

# Public Document Pack

## BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

### **SUMMONS TO ATTEND THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**TO: THE LORD MAYOR, ALDERMEN AND THE COUNCILLORS OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL**

Notice is hereby given that the monthly meeting of the Council will be held in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Belfast on Monday, 1st June, 2026 at 6.00 pm, for the transaction of the following business:

1. Summons
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of the Council (Pages 1 - 12)
5. Change of Membership on Outside Bodies
6. Official Announcements
7. Request to Film Proceedings
8. Appointment of Positions of Responsibility 2026/2027 (Pages 13 - 14)
9. Installation of Lord Mayor
10. Installation of Deputy Lord Mayor
11. Appointment of Members to Committees 2026/2027 (Pages 15 - 18)
12. Minutes
  - a) Reconsideration of a decision in respect of the Irish Language Policy (Pages 19 - 50)
13. Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (Pages 51 - 98)
14. People and Communities Committee (Pages 99 - 118)
15. City Growth and Regeneration Committee (Pages 119 - 136)
16. Licensing Committee (Pages 137 - 142)
17. Planning Committee (Pages 143 - 152)
18. Climate and City Resilience Committee (Pages 153 - 160)

19. Standards and Business Committee (Pages 161 - 162)

The Members of Belfast City Council are hereby summoned to attend.

John Walsh  
Chief Executive

## Council

### MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall  
on Tuesday, 5th May, 2026 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly (Chairperson);  
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);  
The High Sheriff (Councillor McCoubrey);  
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCullough  
and Rodgers; and  
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Beattie, Bell,  
Black, Bower, Bradley, Brennan, R. Brooks,  
T. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain,  
Collins, de Faoite, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly,  
R. M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas,  
Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey,  
Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, McCabe, McCallin,  
McCann, McCusker, McDonough-Brown, McDowell,  
McKay, McKeown, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin,  
Meenehan, Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Ó Néill,  
Smyth, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

#### Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

#### Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillors McAteer and McCormick.

#### Declarations of Interest

#### Minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Councillor de Faoite declared an interest in relation to the item 'Planning Information' in that he was on the Board of Governors of Forge Integrated Primary School.

Councillors P. Donnelly, R. M. Donnelly, Duffy, Groogan, McCabe, McCann and Verner declared an interest in relation to the item 'Minutes of the Shared City Partnership Meeting' in that they were employed by or associated with organisations which were in receipt of PEACEPLUS funding.

Councillors Beattie, Bradley, Canavan, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, Duffy, Groogan and McCann declared an interest in relation to the item 'Social Supermarket Fund' in that they were employed by or associated with organisations which had applied for or were in receipt of funding.

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Councillors Doran and McCabe declared an interest in relation to the item 'Summer Community Diversionary Fund' in that they were associated with an organisation which had applied.

Councillors Duffy, Groogan and Verner declared an interest in relation to the item 'City Innovation' in that they were associated with an Area Partnership.

Councillor Duffy declared an interest in relation to the item 'Potential Additional Funding from Special EU Programmes Body - Local PEACEPLUS Action Plans' in that his employer was involved in the delivery of projects.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest in relation to item 'Summit of the Cities 2026' in that his employer organised the event.

As the above-mentioned items did not become the subject of debate, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Councillors R. M. Donnelly, Duffy, Lyons and Whyte declared an interest in relation to the item 'NICVA Summit 2026' in that they were associated with the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Councillors Bunting, D. Douglas, Doran and Verner declared an interest in relation to the item 'Request for Funding' in that they were associated with applicants and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

**Minutes of the People  
and Communities Committee**

Councillors Black, Bradley Canavan M. Donnelly, Groogan declared an interest in relation to the item 'Integrated Advice Partnership and Community Support Funding 2026/27' in that they were associated with organisations which had applied for or were in receipt of funding.

Councillor Doran declared an interest in relation to the item 'Summer Schemes – Children with Additional Needs' in that he was associated with an organisation in receipt of funding.

As the above-mentioned items did not become the subject of debate, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in relation to the item 'Notice of Motion - Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals', in that he worked for the Public Health Agency, and he left the meeting for the duration of the item.

**Minutes of the City Growth  
and Regeneration Committee**

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in relation to the item 'Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update' in that her employer was in receipt of a grant through the scheme.

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Councillor Duffy declared an interest in relation to the item 'Employability and Skills Update' in that his employer managed the Employability and Skills Provider Network.

As the above-mentioned items did not become the subject of debate, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

**Notices of Motion**

Councillor Long declared an interest in relation to the motions 'Tackling Anti-Social Scrambler and E-Scooter Use in Belfast' and 'University of Ulster to rescind decision to cut 450 jobs' in that his wife was the Minister of Justice and he left the meeting whilst those items were under consideration.

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in relation to the motion 'Calling for University of Ulster to rescind decision to cut 450 jobs' in that his partner was a Junior Minister in the Executive and he left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest in relation to the motion 'Calling for University of Ulster to rescind decision to cut 450 jobs' in that the University of Ulster was a client of his employer and left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion.

**Minutes of the Council**

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Kelly),  
Seconded by Councillor Bunting, and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the meetings of the Council of 1st and 23rd April, 2026, be taken as read and signed as correct.

**Official Announcements**

Councillor Walsh marked the 45th anniversary of the death of Bobby Sands.

Councillor Ó Néill congratulated former Cliftonville Football Club and Northern Ireland captain, Marissa Callaghan, who had been recently inducted into the Northern Ireland Football Writers' Association Hall of Fame.

Councillor Bunting condemned the recent attack on Dunmurry Police Station.

Councillor R. Brooks welcomed that the Sign Language Bill had passed its final stage in the Northern Ireland Assembly and thanked the Minister for Communities for bringing the Bill forward.

Councillor R. M. Donnelly commended the families of the five civilians killed in the Springhill/Westrock area of West Belfast in 1972 for their strength and resilience throughout their fight for justice.

Councillor McKeown paid tribute to local actor Michael Campbell (Patrick) who had recently passed away following a courageous battle with Motor Neurone Disease (MND). At the request of Councillor McKeown, the Lord Mayor agreed to send a letter of condolence to his wife on behalf of the Council.

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Councillor Maghie congratulated CI Ladies Hockey Club on the recent success of several of its teams and praised the work of the club and its volunteers. At the request of Councillor Maghie, the Lord Mayor agreed to send a letter of congratulations to the club.

Councillor Lyons paid tribute to all those who had participated in the Belfast City Marathon and highlighted the efforts of brothers Cian and Jordan Adams from Redditch, Worcestershire, who had completed the marathon as part of thirty-two marathons in thirty-two days to raise money for research into frontotemporal dementia (FTD).

Councillor Long congratulated his party colleague Councillor McAteer and her husband on the recent birth of their son.

Councillor Collins commended Unite Hospitality workers who had organised a recent protest at Queen's University Belfast in response to the proposed closure of café outlets at the University and the potential loss of jobs.

Councillor Doran congratulated Ballysillan resident Louisa Wilson who had recently celebrated her 105th birthday.

Councillor de Faoite extended his condolences to the Donaldson and Shiels families on the recent passing of Marie Donaldson who had been an integral member of the Rosario community on the Ormeau Road through her work with the youth and football clubs.

**Change of Membership on Outside Body**

The Chief Executive advised the Council that notification had been received from the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) which indicated that it wished to replace the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty) with Councillor Whyte on the Board of the Ulster Orchestra.

The Council noted the change.

**Requests to Address the Council**

**University of Ulster Job Cuts**

The Lord Mayor advised that a request to address the Council had been received in relation to the notice of motion on the agenda regarding the University of Ulster's decision to cut 450 jobs.

The Council acceded to the request and the Lord Mayor welcomed Ms. Aisling O'Beirn and Mr. Paddy Mackel of the University and College Union (UCU), and Mr. Albert Hewitt of Unite the Union (Unite) to the meeting

Ms. O'Beirn and Mr. Mackel welcomed the motion on the agenda, which would be proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor Flynn, and outlined the devastating impact the potential job losses would have on the University, its staff and students. They stated that the University's decision would cut a substantial number of the workforce and would have a significant negative impact on staff workloads and the education of students.

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The deputation raised concerns in respect of how the University communicated its decision with staff and highlighted that there was considerable uncertainty amongst staff, current students and potentially prospective students.

Ms. O'Beirn and Mr. Mackel advised the Council that the three trade unions within the University, namely UCU, Unite and Unison, were all united in their opposition to the potential job losses and called on the University of Ulster to rescind its decision to cut 450 jobs.

The Lord Mayor thanked the deputation for their presentation and they left the meeting.

**Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD)**

The Lord Mayor advised that a request to address the Council had been received in relation to the notice of motion on the agenda regarding Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD).

The Council acceded to the request and the Lord Mayor welcomed Ms. Melanie Law and Ms. Katie Watson to the meeting.

Ms. Watson explained that Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) was an endocrine disorder and was the abnormal reaction to fluctuations in hormones. She reported that 82% of people with PMDD experienced suicidal ideations and that 34% of people with the condition had attempted suicide. Ms. Watson stated that, although PMDD affected 1 in 20 women, more needed to be done within the education system and the medical profession to raise awareness of the condition and develop specialist advice services in order to help support people with PMDD.

Ms. Law described to the Council her experience of living with the condition which included her physical, emotional and mental symptoms. She outlined the impact that PMDD had on her daily life and career and highlighted the importance of increased awareness and education of the condition.

The deputation urged Members to support the motion on the agenda, which would be proposed by Councillor Groogan and seconded by Councillor Maghie, and stated that it was crucial to help raise awareness of PMDD and could potentially save lives.

The Lord Mayor thanked the deputation for their presentation and they left the meeting.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee**

Moved by Councillor Brennan,  
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

“That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 24th and 30th April, 2026, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.”

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**NICVA Summit 2026**

At the request of Councillor Murray, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 24th April, 2026, under the heading “NICVA Summit 2026” be amended to provide that the Council contribute £20,000 of sponsorship to support the NICVA 2026 Summit event.

**Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update**

At the request of Councillor Collins, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 24th April, 2026, under the heading “Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update” be amended to provide that the Notice of Motion ‘Save West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness’ (ID 331) remained open.

**Notice of Motion –  
Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme**

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Council agreed that the Notice of Motion ‘Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme’, proposed by Councillor Long and seconded by Councillor Nelson, which was considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 24th April, 2026, be amended to include the following paragraph:

“Proposals shall be brought back to the Committee in respect of addressing the gender imbalance amongst recipients of the Freedom of the City, including a process, in consultation with the women's sector, to identify four women who have made a lasting positive impact in Belfast, to be awarded the Freedom of the City as part of the International Women’s Day programme of events in March 2027.”

The motion, as amended, therefore read:

“This Council will introduce a City Ambassadors scheme which recognises those in the city who have made outstanding contributions in various sectors. These individuals will have a formal role in promoting Belfast.

This new scheme will be more inclusive and allow for more diverse recognition than the Freedom of the City scheme and allow us to better recognise the achievements of those in Belfast.

Proposals shall be brought back to the Committee in respect of addressing the gender imbalance amongst recipients of the Freedom of the City, including a process, in consultation with the women's sector, to identify four women who have made a lasting positive impact in Belfast, to be awarded the Freedom of the City as part of the International Women’s Day programme of events in March 2027.”

**Bonfire Update**

At the request of Councillor Bunting, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 30th April, 2026, under the heading “Bonfire

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Update” in relation to the temporary fencing of bonfire sites, be referred back to the Committee for further consideration.

**Requests for Funding**

At the request of Councillor I. McLaughlin, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 30th April, 2026, under the heading “Requests for Funding” be amended to provide that the Director of Finance submit a report to the Committee which would outline how the remaining requests could be funded.

**Adoption of Minutes**

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 24th and 30th April, 2026, omitting matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee were thereupon approved and adopted.

**People and Communities Committee**

Moved by Councillor Cobain,  
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 14th April, 2026, be approved and adopted.

**Notice of Motion - Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals**

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Council agreed that the Notice of Motion ‘Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals’ proposed by Councillor Murray and seconded by Councillor Smyth, which was adopted by the People and Communities Committee at its meeting on 14th April, 2026, be amended to provide that Queen’s University Belfast be included as part of the Council’s engagement with relevant stakeholders.

**Integrated Advice Partnership and Community Support Funding 2026/27**

At the request of Councillor R.M. Donnelly, the Council agreed that the minute of the People and Communities Committee of 24th April, 2026, under the heading “Integrated Advice Partnership and Community Support Funding 2026/27” be amended to reflect the Committee’s decision for the uplift payments in respect of the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund to be distributed on an ‘equal split’ basis as set out within option 2 of the report.

**Adoption of Minutes**

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 14th April, 2026, were thereupon approved and adopted.

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**City Growth and Regeneration Committee**

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

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 15th April, 2026, be approved and adopted.

**Licensing Committee**

Moved by Councillor Doran,  
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 22nd April, 2026, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

**Planning Committee**

Moved by Councillor Murphy,  
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 21st April, 2026, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

**Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee**

Moved by Councillor Hanvey,  
Seconded by Councillor McKay and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee of 29th April, 2026, be approved and adopted.

**Climate and City Resilience Committee**

Moved by Councillor M. Donnelly,  
Seconded by Councillor S. Douglas and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 16th April, 2026, be approved and adopted.

**Standards and Business Committee**

Moved by Councillor Flynn,  
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 28th April, 2026, be approved and adopted.

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**Notices of Motion**

**Premenstrual Dysphoric  
Disorder (PMDD)**

In accordance with notice on the agenda, it was

Moved by Councillor Groogan,  
Seconded by Councillor Maghie,

“This Council recognises that April is PMDD Awareness Month. PMDD stands for Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, which is an endocrine disorder and is the abnormal reaction to fluctuations in hormones.

This Council notes that PMDD affects 1 in 20 women and those assigned female at birth and has serious impacts on their mental and physical health. Symptoms can be emotional, physical and psychological including mood swings, fatigue, pain and suicidal ideations, and can affect those with the conditions for up to two weeks of every month. 34% of those with the condition have attempted to take their own life, yet despite how serious the condition can be there is a lack of training and awareness of the condition throughout GPs and medical practitioners. It can take twelve years to get a diagnosis and it can often be misdiagnosed and therefore mistreated as bipolar disorder.

This Council will write to the Department of Health to ask them what training and awareness campaigns they provide for medical practitioners of the symptoms of PMDD and will also write to the Public Health Agency to ask them to launch a public campaign to highlight the condition and how to track the symptoms.

This Council will work with the PMDD Project to hold workshops for councillors and all council staff to provide more awareness and information of how to get help for the condition.”

The motion was put to the Council and passed.

**Tackling Anti-Social Scrambler  
and E-Scooter Use in Belfast**

In accordance with notice on the agenda, it was

Moved by Alderman McCullough,  
Seconded by Councillor R. Brooks,

“Belfast City Council expresses serious concern at the growing impact of antisocial scrambler and e-scooter use across the city, which has caused significant distress to residents, poses a clear risk to public safety and, in some cases, has resulted in serious injury and loss of life.

The Council recognises that, when used responsibly and in appropriate settings, such vehicles can have legitimate recreational value; however, their

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misuse in residential areas, parks and public spaces is causing serious and growing concern across Belfast.

The Council notes ongoing enforcement challenges and the need for stronger, more effective interventions to tackle dangerous use and repeat offending.

Accordingly, the Council agrees to:

- write to the Minister of Justice calling for strengthened powers for the PSNI to seize and, where appropriate, retain or dispose of vehicles being used in a dangerous or antisocial manner;
- call for the introduction of mandatory registration of scramblers and e-scooters at the point of sale;
- support the provision of additional enforcement tools, including the use of drone technology and dedicated resources to assist in identifying and tackling offenders; and
- request a detailed briefing from the PSNI — open to all Members — on enforcement activity, hotspot areas, and barriers to effective action within Belfast.”

**Amendment**

Moved by the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty),  
Seconded by Councillor McCusker,

“After the final bullet point, insert:

- *support the development of community-led intervention schemes, aligned with the justice system and delivered in partnership with local schools, youth centres, community organisations and statutory agencies, alongside the exploration of dedicated, safe and properly managed sites for scrambler use, recognising that similar targeted programmes have shown significant reductions of dangerous and antisocial use by engaging young people directly and providing safer, structured alternatives.”*

The motion, as amended, therefore read:

“Belfast City Council expresses serious concern at the growing impact of antisocial scrambler and e-scooter use across the city, which has caused significant distress to residents, poses a clear risk to public safety and, in some cases, has resulted in serious injury and loss of life.

The Council recognises that, when used responsibly and in appropriate settings, such vehicles can have legitimate recreational value; however, their misuse in residential areas, parks and public spaces is causing serious and growing concern across Belfast.

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The Council notes ongoing enforcement challenges and the need for stronger, more effective interventions to tackle dangerous use and repeat offending.

