line with pending contract award (1st April, 2026) and before 30th September, 2026;
- The creation of “an approved hours of work report” to monitor contracted hours verses actual hours worked; and
- Ongoing work to resolve Prism system issues and the development of new reports to increase monitoring activity.

Noted.

Belfast City Council 2025-26: Audit Strategy

Mr. C. McGeown from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) outlined the NIAO’s Audit Strategy for Belfast City Council for the 2025-26 financial year and explained that it was intended to provide the Council with a clear understanding of how the audit was carried out and highlighted the key messages, that included the audit approach, one significant risk that had been identified and other matters of interest.

He highlighted that substantial and significant accounting changes had been made to the 2025-26 Code of practice as a result of HM Treasury’s Thematic Review on Non-Investment Assets, together with the actions for the Audit and Risk Panel contained within the Audit Strategy to the Panel Members.

The Panel noted the Audit Strategy and the Chairperson thanked Mr. McGeown and the team for their attendance at the meeting.

Date of next meeting

The Panel noted that the next meeting was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 9th June, 2026.

Chairperson