Accordingly, the Council agrees to:

- write to the Minister of Justice calling for strengthened powers for the PSNI to seize and, where appropriate, retain or dispose of vehicles being used in a dangerous or antisocial manner;
- call for the introduction of mandatory registration of scramblers and e-scooters at the point of sale;
- support the provision of additional enforcement tools, including the use of drone technology and dedicated resources to assist in identifying and tackling offenders;
- request a detailed briefing from the PSNI — open to all Members — on enforcement activity, hotspot areas, and barriers to effective action within Belfast; and
- support the development of community-led intervention schemes, aligned with the justice system and delivered in partnership with local schools, youth centres, community organisations and statutory agencies, alongside the exploration of dedicated, safe and properly managed sites for scrambler use, recognising that similar targeted programmes have shown significant reductions of dangerous and antisocial use by engaging young people directly and providing safer, structured alternatives.”

The motion as amended was put to the Council and passed.

**Calling for University of Ulster  
to rescind decision to cut 450 jobs**

In accordance with notice on the agenda, it was

Moved by Councillor Collins,  
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

“This Council:

- expresses deep concern at the announcement of up to 450 redundancies at University of Ulster (UU);
- stands in solidarity with workers at UU in campuses in Belfast and across the north against these jobs losses;
- calls on and will write to senior University of Ulster management urging them to rescind these proposals to protect jobs and educational provision;

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- will also write to the Economy Minister requesting an urgent intervention by the Stormont Executive to protect jobs and educational provision in UU; and
- supports the UCU, UNITE and other trade unions representing workers at UU and supports action to resist the loss of 450 jobs and the resultant impact on educational provision.”

The motion was put to the Council and passed.

Lord Mayor  
Chairperson

# Agenda Item 8

## Appointment of Positions of Responsibility 2026/2027

### Civic Dignitaries

Lord Mayor	Councillor Róis-Máire Donnelly
Deputy Lord Mayor	Councillor Hedley Abernethy

### Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Chairperson	Councillor Ian McLaughlin
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Arder Carson

### City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Chairperson	Councillor Joe Duffy
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Sam Nelson

### People and Communities Committee

Chairperson	Councillor Jenna Maghie
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Micheal Donnelly

### Licensing Committee

Chairperson	Councillor Tara Brooks
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Conor McKay

### Planning Committee

Chairperson	Councillor Ryan Murphy
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Natasha Brennan

### Climate and City Resilience Committee

Chairperson	Councillor Dónal Lyons
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Brónach Anglin

### Standards and Business Committee

Chairperson	Alderman James Lawlor
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Gary McKeown

### Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Chairperson	Councillor Fiona McAteer
Deputy Chairperson	Councillor Áine McCabe

## **Policing and Community Safety Partnership Political Members**

### **Belfast Policing and Community Safety Partnership**

Councillor Tara Brooks (Chairperson)  
Councillor Claire Canavan  
Councillor Séamas de Faoite  
Councillor Davy Douglas  
Councillor Joe Duffy  
Councillor JJ Magee  
Councillor Conor McKay  
Councillor Ian McLaughlin  
Councillor Sam Nelson

### **North Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership**

Councillor Sam Nelson (Chairperson)  
Alderman Dean McCullough  
Councillor Nichola Bradley  
Councillor Fred Cobain  
Councillor Ron McDowell  
Councillor JJ Magee

### **South Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership**

Councillor Tara Brooks (Chairperson)  
Councillor Natasha Brennan  
Councillor Sarah Bunting  
Councillor Pádraig Donnelly  
Councillor Conor McKay  
Councillor Gary McKeown

### **East Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership**

Councillor Séamas de Faoite (Chairperson)  
Councillor Ruth Brooks  
Councillor Pádraig Donnelly  
Councillor Davy Douglas  
Councillor Fiona McAteer  
Councillor Conor McKay

### **West Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership**

Councillor Ian McLaughlin (Chairperson)  
Alderman Jim Rodgers  
Councillor David Bell  
Councillor Claire Canavan  
Councillor Micheal Donnelly  
Councillor Caoimhín McCann

## Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Ian McLaughlin
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Arder Carson
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Ciaran Beattie
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Christina Black
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor Natasha Brennan
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Matt Garrett
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Ronan McLaughlin
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor Ryan Murphy
9	Sinn Féin	Councillor Tomás Ó Néill
10	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Sarah Bunting
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Fred Cobain
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Jordan Doran
13	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Nicola Verner
14	Alliance	Councillor Michael Long
15	Alliance	Councillor Jenna Maghie
16	Alliance	Councillor Micky Murray
17	Alliance	Councillor Sam Nelson
18	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Dónal Lyons
19	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Séamas de Faoite
20	Green Party	Councillor Brian Smyth

## City Growth and Regeneration Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Joe Duffy
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Alliance	Councillor Sam Nelson
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Christina Black
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Áine McCabe
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor Conor McKay
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Ronan McLaughlin
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Luke Meenehan
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor Tomás Ó Néill
9	Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman James Lawlor
10	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Sarah Bunting
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Sammy Douglas
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Tracy Kelly
13	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Ian McLaughlin
14	Alliance	Councillor Fiona McAteer
15	Alliance	Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown
16	Alliance	Councillor Christine Bower
17	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Séamas de Faoite
18	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Dónal Lyons
19	Green Party	Councillor Áine Groogan
20	People Before Profit Alliance	Councillor Michael Collins

## People and Communities Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Alliance	Councillor Jenna Maghie
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Micheal Donnelly
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Ciaran Beattie
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Christina Black
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor Nichola Bradley
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Claire Canavan
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Matt Garrett
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor JJ Magee
9	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Ruth Brooks
10	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Sarah Bunting
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Fred Cobain
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Jordan Doran
13	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Nicola Verner
14	Alliance	Councillor Hedley Abernethy
15	Alliance	Councillor Christine Bower
16	Alliance	Councillor Micky Murray
17	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Séamas de Faoite
18	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Gary McKeown
19	Green Party	Councillor Anthony Flynn
20	Ulster Unionist Party	Alderman Sonia Copeland

## Licensing Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Alliance	Councillor Tara Brooks
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Conor McKay
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Brónach Anglin
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Nichola Bradley
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor Micheal Donnelly
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Pádraig Donnelly
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Siobhán McCallin
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor Caoimhín McCann
9	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Ruth Brooks
10	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Davy Douglas
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Bradley Ferguson
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Tracy Kelly
13	Alliance	Councillor Hedley Abernethy
14	Alliance	Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown
15	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Séamas de Faoite
16	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Gary McKeown
17	Green Party	Councillor Brian Smyth
18	Ulster Unionist Party	Alderman Jim Rodgers
19	Traditional Unionist Voice	Councillor Ron McDowell
20	Independent	Councillor Paul McCusker

## Planning Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Ryan Murphy
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Natasha Brennan
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Brónach Anglin
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Arder Carson
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor Matt Garrett
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Áine McCabe
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Caoimhín McCann
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor JJ Magee
9	Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman James Lawlor
10	Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman Dean McCullough
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Jordan Doran
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Davy Douglas
13	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Sammy Douglas
14	Alliance	Councillor Hedley Abernethy
15	Alliance	Councillor David Bell
16	Alliance	Councillor Tara Brooks
17	Independent	Councillor Eric Hanvey
18	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Carl Whyte
19	Green Party	Councillor Áine Groogan
20	Ulster Unionist Party	Alderman Jim Rodgers

## Climate and City Resilience Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Dónal Lyons
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Brónach Anglin
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Micheal Donnelly
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Pádraig Donnelly
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor JJ Magee
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Caoimhín McCann
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Luke Meenehan
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor Séanna Walsh
9	Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman Frank McCoubrey
10	Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman Dean McCullough
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Bradley Ferguson
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Andrew McCormick
13	Alliance	Councillor David Bell
14	Alliance	Councillor Tara Brooks
15	Alliance	Councillor Michael Long
16	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Carl Whyte
17	Green Party	Councillor Áine Groogan
18	Ulster Unionist Party	Alderman Sonia Copeland
19	People Before Profit Alliance	Councillor Michael Collins
20	Independent	Councillor Paul McCusker

## Standards and Business Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman James Lawlor
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Gary McKeown
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Nichola Bradley
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Arder Carson
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor Pádraig Donnelly
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Siobhán McCallin
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Ronan McLaughlin
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor JJ Magee
9	Sinn Féin	Councillor Ryan Murphy
10	Sinn Féin	Councillor Séanna Walsh
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman Dean McCullough
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Davy Douglas
13	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Bradley Ferguson
14	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Tracy Kelly
15	Alliance	Councillor Christine Bower
16	Alliance	Councillor Michael Long
17	Alliance	Councillor Fiona McAteer
18	Alliance	Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown
19	Green Party	Councillor Anthony Flynn
20	Traditional Unionist Voice	Councillor Ron McDowell

## Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

1	<b>Chairperson</b> Alliance	Councillor Fiona McAteer
2	<b>Deputy Chairperson</b> Sinn Féin	Councillor Áine McCabe
3	Sinn Féin	Councillor Natasha Brennan
4	Sinn Féin	Councillor Claire Canavan
5	Sinn Féin	Councillor Caoimhín McCann
6	Sinn Féin	Councillor Conor McKay
7	Sinn Féin	Councillor Tomás Ó Néill
8	Sinn Féin	Councillor Séanna Walsh
9	Democratic Unionist Party	Alderman Frank McCoubrey
10	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Ruth Brooks
11	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Bradley Ferguson
12	Democratic Unionist Party	Councillor Andrew McCormick
13	Alliance	Councillor Christine Bower
14	Independent	Councillor Eric Hanvey
15	Social Democratic and Labour Party	Councillor Carl Whyte
16	Green Party	Councillor Anthony Flynn
17	Ulster Unionist Party	Alderman Sonia Copeland
18	People Before Profit Alliance	Councillor Michael Collins
19	Traditional Unionist Voice	Councillor Ron McDowell
20	Independent	Councillor Paul McCusker



<b>Subject:</b>	Reconsideration of a decision in respect of the Irish Language Policy
<b>Date:</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2026
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Walsh, Chief Executive
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services Jim Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance Manager

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

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of report or summary of main issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to furnish Members with Counsel's opinion in relation to the call-in of a decision by the Council at its meeting on 1 October 2025, to approve the draft Irish Language Policy.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	<p>Council is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents the legal opinion;</li> <li>• Note that the call-in was not considered to have merit on community impact grounds; and</li> <li>• Note that the decision will now be implemented in accordance with Standing Order 48.</li> </ul>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main report</b>
3.1	<p>Members will recall at the meeting of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025, the City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services submitted a report which addressed a number of proposed amendments to the draft Irish Language Policy that had been tabled at the Committee meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> September for consideration.</p> <p>The Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) noted the contents of the report including the documentation presented to the Committee at its previous meetings in August and September - SP&amp;R Committee - 22 August 2025 SP&amp;R Committee - 19 September 2025</li> <li>(ii) noted that the policy as presented to Committee on 19<sup>th</sup> September was agreed subject to consideration of the proposed amendments tabled at the meeting;</li> <li>(iii) agreed to the following proposed amendments: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Under Paragraph 15 "Belfast City Council will adopt a new bilingual (Irish/English) corporate identity and logo, having due regard to international best practice for minority languages, to reflect this commitment";</li> <li>- The proposed amendments outlined in the report under paragraphs 14, 19 and 24 would be detailed in the Implementation Plan; and</li> <li>- The development of an Educational Programme be included in the Implementation Plan and that a report be submitted to a future meeting in relation to the FLOURISH project.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Members will recall that on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2025 the Council considered Agenda Item 6 – Minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meetings of 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September 2025 and, after a vote, resolved:</p> <p>"That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 19<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> September, 2025, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted."</p>

	<p>Subsequently, the decision of the Council of 1st October 2025 to ratify the minutes of the September Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meetings was ‘called-in’ under Section 41(1) (b) of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014.</p> <p>In accordance with Standing Order 48, the City Solicitor sought a legal opinion, and this is appended to the report (<b>Appendix 1 – Counsel’s opinion</b>).</p> <p>Members will note that the opinion has concluded there is no merit in the call-in.</p> <p>Members will be aware that judgement was recently issued in a case regarding the Council’s Standing Orders. It can be found at the following link:  <a href="https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/2026-nikb-16">https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/2026-nikb-16</a></p> <p>Mr Justice McLaughlin K.C concluded that the Council’s Standing Orders were lawful. He found that the 2014 Act does not require qualified majority voting in response to every requisition presented on the ground of disproportionate adverse effect, solely on account of the belief of 15% of councillors as to the effects of the decision.</p> <p>A notice of appeal has been received and Members are advised that the applicant has written to Council asking that it does not progress to a decision on this. However, the appellant has not actually applied for interim relief to prevent the Council from making a decision on the call in.</p>
3.5	<p><b><u>Next steps</u></b></p> <p>In accordance with Standing Order 48(9), Council is asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note the contents the legal opinion;</li> <li>• Note that the call-in was not considered to have merit on community impact grounds; and</li> <li>• Note that the decision will now be implemented.</li> </ul>
3.6	<p><b><u>Financial &amp; Resource Implications</u></b></p> <p>There are no financial or resource implications arising directly from this report.</p> <p>A future report will be brought back to SP&amp;R Committee in relation to draft implementation plan, which will further consider financial and resource implications.</p>
3.7	<p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations, or rural needs implications arising directly from this report. Members will recall that the public consultation in relation to the draft policy included a draft EQIA.</p> <p>This was subsequently updated to reflected feedback throughout the consultation and presented to SP&amp;R Committee at its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2025.</p>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Appendices</b>
4.1	<p>Appendix 1 – Call-in Requisition</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Counsel’s opinion</p>





31/10/25 at

2pm



### Call-in requisition form

Section 41(1) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 provides that a decision of the Council or one of its Committees can be called in for reconsideration if at least 15% (9 Members) of the total number of Members request it on the basis that the decision:

- (a) was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues; and/or
- (b) would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district..

We, the undersigned, require that the following decision of the Committee be called in for reconsideration.

Date of Committee meeting	1/10/25		
Minute Heading	MINUTES OF SP8R COMMITTEE OF 19th & 26th September DRAFT IRISH LANGUAGE POLICY.		
Section under which call-in is being requested (please tick)	Section 41(1)(a) Procedural grounds		Section 41(1)(b) Community impact grounds
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	Print name	Signature
Councillor	SARAH BUNTING	
Councillor	DEAN MCCULLOUGH	
Councillor	FRANK MCCOUBREY	
Councillor	JAMES LAWLOR	
Councillor	IAN McLAUGHLIN	
Councillor	NICOLA VERNER	
Councillor	RUTH BROOUS	
Councillor	DAVY DOUGLAS	
Councillor	BRADLEY FERGUSON	
Councillor	JORDAN DORAN	
Councillor	RON McDOWELL	
Councillor	JIM RODGERS	

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Reasons for call-in

(Please outline below the reasons why you consider that the decision should be called in. Failure to provide adequate reasons to support your request may invalidate the Call In).

**A. Call-in under Section 41(1)(a) – Procedural grounds**

*That the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues*

	Reasons
1	
2	
3	

**Explanatory Notes**

If the decision is properly requisitioned for Call In by at least 9 Members of the Council and the number of Members so requesting the Call In remains at that number at the expiration of the call in period, the decision will not be submitted to the Council for ratification and the Chief Executive will summon a meeting of an Ad-Hoc Committee comprising the Chairs and Deputy Chairs of the 7 Committees.

On a procedural call-in, authority is delegated to the City Solicitor, in consultation with the Chief Executive, to obtain legal to be tabled at the meeting of the ad hoc committee, if it is their view that this will assist in addressing the issues raised within the call-in.

That Ad Hoc Committee will be empowered to make the following decisions on the matter which has been called in:

- (a) Refer the decision back to the Committee which took it for further consideration; or
- (b) Refer the decision of the Committee which originally took it to the next available meeting of the Council for ratification.

The Members who submitted requisitions on the decision called in shall be invited to attend the meeting of the Ad-Hoc Committee which is considering the request and may, with the consent of the Committee, address the meeting but they shall not have voting rights.

The Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee where the decision in question was originally taken shall also not have voting rights at the Ad-Hoc Committee which is considering the request.

The following grounds are suggested as legitimate reasons why a Member or Members might seek for a decision to be called in on procedural grounds:

- A. Misapplication/misunderstanding as to legal requirements
- B. Failing to take into account relevant considerations/failure to exclude irrelevant considerations including factual mistake
- C. Failure to follow a procedural requirement
- D. Failure to have a fair hearing
- E. Failure to give reasons

**B. Call-in under Section 41(1)(b) – Community impact grounds**

*That the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district*

		Reasons
1	The community affected by the decision	The Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist; Ulster British community
2	The nature and extent of the disproportionate adverse impact	<p>The imposition of Irish language signage is significant and controversial, generating community division and opposition. On 24 May 2025, polling was published by the Belfast Telegraph, commissioned by establishing polling agency LucidTalk. This was focused on Irish language at Grand Central station; the results demonstrated that 91% of DUP voters, 97% of TUV voters and 71% of UUP voters opposed the imposition of Irish language signage.</p> <p>In LucidTalk polling published on 19 March 2025 showed 88% of people who identify as unionist would feel uncomfortable to have Irish language signage imposed in their street.</p> <p>It is further an objective fact that local Government in Northern Ireland collapsed for three years over the issue of Irish language, with complete unionist opposition. That Irish language is seen as political, controversial and divisive is beyond any objective dispute.</p> <p>The impact on community relations will be significant, with the unionist community- and those members of staff who identify as unionist/British- will under this strategy be forced to display Irish language, despite fundamental disagreement with such displays.</p> <p><b>ADD IN SOME MORE DETAIL FROM CONSULATIONS ETC- refer in particular to any section 75 points</b></p> <p>As set out by Humphreys J at paragraph [40] of <i>Re Bryson's Application</i> [2024] NIKB 86 the question as to whether there is significant community detriment is essentially a classically political rather than legal question. Therefore, the statutory scheme envisages that in circumstances whereby 15% of councillors form the view a particular decision will have significant detrimental impact, then that is sufficient. Any challenge to such a position could only be amounted on grounds of Wednesbury unreasonableness. Whether a call-in has merit is not properly a legal question, and is further entirely subjective: put simply, depending on who you ask.</p>

		<p>This call-in is clearly nowhere near the irrationally threshold. It is therefore a valid call-in under section 41 (1) (b) of the 2014 Act, which commences a process that requires (i) a legal opinion to be obtained under section 41 (2); (iii) the matter to be brought back before the council for a vote, in which an 80% majority is required in order to sustain the decision, in so far as the question of 'merit' is not to be determined by a opinion under section 41 (2).</p> <p>It is noted that the call-in form provides that, if a legal opinion obtained under section 41 (2) of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014 deems a call-in without merit, then the call-in shall not be subject to a qualified majority vote.</p> <p>These standing orders are made under powers conferred by section 37 (1) of the 2014 Act, however these powers are subject to section 37 (3) which requires that standing orders are subject to "the other provisions of the Act". They must therefore be consistent with, inter alia, section 41.</p> <p>Section 41 (2) requires the obtaining of a legal <u>opinion</u>; however nothing in this provision permits the legal opinion to be treated as adjudicatory or determinative. Rather, it must merely be put before the council at the next meeting.</p> <p>The elevation of the legal opinion to a binding adjudication is contrary to section 41 (2), and therefore the standing orders purporting to provide for such an adjudication are ultra vires section 37 (3) owing to their inconsistency with section 41 (2).</p> <p>Therefore, this call-in is valid, in order and therefore must be reconsidered by the council, with a qualified majority required.</p>
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**Explanatory Notes**

If the decision is properly requisitioned for Call In by at least 9 Members of the Council and the number of Members so requesting the Call In remains at that number at the expiration of the call in period, the decision will not be submitted to the Council for ratification and the Chief Executive will within 1 working day seek the opinion of a practising solicitor or barrister on the validity of the Call in.

When the opinion of the solicitor or barrister is received by the Chief Executive she shall:

Where the opinion confirms that the call in has merit

1. circulate the opinion to the Members of Council; and
2. include the decision of the Committee on the agenda for the next available meeting of the full Council for decision.

Please note that the full Council will be required to decide on such a matter by way of a qualified majority vote where at least 80% of the members present and voting will be required to support a decision.

Where the opinion indicates that the call in does not have merit

1. circulate the opinion to the Members of Council; and
2. include the decision on the agenda for the next meeting of the full Council for ratification by way of a simple majority decision.

The following advice is offered to assist Members considering calling in a decision on Community Impact grounds:

- A. The decision or policy was not screened for compliance with Section 75 of the NI Act 1998
- B. The decision in question is contrary to a strategic or community plan or policy agreed by the council
- C. The decision is in conflict with the council's equality scheme
- D. For decisions requiring an equality impact assessment, the assessment was not properly conducted
- E. The disproportionate impact of a decision outweighs its beneficial effect
- F. The decision does not comply with the council's best value duty

The requirement is for a decision to be reconsidered- accordingly disproportionate adverse impact is necessarily qualified in that those decisions in which an adverse impact is identified may still be adopted if the impact is reasonably justified.

**Note**

Call-in requisitions must be delivered to the Chief Executive no later than 10.00am on the fifth working day following the publication of the draft minutes or decision register.

<b>Time received</b>	<b>Date received</b>	<b>Received by</b>
2 pm	3/10/25	

(for completion by Chief Executive's Office)

## RE: BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

### In the Matter of a call-In brought on the grounds of section 41(1)(b) of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014

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#### OPINION

##### INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

1. We are instructed by the Belfast City Council ("**Council**") to provide an opinion with respect to the call in of a decision to approve an Irish language policy ("**Policy**"), received on 3 October 2025.
2. The call in requisition form ("**requisition**") requests call in of the decision on the grounds that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the district, pursuant to Section 41(1)(b) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 ("**2014 Act**").
3. Accordingly, this opinion addresses whether the decision would disproportionately affect adversely the section of inhabitants identified in the call-in, with specific reference to the reasons outlined in the requisition.
4. In brief summary, for the reasons set out below, having considered the matters outlined in the requisition, it is our opinion that the decision **would not** disproportionately affect adversely the section of inhabitants identified in the call-in.

##### RELEVANT FACTUAL BACKGROUND

5. In 2018, with support from all political parties, the Council adopted a Language Strategy. The objectives of the strategy are to create a place where linguistic diversity is celebrated and respected and where all those who live, work and visit Belfast can access the city using languages with which they are familiar and comfortable.
6. In May 2024, the Council approved a Language Strategy Action Plan, which sets out proposals for delivering the objectives of the Language Strategy.
7. On 22 August 2025, following public consultation and equality impact assessment, a draft Irish Language Policy was brought before the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee ("**the Committee**"). The Committee considered the draft policy and the consultation responses on 19 September 2025 and again on 26 September 2025 when the Committee voted to approve a final version of the Irish Language Policy.
8. On 1 October 2025, the minutes of the Committee (and therefore the Policy as appended to the minutes) came before the full Council. The minutes of the Council

meeting disclose that the minutes of the Committee were ultimately approved by majority vote (42 in favour, 17 against), after a proposal that the minutes be amended to provide that this Council excludes staff uniforms from the Policy in terms of branding and corporate logo was rejected by members (again by majority vote, 17 in favour, 42 against):

*“Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee  
Moved by Councillor Brennan,  
Seconded by Councillor Murphy,*

*“That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 19th and 26th September 2025, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.”*

*Amendment Draft Irish Language Policy  
Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,  
Seconded by Alderman McCullough,*

*“That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Committee of 26th September under the heading ‘Draft Irish Language Policy’ be amended to provide that this Council excludes staff uniforms from the Policy in terms of branding and corporate logo.”*

***On a vote, seventeen Members voted in favour of the amendment and forty-two against and it was declared lost.<sup>1</sup>***

*Adoption of Minutes*

*The Lord Mayor put the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Committee of the 19th and 26th September to the Council for adoption. As there was no consensus, the adoption of the minutes became subject to a vote.*

***On that vote, seventeen Members voted against the adoption of the minutes and forty-two for and, accordingly, the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Committee of the 19th and 26th September were adopted.”***

9. On 3 October 2025 (within the 5-day working period in which a decision can be called in), a call-in requisition was presented to the Clerk signed by 12 members of the Council. It was brought on the grounds that it was contended that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the district, pursuant to Section 41(1)(b).

## **THE CALL IN REQUISITION FORM**

10. The requisition requires the decision of the Committee dated 1 October 2025 to be called in for reconsideration. It is grounded on section 41(1)(b) only i.e. that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district.

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<sup>1</sup> All emphasis is added save where it appears to the contrary

11. The section of the inhabitants of the district identified as being disproportionately adversely affected is *“The Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist; Ulster British community”*.
12. The nature and extent of the disproportionate adverse impact is described within the requisition as follows:

*“The imposition of Irish language signage is significant and controversial, generating community division and opposition. On 24 May 2025, polling was published by the Belfast Telegraph, commissioned by establishing polling agency LucidTalk. This was focused on Irish language at Grand Central station; the results demonstrated that 91% of DUP votes, 97% of TUV votes and 71% of UUP voters opposed the imposition of Irish language signage. In LucidTalk polling published on 19 March 2025 showed 88% of **people who identify as unionist would feel uncomfortable to have Irish language signage imposed in their street**. It is further an objective fact that local Government in Northern Ireland collapsed for three years over the issue of Irish language, with complete unionist opposition. That Irish language is seen as political, controversial and divisive is beyond any objective dispute. The **impact on community relations will be significant, with the unionist community- and those members of staff who identify as unionist/British-will under this strategy be forced to display Irish language, despite fundamental disagreement with such displays.**”<sup>2</sup>*

#### LEGAL FRAMEWORK

13. Section 41 of the 2014 Act is entitled *“Power to require decisions to be reconsidered”*, and provides:

*41 – (1) Standing orders must make provision requiring reconsideration of a **decision if 15 per cent.** of the members of the council (rounded up to the next highest whole number if necessary) **present to the clerk of the council a requisition** on either or both of the following grounds –*

*(a) that the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues;*

*(b) that **the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district.***

*(2) Standing orders **must require the clerk of the council to obtain an opinion** from a practising barrister or solicitor before reconsideration of a decision on a requisition made wholly or partly on the **ground mentioned in subsection (1)(b).***

*(3) Regulations may amend the percentage mentioned in subsection (1) and the process by which a legal opinion is obtained in subsection (2).*

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<sup>2</sup> The requisition also sets out a legal argument about the approach that should be adopted by the Council in respect of its interpretation of its standing orders and to a call-in brought under section 41(1)(b) of the 2014 Act. As set out above, this opinion is limited to counsel’s opinion on whether the decision would, as a matter of law, disproportionately affect adversely any section of the district, pursuant to Section 41(1)(b).

(4) In this section –

“decision” means a decision of the council or a committee of the council and includes a decision to make a recommendation;

“reconsideration” means –

(a) in the case of a decision of the council, reconsideration by the council;

(b) in any other case, consideration by the council or any specified committee of the council (whether or not the decision is a decision of that committee);

“section”, in relation to the inhabitants of a district, means a section of a specified description;

“specified” means specified in standing orders.

14. In *Re Hartlands (NI) Ltd for Judicial Review and another* [2021] NIQB 94, Mr Justice Scofield described section 41 as:

*“[132] ... a facility for such elected members to require reconsideration on the basis of one or both of the statutory grounds. Section 41 does not, in my view, nor was it intended to, confer rights directly on other persons (such as members of the public, inhabitants of the council's district or, as in this case, disappointed planning applicants) to have a council reconsider decisions with which they are unhappy. It is a **mechanism by which council members themselves may ensure that decisions in their name have been taken only after proper consideration and reflection** (including, in the case of a s 41(1)(b) call-in, consideration of disproportionate adverse effect on any section of the inhabitants of the district).”*

15. In *Re Bryson's Application for Leave to Apply for Judicial Review* [2024] NIKB 86, Mr Justice Humphreys opined that care should be taken when analysing the reasons contained within the requisition:

*“[38] ... This is an unusual statutory procedure, by which the norms of democratic decision-making are subverted, and it is arguable that its provisions ought to be construed strictly as a result. In this context, it is arguable that the references to the “real potential” to make the district “less inclusive, welcoming and harmonious” and to the “risks having an adverse impact” do not meet the requirement in s 41(1)(b) and standing order 23.2(4) & (5). In particular, it can be argued that the reasons given do not specify “the nature and extent of the adverse impact” but **rather call for speculation as to what the impact may be in the future.***

*[39] This is a far from conclusive interpretation. I am conscious that the court has not had the benefit of any sworn evidence from the proposed respondent, nor sight of the legal opinion obtained pursuant to the s 41(2) obligation.”*

16. In the very recent case of *Ann McClure's application for judicial review* [2026] NIKB 16, Mr Justice McLaughlin made a number of relevant observations in respect of the legal opinion to be obtained under section 41(2):

*“[142]... I also consider that the requirement for a legal opinion under section 41(2) is **sufficiently broadly defined to permit councils to use it as a form of “filter” mechanism.** Nothing in the language of section 41(2) prohibits such a procedure ... I consider that these provisions **simply create a requirement for the opinion to address the question of whether the beliefs of council members about adverse effects***

*explained within the requisition are sufficiently well-founded to reach the statutory threshold for reconsideration.* The use of the word “indicates” contains a recognition that it is not a requirement for the opinion to determine to a scientific standard whether or not the decision would have the feared effects. Rather, it is a requirement for an informed and reasoned assessment of whether the requisition is based upon sufficiently well founded concerns and where there can be sufficient certainty about the effects of the decision. **I consider that the purpose and effect of such a procedure, within standing orders does not conflict with any requirement of the parent statute.**

[143] In *Re Bryson* [2024] NIKB 86, the applicant challenged the validity of a call-in requisition in relation to a council decision to fly the union flag 365 days per year from war memorials in the Borough. In granting leave, Humphreys J. expressed the that in any given scenario the question of whether a decision would have a disproportionate adverse effect upon a section of the district population was “properly a matter for political judgment” (at [40]). **I agree that judgment plays an important role in any assessment of whether the statutory threshold has been reached,** since the question of disproportionate adverse effects is rarely, if ever likely to yield a scientific answer. **However, I do not consider that it is exclusively a matter of subjective belief.** In deciding whether the statutory threshold is met, BCC’s procures will ensure that the nature and extent of the apprehended effects are identified and explained. **The reasons put forward and any materials referred to in the requisition to support the belief of the council members is available to the lawyer. An assessment of the strength of the relevant reasoning is a matter which is well suited to the skills of a lawyer. The use of a qualified lawyer also adds a vital element of independence in the assessment, which is precisely what was recommended by the Policy Development Group.** In many cases, the lawyer will also have the benefit of equality screening or an assessment which has been undertaken by council officials, which also adds a further layer of objectivity to the process. As the facts of this case demonstrate, there will be some types of decisions where questions of law arise which will inform the opinion. Here, the decisions in *Re McMahon* and *Re Murphy* provided a very important objective and authoritative basis for determining whether concerns about the adverse effects of flying flags from public buildings were sufficiently well founded. **In summary, I do not consider that the process of instructing a lawyer to provide an opinion on the “merit” of a requisition on the grounds of disproportionate adverse effects is purely a question of political judgment. While judgment is inevitably involved, it is a mixed issue and it is one which I consider is sufficiently suited to the skills of a lawyer that I do not consider it to be beyond the scope of the rule making autonomy conferred upon councils by section 41.”**

[144] **...If it is sufficiently clear that the decision of the council is “likely” to affect adversely any of those groupings, the decision will (or at least should) have been preceded by equality impact screening and/or assessment in accordance with its equality scheme and the council ought to have taken account of those likely effects.** The exercise will have been conducted by council officials rather than by council members, prior to the initial decision and hence ought to have been compiled without regard to political considerations. This statutory protection had been in place for many years at the time of enactment of section 41 and must therefore have been within the contemplation of the Assembly. **As explained above, in many cases this equality analysis will also provide an objective and verifiable basis for the lawyer to assess the merit of the requestion and, if appropriate, the decision of council members, upon a reconsideration.”**

## OPINION

### *INTRODUCTION*

17. The language used within the call-in (“*significant and controversial*”) deploys the language of section 20 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which – briefly stated – governs the circumstances in which matters must be brought to the Northern Ireland Executive Committee. That is not the test to be applied under section 41(1)(b) of the 2014 Act.
18. There are a number of elements to the test contained within Section 41(1)(b):
  - (i) The decision must have an adverse effect;
  - (ii) The adverse effect must be on a specified section of the inhabitants of the district; and
  - (iii) The effect on them must be disproportionate.
19. There is no question that the requisition identifies a specified section of the inhabitants of the district for the purposes of Standing Order 48(b)(4). The question is whether the decision has an adverse effect on the section identified, and if so, is that effect disproportionate.
20. It is important to note at the outset that the decision which is under scrutiny is the adoption of a policy.
21. The stated purpose of the Policy is found at [7] of the Irish Language Policy. It is said to be intended:

*“...to give a clear indication of the specific steps the Council will promote the Irish language within its own work and to support the growing community of Irish speakers in Belfast.”*

22. The Policy aim is stated in the Policy at [8]:

*“The aim of this Policy is to set out how the Council will promote the use of Irish language internally and in the wider Council area in accordance with the commitments outlined above and the specific steps it will take to doing this. It will do so in line with the six Guiding Principles for Promoting, Protecting and Enhancing Linguistic Diversity which were agreed by the Council’s Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in June 2022. These are:*

- ***Changing the perspective on languages in our city*** to increase the profile of different languages along with awareness and understanding of associated cultures, heritage and traditions.
- ***Engaging with language communities*** to increase equal opportunities and to enhance and protect good relations within the city.
- ***Improving organisational capacity*** to address staff training needs and improve our language capabilities.

- ***Working in partnerships with others*** to promote linguistic diversity across the city to move towards our shared vision of inclusive growth, where no-one is left behind.
- ***Identifying and implementing actions*** in line with agreed priorities to promote, protect and enhance linguistic diversity.
- ***Establishing efficient and effective solutions which*** are proportionate to need, affordable and measurable.”

23. The Policy Statement provides at [9]-13]:

- “9. A person requesting service through the medium of Irish from the Council is entitled to the same standard of service as they would receive were they to request service in English, and for the availability of Irish language services to be made known to them at the outset of their dealing with the Council through active offer.
10. The Council will remove barriers to the use of Irish in public life.
11. The Council will promote the learning of Irish as a vibrant modern language
12. **The Council will support the promotion of Irish language through its facilities, programmes and events.**
13. The Council will take resolute action to promote and protect the Irish language across the Council area across its own public facing services.”

24. At [3] of the Policy the Council states:

*“In adopting the Language Strategy, it was mindful of international and domestic legal obligations and standards which are set out at Appendix 1. It was also informed by demand for the use of minority languages and feedback from wide- ranging consultation.”*

25. The sources of law cited in Appendix 1 include the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and The St. Andrews Agreement 2006.

#### ***THE EFFECT OF THE POLICY***

26. The effect of the decision is to adopt the Irish Language Policy in the terms contained within the draft provided to the Council. Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, in particular the policy provides as follows under the subheading entitled “communications”:

*“14. The Council will develop a list of key strategic Council documents and publications to proactively be made available in Irish. The 10 most common front-facing forms (online and hard copy) will be identified and translated into Irish for immediate use. The Council commits to publishing information leaflets, marketing and promotional materials bilingually in printed form and online. In instances where consultations are being conducted and the subject matter has the potential to impact the use of the*

*Irish language or the Irish language community themselves, consultation questionnaires, engagement sessions and associated documents will be conducted proactively through the medium of Irish/bilingually as part of the active offer.*

15. *Belfast City Council will adopt a new bilingual (Irish/English) corporate identity and will develop a new corporate logo to reflect this commitment.*
  16. *The Council will provide and promote interpretation and translation services across the Council.*
  17. *The Council will codify the arrangements for the use of Irish in Council meetings through the Council's Standing Orders. Members and those addressing the Council in Irish will not be placed at a disadvantage for doing so. Members of the public addressing the Council will be given the option of addressing the Council in Irish at their earliest interaction with the Council.*
  18. *The Council commits to publishing regular and often bilingual English / Irish content across all social media platforms. Information posts, marketing initiatives, community / service announcements will take place in Irish and in English. The relevant officer(s) will work in conjunction with the marketing team to develop a comprehensive strategy on how best to promote the Irish language across the Council's platforms. The Strategy will set out clear annual goals, increasing annually, around the % of social media posts produced.*
  19. *The Council will develop and maintain a functioning bilingual (Irish/English) website. A choice of languages, English/Irish, will first appear on the Council home page and users will be asked which language they wish to view the site in. The Council website will also develop, host and regularly update a specific Irish language page, with information about the Irish language services available from Council, information on classes throughout the city and on Irish medium education.*
  20. *The Council will promote Irish language events in the city and provide information in Irish about major upcoming events and the launch of any key strategic Council initiative.*
  21. *The Council will provide staff with a code of courtesy for indigenous languages and provision of cultural awareness training."*
27. Under the sub-heading "*Signage*", the policy provides:
- "22. *The Council **will adopt** a dual-language approach to signage in all its facilities. These signs will **also include pictorial and tactile (Braille) options** where possible.*
  23. *The Council will, **as part of a rolling programme, prioritise the erection of dual language signage in all of its facilities** through a categorisation approach as set out in Appendix 2. For the purposes of this policy the boundaries of the Gaeltacht Quarter will be expanded to include the Glen Road and Shaw's Road. For the purposes of this Policy the Gaeltacht Quarter is delineated in the map at Appendix.*

24. *For the purposes of this Policy, signs includes all informational and directional signage within facilities, signage and names outside of buildings and also signs at outdoor facilities such as parks and allotments. It also includes interactive displays, educational aids, information leaflets and other resources.*
25. *Translation for signage will be produced by an independent accredited Irish language translator and will be consistent across Council facilities and will have regard to the proper use of standardised forms.*
26. *The erection of street signs in Irish are dealt with separately under the Council's Dual Language Street Signs Policy which was adopted in October 2022."*

***AVAILABLE EVIDENCE OF THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF THE IMPACT ON THE SECTION OF THE COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED***

***i. The requisition***

28. As set out above, the requisition describes the alleged disproportionate adverse impact as follows:

*"The imposition of Irish language signage is significant and controversial, generating community division and opposition. On 24 May 2025, polling was published by the Belfast Telegraph, commissioned by establishing polling agency LucidTalk. This was focused on Irish language at Grand Central station; the results demonstrated that 91% of DUP votes, 97% of TUV votes and 71% of UUP voters opposed the imposition of Irish language signage. In LucidTalk polling published on 19 March 2025 showed 88% of people who identify as unionist would feel uncomfortable to have Irish language signage imposed in their street. It is further an objective fact that local Government in Northern Ireland collapsed for three years over the issue of Irish language, with complete unionist opposition. That Irish language is seen as political, controversial and divisive is beyond any objective dispute. The impact on community relations will be significant, with the unionist community- and those members of staff who identify as unionist/British-will under this strategy be forced to display Irish language, despite fundamental disagreement with such displays."*

29. Insofar as it is disclosed from the foregoing, the alleged adverse impact to this identified section of the community appears to be asserted to be:
  - (i) That this section of the community opposes and/or is uncomfortable with Irish Language Signage (as evidenced by opposition to Irish language at Grand Central Station and/or signage on residential streets);
  - (ii) That Irish language is seen as political, controversial and divisive; and
  - (iii) That those members of (Council) staff who identify as unionist/British will be forced to display Irish language, despite fundamental disagreement with such displays.

30. More broadly it appears to be contended that as a result of the foregoing there will be an adverse impact on community relations in the future.

*ii. Public consultation<sup>3</sup>/EQIA report*

31. It is important context that the Council conducted a public consultation process prior to this decision being taken, which ran for a period of 14 weeks.

32. The Council further conducted a full Equality Impact Assessment (“EQIA”), despite the fact there had been no initial screening (a course that the Council has been criticised for by Irish Language Groups<sup>4</sup>).

33. The EQIA report prepared is presently restricted in nature and not available to the public at large but has been provided to counsel for the purposes of this opinion. It was also provided to the members of the Committee which approved the policy before the decision was taken.

34. Given the relevance of this report to the issues under consideration, it is important to set out the key findings in some detail.

35. Under the sub-heading “*Assessment of Impacts*”, the report set out the background to the EQIA:

*“5. Assessment of impacts*

*5.1 In accordance with the EQIA process, having gathered information on the draft policy and those that are likely to be affected by it, the Council must then assess whether there is likely to be a differential impact on groups within one or more of the Section 75 categories should the policy be adopted, before determining the extent of that differential impact and whether it is likely to be adverse.*

*5.2 Based on previous engagements, the Draft EQIA Consultation Report suggested that Irish speakers and members of Irish representative groups and communities would be likely to maintain that the draft policy should be regarded primarily as a positive action measure, while downplaying any potential adverse impact attaching to those with a different perception or of a different identity.*

*5.3 The EQIA has confirmed this perspective but alongside a counter opinion that does not regard the promotion of the language as apolitical and is a view that highlights the polarity of opinion across the city.*

*5.4 Previous consultations around language issues in the city have consistently provoked considerable interest along with a binary division of opinion between those for and those against, and the present consultation has confirmed both.*

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<sup>3</sup> We understand that the version of the Policy which was subject to consultation contained commitment for an English-only version of the Council logo to be available on request, a bilingual logo to be used across all corporate branding, and the availability of an Irish language logo to be promoted for use in correspondence, documentation and literature.

<sup>4</sup> EQIA report, pg. 45

5.5 *At the same time the EQIA has afforded a contemporary opportunity to gauge opinion and thereby help the Council reach an informed decision at this particular moment in time and mindful of ever-changing political circumstances both regionally and locally.*

5.6 *Before proceeding further, it is important to reiterate that the draft policy must be seen in context and as representing the progressive realisation of the Council's longstanding Language Strategy, a strategy which has already been subject to close and regular scrutiny over many years.*

5.7 *Hence it is not the principles underpinning the strategy that are under scrutiny here, including the promotion and celebration of linguistic diversity, but its outworkings in the form of the first of six individual language policies, Irish (to be followed by Ulster-Scots; Minority Ethnic Communities; Sign Languages (British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language; and Disability Communications).*

5.8 *As the previous sections have made abundantly clear, the draft policy sits very comfortably within the framework of local, national and international minority language obligations, charters and guidance, with all the proposed actions being endorsed within these various statutes and documents.*

5.9 *Indeed, it could be argued that the Council should already have moved further and faster in order to meet these national and international standards and especially with the imminent appointment of an Irish Language Commissioner within the Executive's new Office of Identity and Cultural Expression .*

5.10 *These are positive impacts of the draft policy that will be enthusiastically embraced by one section of the community. However, in light of findings from this and earlier rounds of engagement, the potential for concerns to be raised, or perceived, with regard to the promotion of good relations across the city cannot be ignored.*

5.11 *In other words, while many who embrace the Irish language with enthusiasm are of the view that its use and promotion is non-contentious and apolitical, there are those (predominantly from Protestant, Unionist and Loyalist communities) who would argue that the Irish language has been overtly politicised within the context of Northern Ireland and hence is perceived to be a threat to their sense of identity.*

5.12 *In light of these perceptions, it is suggested that the draft policy may have the potential to adversely impact people with regard to their religious belief, political opinion and/or race/ethnic origin (i.e. national identity) but the precise extent of this impact could not be determined prior to the current round of consultation.*

5.13 *In this way, the EQIA process, and in particular the public consultation and stakeholder engagement, has helped consider further the tangible and contemporary impacts of the draft policy in terms of encouraging or discouraging engagement with the Council and its various facilities and services, the promotion of a good and harmonious environment across the city and the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations among Council employees, residents and visitors.*

## *Equality of opportunity*

5.14 *An EQIA is primarily a device for systematically determining whether or not a policy is likely to have an adverse impact on one or more Section 75 groups. Furthermore, if a policy does show a potential 'adverse impact' then the public authority must consider how this may be reduced. This would include how an alternative policy may lessen this effect and thereby serve to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations.*

5.15 *The EQIA process itself is intended to anticipate barriers to participation or engagement (for example by staff), or failings in service provision (i.e. the promotion of equality of opportunity), and to assist public authorities in mitigating these adverse impacts as well as complying with the law. **One of the key indicators of adverse impact, as identified by the Equality Commission, can be lower participation rates or uptake by one or more group, but in the current example, until the policy is actually in place then this must remain a matter for conjecture.***

5.16 *It has been suggested by a number of consultees that the proposals contained within the draft policy may give rise to a potential adverse impact for users and potential users of Council facilities and services, along with staff, and in particular those from a Protestant, Unionist, or Loyalist background.*

5.17 *It could be argued that there may be the potential for outworkings of the draft policy, including bilingual signage, to introduce a 'chill factor' for those from particular communities which may in turn discourage engagement with access to, or use of, Council facilities and services. This could also extend to Council staff.*

5.18 *The consultation process was able to explore this possibility further and did reveal concern among members of certain communities that this remained a real possibility. **However, the extent to which this voiced attitude or opinion would be manifest in actual behaviour has yet to be tested.***

5.19 *A further concern was raised in relation to young people who have been raised and educated through the medium of Irish, and who may be disadvantaged if the draft policy is not put in place within a reasonable timeframe.*

...

5.24 *The present EQIA acknowledges the primacy afforded to the equality of opportunity duty in Section 75 (1) and recognises that there is no statutory obligation to proceed with an EQIA mindful of Section 75 (2) considerations. However, in line with ECNI guidance, where a policy has the potential to harm good relations then it is maintained that the potential for adverse impact should not be disregarded.*

5.25 *This may be especially true if there is a likelihood that the promotion of equality of opportunity may also be affected directly or indirectly, for example where members of one community are then less likely to access a facility or service, or where community relations deteriorate to a point where the use and/or availability of facilities or services is affected.*

5.26 *The evidence that is available to date, and including the present consultation, indicates that the draft policy **may have the potential to be perceived as having an***

***adverse impact on good relations on grounds of religious belief, political opinion, and also perhaps race/ethnic origin (i.e. national identity), with residents, visitors and employees from a Protestant, Unionist or Loyalist (PUL) community background more likely to perceive this possibility.***

5.27 Previous consultations on related matters and including those relating to street signs and leisure centre signage, have suggested that there may be the potential for those who do not support the use of languages other than English to regard elements of the draft policy as potentially challenging to their sense of identity.

5.28 Despite these concerns and perceptions, the Council is content that there are sufficient safeguards in place within the draft policy to ensure that, through a sensitively managed process of categorisation, a staged implementation programme can be scheduled so as to be fair, reasonable and proportionate and that can accommodate local circumstances across the city.

5.29 It is envisaged that this phased approach, taking into account local demographic trends, should allow for a period of adjustment for communities that may have concerns at this time.

5.30 The consultation also revealed serious criticisms by a number of groups representing sections of the Irish language community. In brief, these centred around perceived deficiencies in both the scope of the draft policy itself and the conduct of the EQIA. While noting these concerns, the Council remains committed to the aims and principles of the draft policy and has confidence in the way in which the EQIA process has been undertaken to date.

***5.31 Unfortunately, the precise extent of support for and against the policy is difficult to gauge given difficulties associated with the anonymised survey process. These difficulties aside, the accumulated data indicates both considerable support for, and opposition to, the policy. To reiterate, this division of opinion was stark in both the public and staff surveys and was also noticeable during engagement events across the city which each tended to be characterised by only one perspective.***

5.32 It was noteworthy that engagement with staff during the current round of consultation tended to mirror these wider community concerns or arguments but there tended to be a broader spectrum of opinions voiced at these events.

***5.33 Engagement with council staff revealed little evidence of opposition to the promotion of the Irish language per se but instead a concern as to how good relations between staff could be maintained throughout the implementation of the policy.***

5.34 In particular, the potential for branding on personal uniforms to become a contentious and divisive issue was raised repeatedly, along with anxiety as to how staff training would be put in place in a way that would not disadvantage those who chose not to engage with the language.

6. Consideration of measures to mitigate

...

6.7 *The consultation has tended to confirm the possibility of using various measures to mitigate potential adverse impacts. For example, the categorisation process has been broadly welcomed as a way to ensure that the implementation of the policy can proceed at a pace which accommodates local concerns.*

...

6.9 *While staff were generally positive about the aims of the policy there were misgivings about how it would be rolled out. This included expectations regarding staff training, and the potential for those who did not engage with Irish thereby to be disadvantaged.*

6.10 *While there was little resistance to the requirement for general awareness and courtesy training, there was a concern regarding the career prospects of those who chose not to become proficient in Irish.*

6.11 *One final emotive issue that was raised repeatedly by both staff and trade union representatives related to Council branding on personal uniforms. There was a widespread concern that unless this matter was handled with sensitivity then the potential for division and conflict was considerable.*

**6.12 Overall, the Council would maintain that the draft policy represents a positive and natural outworking of its original Language Strategy, and a measure that will help to further the aims of the Language Strategy.**

6.13 *The schedule of categorisation of council facilities (see Appendix 1) affords the opportunity to mitigate a number of identified concerns while continuing to progress towards full implementation of the policy.*

6.14 *The roll-out of the policy should proceed mindful of staff concerns in particular regarding uniforms and training requirements.*

**6.15 During this period of implementation the Council will continue to take on board feedback from the consultation period and beyond and will reflect on this information before reaching any final decision."**

36. The report concluded:

*"7.3 In brief summary, as anticipated the draft policy has provoked considerable interest and has stimulated a range of opinions across the consultation period.*

*7.4 To try to strike a balance between often diametrically polarised viewpoints is not straightforward and in particular where the room for compromise or accommodation appears to be narrow*

*7.5 On the one hand there are those who enthusiastically endorse the use of Irish and can see no downside to its promotion. On the other hand, there are those who feel that the language is being used a political device to further challenge their sense of identity and thereby harm good relations across the city.*

7.6 In reflecting on the feedback obtained during the consultation period, it is important to keep in mind the advice of the Equality Commission. The Commission makes clear that the outcome of a consultation should not be regarded as a referendum, poll or plebiscite. Instead, all available information, both quantitative and qualitative, should be used to help inform the decision-making process. In other words, it is not to be regarded as a numbers game.

**7.7 In the present case this advice is especially pertinent as the survey attached to the public consultation has yielded equivocal results that are not easy to interpret with any degree of accuracy.**

...

7.12 These matters aside, in combination the consultation has revealed significant levels of support for the broad principles underpinning the draft policy and including its policy statement which is, 'to ensure that a person requesting service through the medium of Irish from the Council will receive the same standard of service as they would receive were they to request service in English, and for the availability of Irish language services to be made known to them at the outset of their dealing with the Council through active offer.'

**7.13 While there was little evidence of opposition to, and considerable support for, the promotion of the Irish language in itself, there were concerns raised by both the general public and Council staff (including trade union representatives) as to how the roll-out of the draft policy may impact adversely on certain sections of the community, and harm good relations more generally.** This was often alongside a concern with the costs associated with the roll-out of the policy in its entirety.

7.14 With this in mind the process of categorisation (otherwise known as progressive realisation) was welcomed by those from different communities as a way of ensuring that good relations could be maintained over an extended period of implementation, and that accompanying costs could then be borne over a relatively lengthy timeframe.

7.15 This medium to long term approach is in line with the guiding principles attached to the Council's Language Strategy, including the need to establish: 'Efficient and effective solutions which are proportionate to need, affordable and measurable.'

7.16 The expansion of the Gaeltacht Quarter was also generally welcomed and was seen as a natural and integral part of the categorisation process.

7.17 This sentiment appeared related to a further trend that was discernible among those members of the public who were generally less enthusiastic about the draft policy, perhaps best characterised by the acronym 'NIMBY' (i.e. 'Not in my backyard'). In other words, there was little opposition to the broad thrust of the policy but primarily when it was implemented in areas where the Irish language was welcomed - but not necessarily in their own locality.

7.18 Hence, while the underlying principles may not have been challenged, successive engagements with both the wider public and council staff served to highlight the array of practical issues and questions that remain to be answered during the roll-out of the policy

so as to ensure that the commitments contained within the policy statement are met but within a realistic and affordable budget and timeframe.

7.19 Without question one of the most commonly occurring themes resonating through the consultation was the resource implications and costs associated with implementation of all the proposals contained within the draft policy.

7.20 The consultation also revealed very different expectations as to what could or should be realistically delivered - and over what timescale. While some felt that the policy had not gone far enough in promoting the Irish language, others raised concerns that full implementation over a short period of time could place an excessive financial burden on the Council, and a burden which may have the potential to adversely impact on the delivery of other council services.

7.21 At the time of consultation, the draft policy was presented as a 'blue skies' proposal, with no costings attached to the various actions included therein. However, subsequent indicative auditing has begun to reveal the extent of the budget that may be required to fully translate these principles and proposals into sustainable practice, and the sums involved are likely to be considerable.

7.22 In delivering these actions, even through a staged process of realisation, the annual scale of expenditure is likely to be significant, and competition for available resources is likely to become a significant factor.

7.23 During these deliberations, any potential knock-on effects on Section 75 groups should not be ignored, for example where other projects or programmes may need to be revised or curtailed.

7.24 With all these concerns in mind it is imperative that an ongoing review of the implementation plan remains as a standing item on the Language Strategy Working Group.

7.25 The role that the group plays at each stage of implementation will be critical in ensuring the success of a realistic delivery programme that continues to reflect ongoing needs and priorities.

7.26 While Council staff tended to be divided in their support for the draft policy in general, across the board one issue in particular provoked a considerable and often emotive response, personal uniforms.

7.27 The concern was voiced that if mono and bilingual alternative uniforms are made available then these may have the potential to be dangerous and divisive, by overtly highlighting the difference between 'us and them' and thereby undoing decades of progress regarding good relations promotion within the Council. The Trade Union Group were especially concerned about this possibility.

7.28 The introduction of uniform options (e.g. bilingual or monolingual) was seen by many consultees as potentially problematic and divisive, while others had reservations or anxieties about wearing a uniform which carried a bilingual logo.

*7.29 To avoid damage to good relations among staff it is imperative that when addressing the issue of personal staff uniforms that the Council should proceed with caution and with great sensitivity. By way of example, it may be useful to consider imaginative ways of designing Council logos for uniforms that are able to avoid the need for language or acronyms but instead look towards icons or images.*

*7.30 This approach to an especially thorny issue would not necessarily detract from the Council's firm commitment to developing a bilingual corporate identity through a variety of other means and may indeed strengthen staff support towards this objective in the process.*

*7.31 A similar approach to personal uniforms has been successfully adopted elsewhere and could perhaps form part of a wider review of council branding."*

37. A detailed report on the findings from the consultation and engagement process was brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 22 August 2025 which included a Report on the Public Consultation, a Report on the Staff Consultation, a Trade Union Joint response to the Consultation, and an EQIA Final Decision Report. Notably, it appears from the reports available that the Committee resolved not to proceed with its initial proposal of including an "opt-out" provision in relation to uniforms following the concerns raised by the Trade Union Group about the potential for division amongst staff.<sup>5</sup>

***IS THERE AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON THE SECTION OF THE COMMUNITY IDENTIFIED?***

38. The details outlined in the requisition presented arguably fail to demonstrate the existence of an adverse effect on the section of the community identified for the purposes of section 41(1)(b), much less a disproportionate effect.
39. Even if the policy was to be deemed - as is alleged - divisive, political, significant or controversial, that ***in itself*** does not establish an adverse effect on the section of the community identified, without more. Equally, the fact that a section of the community opposes a policy does not necessarily mean it has an adverse effect on that section of the community.
40. The height of the contended adversity is therefore a level of discomfort in respect of signage generally (rather than in respect of the outworkings of this policy), and that those members of staff who disagree with displays of Irish Language, will nevertheless have to display it. It is questionable whether either of these contentions amount to an adverse effect on the section of the community identified.
41. However, it is nevertheless plain from the EQIA report that concerns have been raised about the potential adverse impact on the section of the community identified, and in particular the EQIA report recognises (5.17):

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<sup>5</sup> The Council's Trade Union Group's January 2025 response to the consultation process was cited within the EQIA report as follows (pg. 46-47 EQIA report).

*“...it could be argued that there **may be the potential for outworkings** of the draft policy, including bilingual signage, **to introduce a ‘chill factor’** for those from particular communities which may in turn discourage engagement with access to, or use of, Council facilities and services. This could also extend to Council staff.”*

42. The fears expressed about a chill factor relate not to the policy itself however, but to the outworking of the policy. It is important therefore to restate that the decision which is under consideration is to approve the Irish language policy. Decisions about, for example, the specific nature of Irish language signage and uniform logos remain to be made by the Council.
43. The EQIA concluded that there is an absence of objective evidence to test whether the vocalised concerns or fears of the outworking of the policy are likely to come to fruition in practice (5.16):

*“It has been suggested by a number of consultees that the proposals contained within the draft policy may give rise to a potential adverse impact for users and potential users of Council facilities and services, along with staff, and in particular those from a Protestant, Unionist, or Loyalist background.*

*It could be argued that there may be the potential for outworkings of the draft policy, including bilingual signage, to introduce a ‘chill factor’ for those from particular communities which may in turn discourage engagement with access to, or use of, Council facilities and services. This could also extend to Council staff.*

*The consultation process was able to explore this possibility further and did reveal concern among members of certain communities that this remained a real possibility. **However, the extent to which this voiced attitude or opinion would be manifest in actual behaviour has yet to be tested.**”*

44. We refer to the observations made by McLaughlin J that:

*“...it is not a requirement for the opinion to determine to a scientific standard whether or not the decision would have the feared effects. **Rather, it is a requirement for an informed and reasoned assessment of whether the requisition is based upon sufficiently well founded concerns and where there can be sufficient certainty about the effects of the decision.**”*

45. Based on the available evidence, it cannot be said that the requisition is based upon sufficiently well-founded concerns that the policy will have an adverse effect on the section of the community: there is not sufficient certainty about the effects of the decision to make such a conclusion.
46. For completeness, we have considered whether, if we are wrong in our conclusion that the requisition is not well-founded in that it cannot be reasonably concluded that

it will have an adverse effect on the section of the community identified, if that effect can be said to be **disproportionately** adverse.<sup>6</sup>

47. This is a difficult exercise to undertake, in light of the absence of clear evidence about the impact, as outlined above. However, if one accepts that the concerns expressed amount to an adverse impact, then those concerns must be weighed in the balance against the nature, purpose and effect of the decision (which have already been outlined above).
48. Insofar as the concerns are raised in the requisition about staff members who disagree with Irish Language being required to display signage, it is important to recall that an “opt-out” provision in relation to Irish language on uniforms was initially proposed, but not included following concerns raised by consultees, including the Trade Union Group, an issue summarised in the EQIA report as follows:

*“7.27 The concern was voiced that if mono and bilingual alternative uniforms are made available then these may have the potential to be dangerous and divisive, by overtly highlighting the difference between ‘us and them’ and thereby undoing decades of progress regarding good relations promotion within the Council. The Trade Union Group were especially concerned about this possibility.*

*7.28 The introduction of uniform options (e.g. bilingual or monolingual) was seen by many consultees as potentially problematic and divisive.”*

49. More generally, in our view, to conclude that the adoption of the policy itself would have a disproportionately adverse effect (bearing in mind the nature, purpose and effect of the decision) would effectively amount to concluding that the adoption of the Irish language *per se* is something other than a neutral act by the Council, and/or to elevate the views of one section of the community who are said to disagree with Irish language signage to a right to be offended. The adoption of the Irish Language policy by the Council does not involve a diminution of the rights of those who identify as part of the section of the community identified.
50. We are bolstered in this conclusion by the published views of the Equality Commission and Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in this sphere:

- (i) The Equality Commission has stated (in the context of the Education Authority’s draft ‘Interim Language Policies for the Irish and Ulster-Scots Languages’):

*“1.2 The Commission’s remit is not directly or primarily concerned with the promotion of languages. Our response is provided within the context of our remit on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the provisions of the anti-*

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<sup>6</sup> The concept of proportionality is one that has been developed in both European and domestic law. It revolves around confining the exercise of power to means which are proportionate to the ends pursued (*Pham v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2015] UKSC 19 at [113]).

*discrimination legislation, specifically the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 and the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.*

...

*3.5 The Commission considers that the use of minority languages, particularly Irish or Ulster Scots languages in Northern Ireland, for common or official purposes would normally and objectively be considered to be a neutral act that would not be discriminatory.*

*3.6 The speaking or use of any language in Northern Ireland should be a neutral act and should not be perceived as a threat to any individual or group, nor should it be intended in such a manner.*

*3.7 The Commission considers that the speaking or use of the Irish language in the community does not diminish the entitlements of those whose right to their British identity is guaranteed in the Good Friday Agreement. Similarly, the Commission considers that the wider use of Ulster Scots does not diminish the entitlements of those whose right to their Irish identity is guaranteed.*

...

*5.3 The use of languages other than English, for example in corporate logos and communications, will not, in general, constitute an infringement of a good and harmonious working environment.*

*5.4 Decisions must rest with the employer/service provider and should be based on relevant policies and procedures that are proportionate, reasonable and appropriate to the context in which the organisation operates. Each employer should work to ensure that their premises are a welcoming and harmonious space for their workers and customers alike”<sup>7</sup>*

(ii) The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has expressed the following views on the issue of minority language use by public bodies :<sup>8</sup>

*“... there is no “right to be offended” by another party exercising a right.*

*38 This is a general principle of freedom of expression (ECHR Article 10, which must be read in conjunction with ECHR Article 14 on non-discrimination on grounds that include language). **The Commission is aware of arguments that there are ‘sensitivities’ regarding the Irish language.** Indeed, the UK government within the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement encourages the Assembly to sustain commitments to the Irish language in a manner that ‘takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community’ (albeit it is not clear if this refers to the Irish-speaking or English-speaking community.)*

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<sup>7</sup> Response by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland to the Consultation by the Education Authority, on the draft ‘Interim Language Policies for the Irish and Ulster-Scots Languages’ January 2023

<sup>8</sup> The Irish language and Ulster Scots Briefing paper on the implications of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, European Convention on Human Rights and other instruments from [4.1].

*In general, restricting use or promotion of Irish to accommodate the 'sensitivities' of others would be incompatible with freedom of expression. However, both ECtHR jurisprudence and the Charter provide a clear indication of how the sensitivities of non-speakers can be accommodated, namely through the prevention of monolingualism in the minority language. The promotion of linguistic pluralism implicit in ECtHR jurisprudence is reflected in and explicitly codified into the Charter. For example, the UK's commitment to allow Irish to be used in debates in the Assembly and Council chambers stands alongside an explicit provision that this has to be done without excluding the use of English. The same principle indicates that the sensitivities of non-Irish speakers could be met by ensuring that English is not excluded from appearing alongside Irish in corporate identities.*

*As stressed throughout this paper, under the Human Rights Act 1998 the interpretation of legislation and actions of public authorities must be in a manner compatible with ECHR rights. These include the framework around linguistic diversity, respect for minority language rights and the principle that **the duty of public authorities is "not to remove the cause of tension by eliminating pluralism, but to ensure the competing groups tolerate each other"**. This is important when considering alternative policies or mitigating measures further to an impact assessment of equality of opportunity.*

*Approaches that seek to restrict any expression deemed 'divisive' may be particularly problematic if applied to minority languages, as they would only effectively permit monolingualism in English. In addition to addressing the matter that no recognised 'right' appears to be being violated by promoting Irish, there have also been assertions that taking special measures for Irish speakers constitutes indirect discrimination against others (but not by contrast an assessment that not taking such measures would constitute discrimination against Irish speakers on the same indirect grounds).*

*It is also therefore worth re-emphasising that actions to promote Irish which either take account of its circumstances or merely provide a level of equality with English speakers are not to be considered discriminatory under the Charter. This is an issue that has also been dealt with directly by the Council of Europe: The Committee of Experts has been informed about several instances, especially within local councils, where it was decided not to promote or use the Irish language as it may contravene section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act... The Committee of Experts emphasises that the adoption of special measures in favour of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population or which take due account of their specific conditions is not to be considered an act of discrimination against the users of more widely used languages.*

*Should objections to the use of Irish or other minority languages be based on intolerance or prejudice against the language, there is a positive duty on the state party to take measures to address this. This should be undertaken through measures that tackle intolerance, rather than*

*penalising the minority language, for example, through linguistic diversity training. This is in keeping with the commitments to promote respect, understanding and tolerance of Irish contained in Article 7(3) of the Charter and the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement. The legal basis for complaints has been grounded in attempting to equate the promotion of a language with a symbol or an emblem. Symbols such as Union flags or Irish tricolours, portraits of the Queen or of the Irish President, which identify community allegiance have been subject to lawful restriction in Northern Ireland. It is difficult to see how a language could be seen in this category, not just because of the human rights obligations attaching to language, but also given that a language has to be used in the workplace for communication, and any language could be objected to. The section of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement that outlines positive commitments to the Irish language deals separately with the issue of the sensitivity of symbols and emblems for public purposes, establishing that symbols and emblems are to be treated distinctly from languages."*

51. In due course specific decisions will require to be made about the implementation of the policy. In that context it is important to note that the Council has indicated that the feedback it has received has been reflected on, and will continue to be used to inform the implementation of the policy.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, a recording system will be established to monitor the impact of the Council's decision on the draft policy (thereby establishing its effect on relevant groups within the Section 75 categories). The results of ongoing monitoring will be reviewed on an annual basis and included in the annual review on progress to the Equality Commission, and where monitoring indicates the likelihood of an adverse effect on one or more groups over a period of time then appropriate action will be taken to mitigate this effect.<sup>10</sup>

## CONCLUSION

50. In light of the foregoing, it is our opinion that the requisition is not well-founded: we do not consider that the impact of the decision can properly be said to affect adversely the section of the community identified, having regard to the nature, purpose and effect of the decision. Moreover, if we are wrong about that, we do not consider that any such impact would be disproportionate.

**Monye Anyadike-Danes KC**  
**Lara Smyth**

**Bar Library, 15 May 2026**

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<sup>9</sup> EQIA report, [6.6]

<sup>10</sup> EQIA report, [8.1]-[8.6]

## Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 22nd May, 2026

### HYBRID MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;  
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director  
of Corporate Services;  
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and  
Civic Services;  
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;  
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;  
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;  
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;  
Mr. E. McConville, Director of Communications, Marketing  
and External Affairs;  
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood  
Services;  
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services;  
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;  
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance  
Manager; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance  
Coordinator.

### Apologies

No apologies were reported.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 24th and 30th April, were taken as read and signed as correct, subject to the amendment to the Minutes of 30th April under item 2.b) Request for Funding. The Committee noted that the funding decision which noted Mid Falls Alleyway Regeneration Scheme as the recipient would be amended to note the applicant, namely, St. James' Community Forum.

It was reported that the aforementioned minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meetings on 5th May, subject to the following amendments:

- **NICVA Summit 2026 (24th April)** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that the Council contribute £20,000 of sponsorship to support the NICVA 2026 Summit event.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,  
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- **Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update (24th April)** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that the Notice of Motion 'Save West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness' (ID 331) remained open.
- **Notice of Motion – Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme (24th April)** - the Council agreed that the Notice of Motion be amended to include the following paragraph:

*“Proposals shall be brought back to the Committee in respect of addressing the gender imbalance amongst recipients of the Freedom of the City, including a process, in consultation with the women's sector, to identify four women who have made a lasting positive impact in Belfast, to be awarded the Freedom of the City as part of the International Women's Day programme of events in March 2027.”*

- **Bonfire Update (30th April)** - the Council agreed that the decision in relation to the temporary fencing of bonfire sites, be referred back to the Committee for further consideration.
- **Requests for Funding (30th April)** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that the Director of Finance submit a report to the Committee which would outline how the remaining requests could be funded.

**Declarations of Interest**

Councillor R-M. Donnelly declared an interest under item 9.a) Minutes of Shared City Partnership, in so far as it related to PEACEPLUS in that she worked for an organisation which was funded under the Programme. As the item did not become the subject of debate, she was not required to leave the meeting.

In relation to item 3.a) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, Councillor Murray declared an interest, in that he was employed by S.O.S NI who were a delivery partner of the Fleadh, as the related interests did not become the subject of debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

In relation to item 6.g) Call for Evidence by Criminal Justice Committee, Councillor Long declared an interest, in that his wife was the Justice Minister and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Bunting declared an interest under item 3.b) Request for Funding, in that she was on the Committee of one of the of the applicants and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Doran declared an interest in relation to item 3.b) Requests for Funding, and 6.h) Summer Scheme Small Grant Funding 26/27 in that he was associated with some of the applicants and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

In relation to item 3.d) Belfast Stories - Community Grants and 6.d) Belfast Child - Seamless Pathway for Children and Families, Councillor Smyth declared an interest in that he was employed by the Belfast Trust.

**Presentations**

**Retail NI/USDAW**  
**(Sunday Trading consultation)**

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. G. Roberts, Retail NI and Mr. L. English, Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) to the meeting.

Mr. English stated that the Members of USDAW did not support the proposed extension to Sunday opening hours as outlined in the consultation. He provided an overview of the Survey which the USDAW had undertaken in May, 2026 and highlighted the impact the potential extended hours would have on family life, work-life balance, job growth and the economy. He highlighted that retail workers felt undervalued and there was no incentive to work longer hours. He also questioned how longer hours would be facilitated by the retail companies.

Mr. Roberts provided an overview of why Retail NI did not support the extension to Sunday Opening Hours. He stated that there was a 'poverty of ambition' for the City and pointed out that there were other ways to animate the city. He questioned why a Working Group had not been set up to discuss the issues and the delay in bringing the consultation forward.

During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions in relation to the survey responses, workers rights, alternative options and engagement with stakeholders.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their deputation.

The Committee noted the information provided by the deputation and that, where relevant, the USDAW would provide further survey data on the issues raised.

**Belfast One Business Improvement**  
**District (Sunday Trading consultation)**

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. M. Connolly representing Belfast One and the Belfast Chamber of Commerce.

Ms Connolly provided an overview of the support for the proposed extension to Sunday opening hours as outlined in the consultation. She stated that other locations already benefited from extended Sunday opening hours and highlighted the volume of weekend and cruise ship visitor and their needs.

She described the animation activities that had been undertaken by Belfast One throughout the year. She suggested that businesses needed to have the choice to open if they wished.

During discussion, she explained further the support for the consultation from retailers and hotels.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked Ms. Connolly for her deputation.

Noted.

**Restricted Items**

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

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

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

**Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann**

(Ms. L-A O'Donnell, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism  
attended in connection with this item.)

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Supt. G. Kirkpatrick representing the PSNI. Supt. Kirkpatrick provided an update on the Policing Plan for the Fleadh.

The Director of Economic Development and Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism also provided an update on the planning to support the hosting of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Belfast in August 2026.

During discussion, Members raised a number of queries in relation to vulnerable people. The Chief Executive advised that an update would be provided in June on the issue.

One Member suggested that a meeting should also be set up between the inner city communities and relevant agencies before the next Committee, to help alleviate concerns in relation to parking.

In response to a Member's question in relation to street vendor locations and licensing, the Director of Economic Development advised this would be investigated.

In relation to city dressing on arterial routes, the Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs advised that the potential costs would be reported back to the next meeting of the Committee.

After discussion, the Committee noted the progress to date on the development of the Fleadh Cheoil and that further updates would be provided on the issues which had been raised.

### **Requests for Funding**

The Director of Finance provided an update on the outstanding requests which had been received by the Council for funding.

During discussion, in response to a Member's query regarding an update on a Sports Fund to deal with additional special sporting requests, the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services advised that this was being explored and the criteria would be submitted to a future People and Communities Committee for consideration.

#### **Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Murphy,  
Seconded by Councillor R-M Donnelly,

That the Committee agrees that an application process for the Discretionary Fund requests be implemented and capped to a maximum of £5k per applicant for requests that do not fit into any other Funding Streams, up to the amount of £290,742, and will be funded from the non-recurrent community capacity building monies included in the Growth Fund for 26/27.

#### **Amendment**

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

That the Committee agrees to fund the 47 discretionary funding support requests as outlined in the report and agrees that the funding, totaling £339,242, be allocated from the non-recurrent community capacity building monies included in the Growth Fund for 26/27.

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

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Murphy and seconded by Councillor R-M Donnelly was put to the meeting when nine Members voted for it and eight against and it was subsequently declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee:

1. Agreed that an application process for Discretionary Fund requests be implemented and capped to a maximum of £5k per applicant for requests that did not fit into any other Funding Streams. The Committee agreed that the fund, up to the amount of £290,742, would be funded from the non-recurrent community capacity building monies included in the Growth Fund for 26/27;
2. Agreed for West Well Being to present to the Party Group Leaders to outline their request;

3. Agreed to the holding of Party Briefings to review the Discretionary Fund policy.

### **Asset Management**

The Committee:

- i) St George's Market 1st Floor Restaurant – Lease renewal**
  - Approved the renewal of a Lease to The Mount Charles Group Limited for the 1st Floor Restaurant Premises at St George's Market.
- ii) Forth Meadow Community Greenway (Springvale Park) – Acquisition of Lands**
  - Approved the transfer of c. 12.95 acres of land at Springvale Park, Springfield Road, on which Section 2 of the Forth Meadow Community Greenway had been constructed, from the Department for Communities to the Council.
- iii) Lagan Gateway Phase 2 Project**
  - Approved the use of compulsory purchase powers should they be required to complete land assembly for the Lagan Gateway Phase 2 Project.
- iv) Alexander Park – Easement**
  - Approved the granting of a 99-year Easement to Alpha Housing Association for the installation of a storm drain and associated headwall within Alexandra Park, with the installation works to be undertaken by JAMDAC Developments Ltd.

### **Belfast Stories - Community Grants**

The Committee was provided with an update on the proposed award of Belfast Stories Community Grants strands 2 and 3 following completion of the application, assessment and moderation process.

#### **Proposal**

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

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the report so that further information on the process could be provided to Party Group Leaders.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Bunting,  
Seconded by Councillor Doran,

That the Committee agrees to the recommendations as outlined in the report to:

- Award the recommended 5 creative project grants (up to £30,000) following completion of the assessment and moderation process;
- Note the 12 small grants up to £10,000 approved under delegated authority; and
- In light of the significant demand and high quality of submissions received, as outlined at 3.15, agrees to increase the fund for small grants utilising an additional allocation of £41,560 from the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) reserve to fund 4 additional projects.

On a vote, eight Members voted for the proposal and eight against. There being an equality of votes, the Chairperson exercised her second and casting vote against the proposal and it was subsequently declared lost.

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor R. McLaughlin and seconded by Councillor Beattie was put to the meeting and passed.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report so that further information on the process could be provided to Party Group Leaders.

(Councillor Nelson in the Chair)

**Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 13th May, the City Growth and Regeneration Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the report, which included progress to date on neighbourhood tourism development and the findings from the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme;*
- ii. agreed to defer consideration of the proposed strategic direction and phased delivery approach as set out within the Tourism Plans for North and South Belfast;*
- iii. agreed that approval be sought from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the funding of £300,000 for neighbourhood tourism;*
- iv. agreed that the approach to support neighbourhood tourism delivery would be outcome based and consistent with the existing approach adopted in East and West Belfast, with the delivery aligned to the Council's neighbourhood tourism and cultural investment programmes and local area plans; and*

- v. ***approved the continuation of funding to EastSide Partnership and Fáilte Feirste Thiar to support neighbourhood tourism delivery, coordination, and capacity building across the city.***

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Murray,  
Seconded by Councillor Nelson,

That the Committee agrees that up to £300,000 be allocated from the growth fund to fund the Neighbourhood Tourism Programme in 2026/2027 on a non-recurrent basis, including £75k to each area of the city (North, South, East and West), with delivery aligned to Belfast City Council's neighbourhood tourism and cultural investment programmes and local area plans.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor I. McLaughlin,  
Seconded by Councillor Doran,

That the Committee proceeds with the recommendations as outlined in the report to:

- agree that up to £300 000 is allocated from the growth fund to fund the Neighbourhood Tourism Programme in 2026/2027 on a non-recurrent basis, including £75k to both East and West Belfast with delivery aligned to Belfast City Council's neighbourhood tourism and cultural investment programmes and local area plans; and
- note proposals for the remaining funding to be allocated to North Belfast, South Belfast and Shankill, subject to agreement of strategic direction and phased delivery approaches and a further report to the City Growth and Regeneration committee on the tourism plan for the Greater Shankill area.

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

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Murray and seconded by Councillor Nelson was put to the meeting and passed.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that up to £300,000 be allocated from the Growth Fund to fund the Neighbourhood Tourism Programme in 2026/2027 on a non-recurrent basis, including £75k to each area of the city (North, South, East and West) with delivery aligned to Belfast City Council's neighbourhood tourism and cultural investment programmes and local area plans.

### **Extended Cultural Programme**

The Committee was apprised of the proposed arrangements for 2026/2027 in relation to the extended cultural programme which had been established following a request from members in relation how they might address under representation of certain groups within previous rounds of funding.

#### **Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Beattie,  
Seconded by Councillor Murphy,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the report to invite representatives from Seachtain na Gaeilge and Belfast Orangefest to a Special Meeting to present information on the inclusivity and equality of their events.

#### **Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Bunting,  
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the Committee:

1. agrees to approve up to £100,000 towards an Extended Cultural Programme and to develop and issue Funding Agreements for 2026/27 as detailed in the report in relation to:
  - Seachtain na Gaeilge / Irish language week
  - Belfast Orangefest
2. agrees to the additional funding of up to £20,000 for Belfast Pride, subject to legal advice, due diligence and funding agreement.

On a vote, eleven Members voted for the proposal and eight against and it was declared carried. The amendment was put to the Committee as the substantive motion and agreed.

Accordingly, the Committee:

1. Agreed to approve up to £100,000 towards an Extended Cultural Programme and to develop and issue Funding Agreements for 2026/27 as detailed in the report in relation to:
  - Seachtain na Gaeilge / Irish language week
  - Belfast Orangefest;
2. Agreed to the additional funding of up to £20,000 for Belfast Pride, subject to legal advice, due diligence and funding agreement;

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3. Agreed the allocation of up to £35,000 to support the Lord Mayor's Installation Event for 2026, taking recognition of the significance presented in hosting the Fleadh Cheoil in August and allowing to maximise the opportunity that this presented to engage with key stakeholders; and
4. Agreed that officers submit a future report to the Committee to outline options for events currently or previously supported by the Extended Cultural Programme to be delivered on a recurrent basis and considered as part of the rate setting process for 2027/28, to include economic impact data on Belfast Pride from 2024 and 2025.

**Update on Phase 1 of the Governance Review**

The Committee noted:

1. the update in relation to Phase 1 of the Governance Review;
2. that Party Briefings would be arranged to discuss the key governance documents; and
3. that updated documents would be brought to Committee in June for approval.

**Matters referred back from Council/Motions**

**Bonfire Update - Temporary Fencing (RESTRICTED)**

The Committee was reminded that, the Council, at its meeting on 5th May had agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 30th April, 2026, under the heading "Bonfire Update" in relation to the temporary fencing of bonfire sites, be referred back to the Committee for further consideration.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to rescind its decision of 30th April in relation to the Temporary Fencing of Bonfire Sites and agreed to delegate authority to officers in relation to the Health and Safety requirements and temporary fencing of bonfire sites at Benmore, Pitt Park, Cregagh Green, Tommy Patton Park and Orangefield Park.

**Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

**Performance Improvement Plan 2026/27**

The Committee was provided with an update on the findings of the public consultation on the draft performance improvement objectives and presented with the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2026-27 for consideration and approval.

The Committee approved the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2026-27 as outlined in [Appendix 2](#) of the report, for publication on the council's website, subject to minor edits and formal ratification by the full council on 1st June, 2026.

## **Workstyles Policy**

The Committee considered a report regarding an update on the Workstyles Policy.

The Committee was reminded that the policy had been implemented on the basis of an 18-month pilot and subject to review on a six-monthly basis throughout, with review points at the end of September 2023, March 2024, and September 2024.

The corporate review measures were: building occupancy levels; customer complaints related to remote working; compliance with the 60% workplace / 40% remote strategy; and completion of the Homeworker and DSE self-assessment checklists and a pulse survey to gather participants' views on the policy and its overall personal impact; the views of line managers, managing in a hybrid environment; and the impact on individuals, the Council, and its customers / stakeholders when individuals were working remotely and when working in the office.

It was reported that consultation with management and trade unions on the revised policy took place in late 2025 / early 2026 and, at its meeting on 26th March 2026, the JNCC had approved the revised [Workstyles Policy](#).

In addition, the revised policy was reviewed by subject matter experts from legal services, digital services, information governance, insurance services, finance and corporate health and safety.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

## **Sunday Trading**

The Director of Planning presented the following report:

### **“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

**1.1 The report sets out the results of the recent public consultation on the proposed designation of the Belfast City Council area as a holiday designation to enable extended Sunday Trading hours for larger retailers.**

### **2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- **Note the results of the public consultation and additional direct responses received from stakeholders attached as appendices 3-7;**
- **Note the issues and viewpoints expressed in the course of the public consultation process, as set out in section 3.5; and**
- **Agree the implementation of the in-principle, council decision from July 2025 and designate the entire Belfast**

City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation under Article 6, paragraph (9) of the Shops Sunday (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. Any resolution passed by the council on 01 June would take effect from 01 July (i.e. one month after the date on which the resolution may be passed by council).

### 3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 At its meeting on 01 July 2025, the Council agreed, in-principle, to progress the Holiday Resort designation citywide under paragraph (9) of [the Shops Sunday \(Sunday Trading &c.\) \(Northern Ireland\) Order 1997](#) ('the legislation'), to be introduced on an ongoing basis commencing March, 2026, following further consultation and engagement with relevant stakeholders, including trade unions.

#### Designation as a Holiday Resort

Under paragraph (9) of the legislation, a Council may designate 'any area in its district as a holiday resort'. This means that for 18 Sundays between 1 March and 30 September in any calendar year (apart from Easter Sunday) a large shop which has a relevant floor area exceeding 280 square metres) may open on Sundays in accordance with notice given to Council. Before making any designation, the Order is clear that a Council should consult those likely to be affected by the proposed designation.

The council has consulted on the designation of the *city centre* as a holiday destination under the legislation on several previous occasions, most recently in 2019-20 but also in 2018 and 2017. On the previous occasions, there was engagement with a broad range of stakeholders including retailers (small and large); trades unions; statutory bodies; cultural sector; families; young people; tourism and hospitality representatives and transport providers.

The issues behind the proposals to designate the city centre as a holiday resort were similar to the current position: ongoing challenges to city centre viability; a desire to accommodate a growing tourism audience and a recognition that there was limited retail and hospitality provision in the city centre on a Sunday morning, compared to other days of the week.

The 1997 Order sets out in paragraph 10 that any resolution to designate a Holiday Resort can only take effect from a specified date, which must be at least one month after the date on which the resolution is passed. Should a decision be taken at this Committee, following due process the specified date on

which the decision could take effect would be Sunday 5 July 2026. The extension of Sunday trading hours would therefore run for 13 weeks until Sunday 27 September 2026. The Council will also have to publish a notice of the designation in such a manner as it considers appropriate.

The most recent engagement commenced in April 2025 linked to a Notice of Motion from September 2024 to deliver a pilot Sunday City Animation Project. Council officers held a number of discussions with key stakeholders including management at Victoria Square, Castle Court and the Kennedy Centre, Belfast One, Cathedral Quarter and Linen Quarter BIDs, Belfast Chamber, Retail NI, NI Hotel Federation, Visit Belfast, Translink, USDAW and the Department for Communities. At that time, Shopping Centre management teams were generally supportive of any proposal to extend hours of opening on Sundays, suggesting that retailer buy-in to the proposal shouldn't be an issue. Views were expressed that flexibility was key for retailers and their workers and that most would probably want to open from 11am onwards rather than anything earlier. The recent engagement and public consultation exercise has confirmed that the positions taken, and views expressed in previous consultations remain relevant.

### **3.2 Sunday Opening Public Consultation 2026**

Following the council decision in July 2025, officers developed an engagement programme to further consult with relevant stakeholders, including trade unions. Crucially this engagement would seek views on the holiday designation being extended across the entire Belfast council area. Officers utilised Your Say Belfast, the council's engagement platform with created two survey instruments targeting both individuals (residents, visitors and workers) and business responses (all sectors including retailers, business representatives, unions and community organisations). The consultation was launched on Monday 23 March and ran for 7 ½ weeks, closing on Wednesday 13 May. In addition, key stakeholders including trade unions who had previously been engaged in April 2025 were contacted directly to discuss their previously expressed opinions.

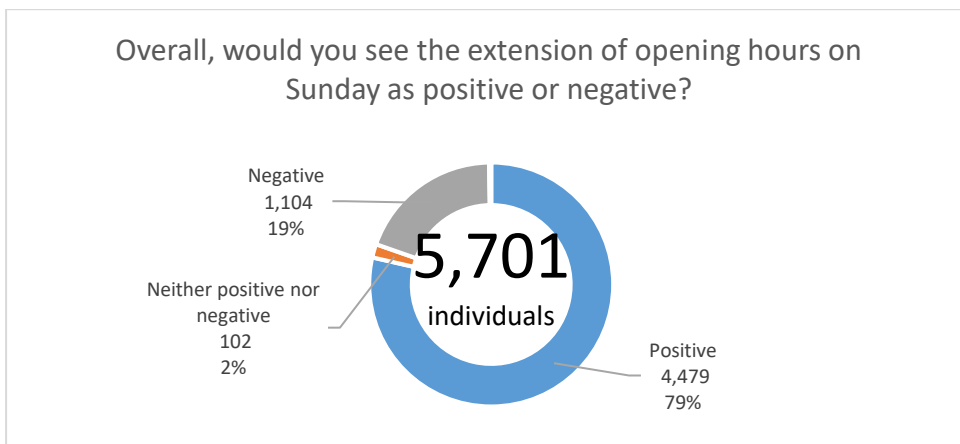
The council issued a press release, and the consultation received considerable press coverage over this period. There were over 11,100 visits to the Sunday Openings 2026 webpage on Your Say Belfast. Almost half of these visits were directed via social media, over 80% of which, came from Facebook, with the remainder coming from other platforms including Instagram, LinkedIn and Reddit. In addition, visitors to the page were also directed from the Belfast City Council website,

search engine results pages and other media outlets including Belfast Live, the Irish News and the Newsletter.

In total, there were 5,701 responses to the individual survey and a further 101 responses to the business survey. Additional replies were also received from 5 stakeholder organisations (USDAW, Belfast Chamber, Translink, NI Hotel Federation and Association of Convenience Shops). These are summarised in section 3.6 below and attached as individual appendices.

### 3.3 Key Findings (Individual Survey)

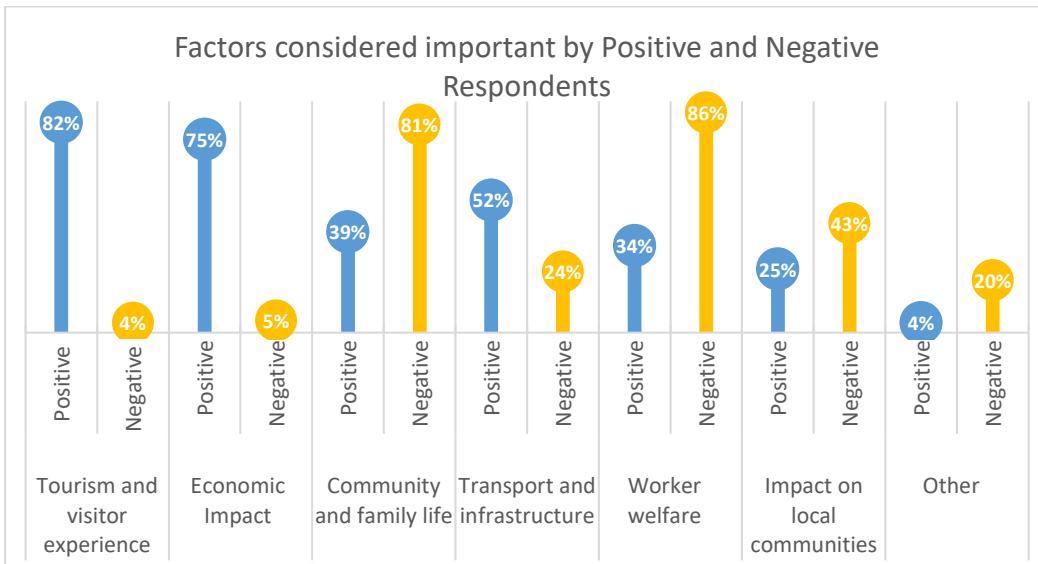
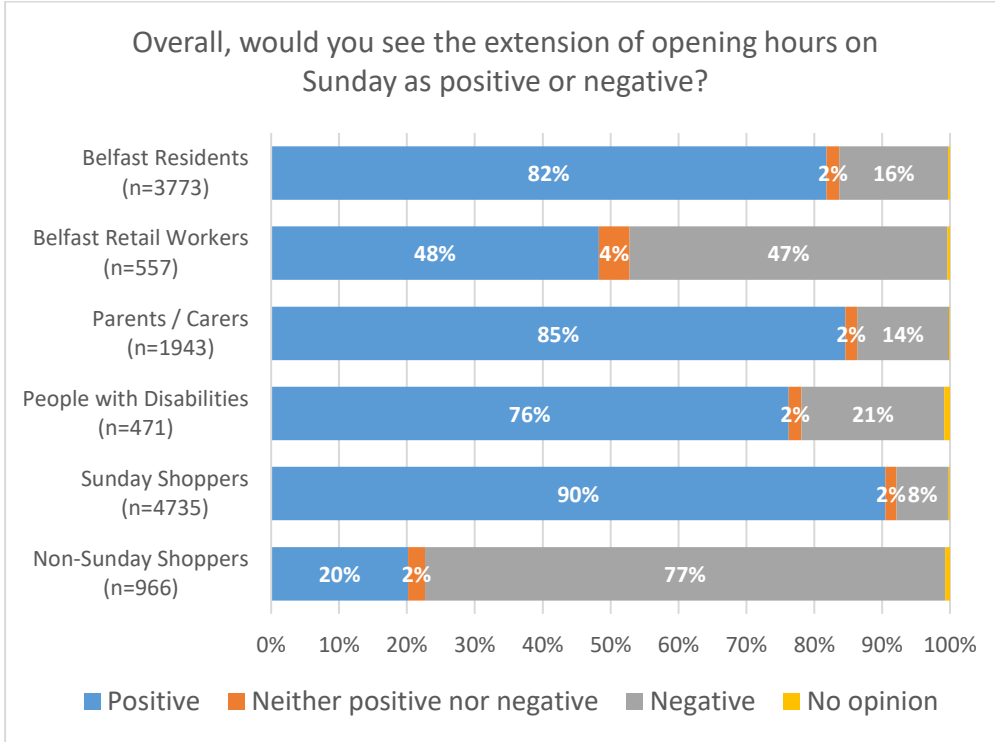
Overall, the majority of (79%) individuals expressed that the extension of Sunday opening hours would be positive, with 19% reporting it as a negative.



Disaggregation by specific cohorts of interest shows a range of perspectives:

- **Belfast residents (82% positive) are in favour of extending Sunday trading hours, by a slightly larger proportion than respondents overall.**
- **Belfast Retail Workers are divided on the issue, with almost identical numbers of respondents expressing a positive or negative view.**
- **Those who stated they care for children (parents/carers) and people with disabilities are both heavily in favour of the proposal.**
- **There is a clear divide in views on the proposal based on whether the respondent currently shops on a Sunday. Those who currently shop on Sundays are 90% positive; whereas those who don't shop on Sundays are 77% negative.**
- **Views on the proposal varied by age-group. Those aged 25-40 (86% positive) were most in favour about extending opening hours on Sunday.**

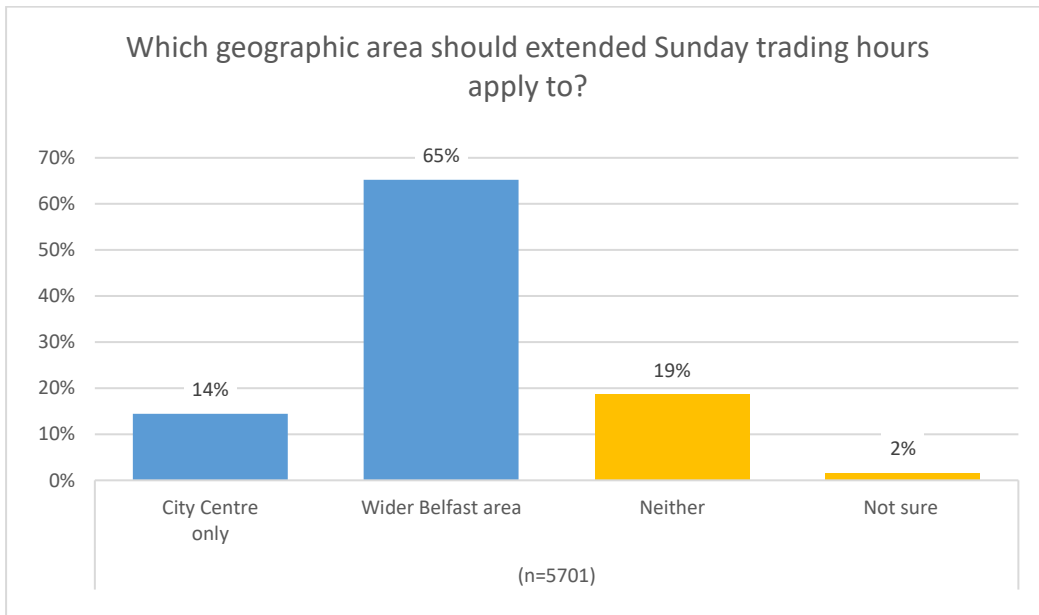
- **Members of the Roman Catholic community background (91% positive) were most in favour of extending Sunday trading; compared with those from the Protestant community background (64% positive). Those from neither background were also strongly in favour (85% positive).**



Respondents were asked to identify the factors that the council should consider most, when assessing the proposal to extend Sunday trading hours. They were allowed to pick more than one factor, and most respondents chose to do so. Responses varied depending on whether they saw the overall proposal as positive or negative.

Tourism and Visitor Experience (82%) and Economic Impact (75%) were the most selected factors by positive respondents, conversely, Worker Welfare (86%) and Community and Family Life (81%) were the most selected factors by negative respondents. Negative respondents were most likely to specify 'Other' factors, with 20% doing so. Additional factors covered a range of issues including religious observance, comparison of Belfast to other cities, sentiment that existing arrangements were archaic and concern about rest for workers.

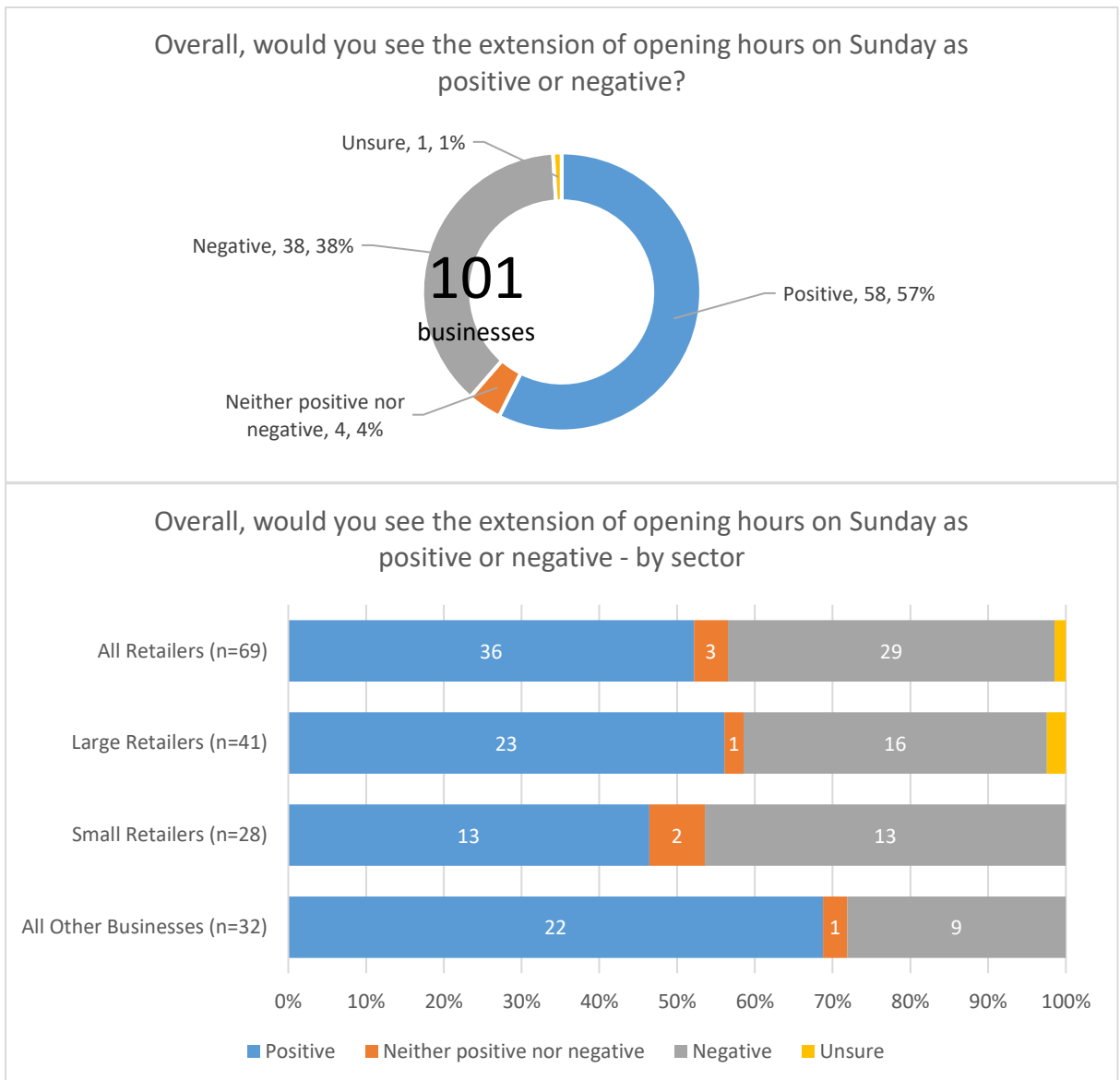
Respondents were asked where they thought the 'holiday resort' designation should apply, a large majority of respondents (65%) thought that, should the designation occur, it should apply across the entire district, rather than solely for the City Centre. This was consistent with the responses to the 2017 and 2018 consultations.



### 3.4 Key Findings (Business Survey)

Similarly, a majority (57%) of businesses seen the extension of opening hours on Sundays as a positive with 38% expressing it as a negative. Most retailers (52%) also reported extending Sunday trading hours as positive. A larger proportion of large

retailers were in favour, whereas an equal number of smaller retailers reported the extension of opening hours as both positive and negative. A majority of all other businesses (69%) seen it as a positive.

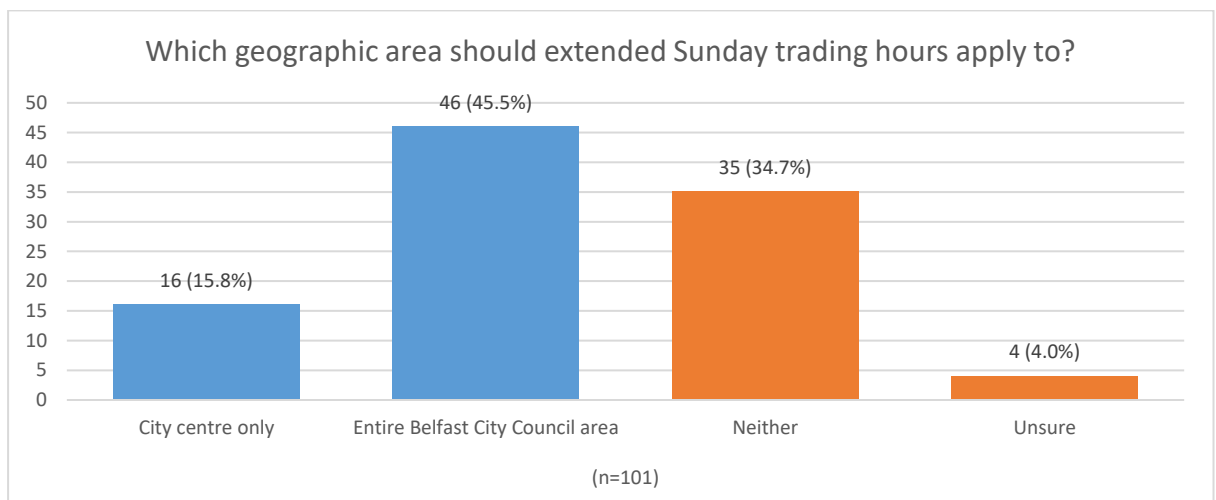


Businesses were also asked which geographic area extended Sunday trading hours should apply to. The entire Belfast City Council area was the most frequent option of responding businesses (46%). Businesses were asked to explain their answer and a selection of responses are listed below:

- ‘Having one rule for city centre and another for surrounding areas seems unnecessary and could be confusing to local patrons and tourists who

increasingly stay in and visit wider areas of the city and surrounding countryside.’

- ‘We have premises in North, East, South, West and city centre.’
- ‘Visitors want to explore whole city’
- ‘As this is related to Holiday resort status, the city centre is where the highest % of tourists will be, it is logical, as with other towns throughout NI who have had their councils designate them HRS.’



A detailed feedback report of the public consultation is attached at appendix 1. This includes a further breakdown of the respondents to each survey including crosstabs of results (where appropriate) and a summary of qualitative responses to open-ended questions.

### 3.5 Main Issues

#### Tourism and Economic Potential

Should committee agree with the in-principle decision to designate the entire Belfast City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation, large retailers will have the opportunity to extend their Sunday opening hours on 13 Sundays before the end of September as follows:

- July – 5th, 12th, 19th, 26th
- August – 2nd, 9th, 16th, 23rd, 30th
- September – 6th, 13th, 20th, 27th

Analysing the 2026 Belfast Cruise Schedule with the above dates shows that there will be 8 cruise ships docking in the city with approximately 20,000 visitors. Many respondents noted

the increase of neighbourhood tourism, highlighting that several tourist attractions and retail offerings are outside of the city centre boundary. This rationale was provided to explain the majority answer to recommend that the entire Belfast City Council area is designated as a holiday designation. Many respondents to the consultation survey highlighted the potential tourism benefits this proposal presents for the city and its neighbourhoods.

### Employee Protections

Article 11 and Schedule 2 of the legislation provide employment rights for shop workers, except those contracted to work only on Sundays. They aim to ensure that shop workers are not compelled to work on Sundays against their wishes. The new rights apply irrespective of age, length of service or hours of work. The Schedule provides that dismissal of a shop worker (including dismissal for reasons of redundancy) is unfair if the reason for it was the worker's refusal to work on Sundays. It also provides the right not to suffer any other detriment (such as denial of normal promotion or training opportunities, or refusal to pay seniority bonuses etc) for refusing to work on Sundays. All shop workers employed when the Order came into operation (1997) are automatically eligible for these rights. Those who enter a contract of employment requiring Sunday working after the commencement date will be able to 'opt out' of Sunday working subject to giving the employer three months' notice.

The core protections focus on any Sunday work rather than specific times (e.g., Sunday mornings). If a worker is protected or has opted out, the employer cannot require them to work any part of Sunday, including mornings, without agreement.

Imposing Sunday work could however raise issues if it indirectly discriminates (e.g., on religious grounds), requiring justification and possible reasonable adjustments. Otherwise, there are limited employee protections for retail workers contracted to work solely on Sunday. It should be noted that in the Republic of Ireland, where Sunday trading is effectively deregulated, there is a [Code of Practice on Sunday Working in the Retail Trade](#). The Code promotes best practice for Sunday rostering and compensation, recognising the impact on workers' quality of life while supporting business needs. It encourages consultation and agreement between employers and employees (or unions), promoting that existing staff should generally volunteer for Sunday work on a rota basis. The Code does not have the force of law, but it is admissible in evidence in proceedings before the Workplace Relations Commission, Labour Court, or civil courts.

As part of the 2018 consultation process, the Council developed a draft Charter (attached at Appendix 2). This Charter sets out a voluntary undertaking for large retailers seeking to operate extended trading hours on designated Sundays.

Should the Committee approve the implementation of the holiday resort designation, the draft Charter will be reviewed and updated in consultation with key stakeholders prior to any application process. This review will be undertaken with specific regard to the Northern Ireland Good Jobs Employment Rights Bill, to encourage retailers not to utilise zero-hours contracts in an exploitative manner when recruiting additional staff for extended Sunday trading.

### Religion

Historically, Sunday trading laws in the UK have long reflected religious and cultural traditions, particularly the observance of Sunday as a day of worship and rest for many citizens within the Christian faith. This significance continues to resonate with many citizens, for whom Sunday serves as a vital day for religious practice, family time, and recuperation. The consultation process clearly reflected these concerns. A substantial number of respondents, particularly in response to all open-ended questions, expressed opposition to the proposed extension of Sunday trading hours on religious grounds. Many highlighted the potential erosion of Sunday's unique status as a day set apart from commercial activity, emphasising its importance for spiritual wellbeing and community cohesion.

### 3.6 Additional Responses

There were written responses submitted on behalf of five organisations (USDAW, Belfast Chamber, Translink, NI Hotel Federation and Association of Convenience Shops). These are summarised below and attached at Appendices 3-7.

- **USDAW - Usdaw's survey of 220 Belfast retail workers shows strong opposition to extending Sunday trading. 82% view it negatively, with 76% of working parents and carers saying it would negatively impact their family life. Respondents fear increased pressure to work Sundays without additional pay, reduced wellbeing, and harm to work-life balance. They report that their workers would rather be spending time with family and engaging in community, sports and leisure activities or attending church. Usdaw also highlights concerns about negative impacts on smaller retailers (referencing in particular St. George's Market traders) who can already open and**

argues there is no clear economic benefit, urging the Council to retain existing arrangements.

- **Belfast Chamber – A May 2026 Belfast Chamber member survey of 94 businesses found strong overall support for extending Sunday trading. 66% believe it would benefit business or the city, and 78.7% support opening before 1pm. Most (68.1%) do not anticipate staffing difficulties. Feedback highlights benefits for tourism, footfall, city activity and business flexibility, though a minority raised concerns around staffing pressures, employee wellbeing, and preserving Sunday as a day of rest.**
- **Translink - while recognising potential benefits of extended Sunday trading, Translink stresses severe funding constraints. Current resources do not allow for extended or enhanced Sunday services across bus and rail networks, and any changes would require dedicated additional funding. Translink therefore takes no position on the proposal but confirms that it lacks capacity to support it operationally at present.**
- **NI Hotel Federation - the NIHF supports limited extension of Sunday trading hours via holiday resort designation, viewing it as a pragmatic step to boost Belfast’s weekend economy. Current restrictions create a morning activity gap despite strong demand and high Saturday hotel occupancy. Extended hours would enhance the visitor experience, increase dwell time and spending, support hotels, and create a more vibrant, family-friendly city. The flexible, seasonal approach is welcomed as balanced and aligned with tourism needs.**
- **Association of Convenience Shops - ACS opposes extending Sunday trading hours, arguing there is no unmet consumer need as convenience stores already open freely. The proposal would mainly benefit large supermarkets, displacing trade from independent retailers without increasing overall spending. It also extends beyond the city centre rationale and lacks evidence for supporting high street regeneration. ACS urges the Council to prioritise issues like rates, crime and accessibility instead of changes that could disadvantage small businesses and workers.**
- **Retail NI - Officers also engaged the Chief Executive of Retail NI, who re-affirmed the organisation’s opposition to any designation of holiday resort designation within the city (particularly at a citywide geography), mirroring previous representations on this issue.**

### 3.7 Animation

There is currently no budget available to deliver a dedicated city-centre, family friendly animation programme on Sunday

mornings during any period of extended Sunday trading hours. Staffing resources are also prioritised on the successful delivery of the Fleadh. Nevertheless, there is scope to develop a comprehensive calendar of events highlighting 'What's On' across festivals, events, and activities delivered by both the council and partners funded through CMAG, CFF and the Bank of Ideas.

### **3.8 Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. Should council designate the entire Belfast City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation, officers from the Place and Economy department will lead the preparations required to enable larger retailer businesses to apply for extended Sunday trading hours. This will include the development of a schedule that will be made available to the public upon request. The Building Control Service currently perform the enforcement role in relation to Sunday trading under the 1997 Order and the designation of the Belfast district as a 'holiday resort' would require an additional level of resource to manage the registration of participating shops and enforcement of same.

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

The decision to designate the entire Belfast City Council area (Sunday Openings 2026) has been subjected to an equality screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment. The policy has been screened out with identified mitigating actions. These actions include monitoring and evaluation of the impact of extended Sunday opening hours. While the council's designation will impact future years, elected members do have the opportunity to de-designate the district as a 'holiday resort'."

During discussion, the Director highlighted the engagement that had been offered and undertaken with stakeholders.

#### **Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Beattie,  
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the Committee:

- Agrees that a Pilot-Scheme be undertaken to designate the entire Belfast City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation under Article 6, paragraph (9) of the Shops Sunday (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 for the two Sundays during the

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Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann on 2nd August and 9th August from 11am; and

- Agrees that a timebound Working Group be set-up with relevant stakeholders and trade unions to further engage on the issues, to include consideration of a city centre animation programme and potential alternative activities, funding options and a review of the pilot by the end of October.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Nelson,  
Seconded by Councillor Long,

That the Committee agrees to proceed with the recommendations as outlined in the report.

On a vote, four Members voted for the amendment and sixteen against and it was declared lost.

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor Beattie and seconded by Councillor de Faoite was put to the meeting when fifteen Members voted for the proposal and five against and it was subsequently declared carried.

**Proposal 2**

Moved by Councillor Murphy,  
Seconded by Councillor Brennan and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees to write to The Executive Office to affirm the Council's support for the 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill and to request that it was progressed as a priority.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- Noted the results of the public consultation and additional direct responses which had been received from stakeholders, attached as appendices 3-7 of the report;
- Noted the issues and viewpoints expressed in the course of the public consultation process, as set out in section 3.5 of the report;
- Agreed that a Pilot-Scheme be undertaken to designate the entire Belfast City Council area as a Holiday Resort designation under Article 6, paragraph (9) of the Shops Sunday (Sunday Trading &c.) (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 for the two Sundays during the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann on 2nd August and 9th August from 11am;
- Agreed that a timebound Working Group be set-up with relevant stakeholders and trade unions to further engage on the issues, to

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include consideration of a city centre animation programme and potential alternative activities, funding options and a review of the pilot by the end of October;

- Noted that any resolution passed by the Council on 1st June, 2026 in relation to the pilot scheme would subsequently require the Council to de-designate the district as a 'holiday resort' on completion of the pilot; and
- Agreed to write to The Executive Office to affirm the Council's support for the 'Good Jobs' Employment Rights Bill and to request that it be progressed as a priority.

**Belfast Child - Seamless Pathway  
for Children and Families**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

**1.1 The purpose of this paper is to submit for the consideration of Members the 'Belfast Child' Strategy document for formal endorsement, following its consideration at the Community Planning Partnership on 16 April 2026.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- I. note the work undertaken by the Belfast Area Outcomes Group to develop 'Belfast Child' blueprint under the auspices of the Belfast Agenda commitments.**
- II. note that the Community Planning Partnership considered the Belfast Child document on 16 April 2026, and requested that individual partner organisations seek endorsement through their respective governance and decision-making processes.**
- III. note the next steps for the development of an associated action plan, to be brought back to the Partnership in due course; and**
- IV. consider and agree that Council endorses the 'Belfast Child' blueprint, in principle, with any specific resource considerations emerging from the action plan relating to the Council brought back for members consideration and approval.**

- V. agree that the Chief Executive (or a nominee) attend the proposed launch event.

**3.0 Main Report**

- 3.1** Members will be aware of the importance given within the Belfast Agenda to supporting our children and young people to reach their full potential and achieve the best educational outcomes and life chances possible. As part of the associated 4-year implementation plan, there is a commitment to ‘design a seamless developmental pathway’ for children and create a joint resourced delivery model’ for children aged 0-8 years.
- 3.2** In line with this commitment, the Belfast Area Outcomes Group (convened by the Belfast Health & Social Care Trust) has led the development of the ‘Belfast Child’ pathway framework’ which is attached at Appendix 1. This blueprint sets out a citywide vision to ensure that every child aged 0-8 years in Belfast can benefit from a seamless developmental journey. It’s built on a shared commitment to a whole-child, whole-family, and whole-community model, which creates support networks where families, communities, and services all play a crucial role.
- 3.3** This document shares the story of how a vision has been collaboratively designed, drawing on the wisdom of experts and the vast experience of Belfast’s community and government partners. Ultimately, this document provides a clear roadmap for how partners will work together to create an environment where every child in Belfast can truly thrive. The shared vision is that every child in the city is supported to realise their full potential through a clear commitment by agencies and services in Belfast to align, connect and collaborate around families. This collaborative approach aims to deliver the best possible outcomes for children.
- 3.4** The Belfast Child is intentionally ambitious. It seeks to build an integrated, city-wide support ecosystem capable of providing timely and effective intervention beginning at pre-conception and continuing until at least age eight. This represents the first stage of a journey that will, over time, extend to all children and young people under 18, aligning with the Belfast Agenda’s 2035 vision.
- 3.5** At the Community Planning Partnership meeting on 16 April 2026, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust presented the final draft of the Belfast Child document for the consideration of the CPP. Members will note that there was broad support for the Belfast Child framework and the ambitions contained therein including Belfast becoming a ‘Child Friendly City’. It was acknowledged however, that further work still remained

to create a supporting implementation/action plan as well as the need for individual partner organisations to seek endorsement through their respective governance and decision making processes of the Belfast Child framework.

- 3.6 Within this context, correspondence from the Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has been received by the Chief Executive (attached an Appendix 2), requesting that the Council consider the 'Belfast Child' document, with a view to supporting its endorsement. It outlines the opportunity presented to create important foundations for Belfast's development as a truly child friendly city and represents a significant opportunity to strengthen partnership delivery under the Belfast Agenda. The correspondence also requests the possible involvement of the Chief Executive in the future launch of the 'Belfast Child' document.

#### Next steps

- 3.7 It is understood that the next steps for the Belfast Area Outcomes Group is to engage with partners to consider key actions and potential lead partners in the development of an action plan with clear resource considerations set out. It would be the intention that the emerging draft action plan would be brought back to the Community Planning Partnership for consideration in due course. Any proposals which relate to the Council would be subject to direct engagement and be subject to established governance and decision-making processes.
- 3.8 Members are asked to consider endorsing the Belfast Child Strategy Document, in principle, with any specific resource commitments emerging from the action planning process to be brought back for members consideration in due course.

#### Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.9 There are no immediate financial or human resource implications arising directly from this report. Resource implications will be understood and considered following the development of a detailed action plan, which will provide assurance around the delivery of the Belfast Child Strategy.

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

- 3.10 The Belfast Child document has a strong focus on equality and inclusion. It explicitly recognises the need to support high-risk and vulnerable groups and promotes a preventative, whole system approach that will have positive equality and good relations impacts across the city. Any Equality Impact

**Assessment would be carried out by BHSCT who are the lead for this work. There are no rural needs implications.”**

During discussion, the Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty answered a range of questions relating to accessibility, funding and viability of the blueprint, realignment of resources of statutory agencies and child-led co-design.

One Member suggested that reference to SEN children’s journey should also be discussed as part of the blueprint.

One Member suggested that Belfast Area Outcomes Group be invited to present at the Party Group Leaders Forum to discuss the approach and application of the document.

After discussion, the Committee:

1. noted the work undertaken by the Belfast Area Outcomes Group to develop ‘Belfast Child’ blueprint under the auspices of the Belfast Agenda commitments;
2. noted that the Community Planning Partnership considered the Belfast Child document on 16th April, 2026, and requested that individual partner organisations seek endorsement through their respective governance and decision-making processes;
3. noted the next steps for the development of an associated action plan, to be brought back to the Partnership in due course;
4. agreed that Council endorses the ‘Belfast Child’ blueprint, in principle, subject to feedback from the Committee, with any specific resource considerations emerging from the action plan relating to the Council brought back for members consideration and approval;
5. agreed that the Chief Executive (or a nominee) attend the proposed launch event; and
6. agreed that the Belfast Area Outcomes Group be invited to present at the Party Group Leaders Forum.

**Outcome of the Judicial Review in relation to Animal Welfare Services and new Animal Welfare Legislation**

(Ms. H. Morrissey, City Protection Manager and Mr. D. Bone, City Service Manager, attended in connection with this item)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Members on the outcome of the High Court Judicial Review in relation to Animal Welfare Services and to advise the Committee about**

new Animal Welfare legislation that the Department intends to introduce in April 2027.

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to approve:**

- 1. Support to write to the AERA Committee (Appendix 1).**
- 2. The continuation of the existing Animal Welfare Service Delivery Model to March 2027 subject to the agreement of respective Councils within each region, to enable continued service delivery.**
- 3. Note that a review of future Service Delivery Options may be required depending upon the response from the AERA Committee.**

**3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 Since April 2012, councils have held responsibility for the enforcement of the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011, in relation to non-farmed animals, namely companion animals and equines.**

**3.2 Region and Belfast which is a standalone region. The five regions employ a total of 10 Animal Welfare Officers (who are authorised to carry out work in all 11 council areas) and 5 administration staff across NI. Based on the contents of this report, members are asked to approve the continuation of the existing Animal Welfare Service Delivery Model to March 2027, subject to the agreement of the other councils to enable continued service delivery.**

**3.3 The Animal Welfare Service within councils was fully funded (approx. £1.25M per annum) by DAERA until August 2023, when DAERA advised that it was unable to continue to provide funding to support councils in relation to non-farmed animal welfare services.**

**3.4 A Judicial Review was then lodged in the High Court by Belfast City Council & Fermanagh Omagh District Council on behalf of SOLACE against DAERA, to challenge the Department's decision to cease funding of the Animal Welfare Service.**

**3.5 The court found that there was a breach on the grounds of a procedural legitimate expectation. The Judge concluded that *'the making of that decision by the Minister without giving advanced notice to the relevant Assembly Committee was in breach of a procedural expectation.'***

- 3.6 The Judgement of the Court can be found at the following link:  
<https://www.judiciaryni.uk/judicial-decisions/2025-nikb-58>
- 3.7 Members are advised that the final Court Order required the following:
- Before making any decision in respect of funding for non-farmed animal welfare services provided by district councils for the financial year 2026/2027 only, the Department must give such advance notice to the AERA Committee for its consideration and must notify councils once it has done so.
  - DAERA must reimburse the Councils' full legal costs in relation to the Judicial Review.
- 3.8 At a meeting of councils CXs SOLACE on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2026, it was agreed that councils would:
- a) Continue current delivery model for the Animal Welfare Service in 2026-27, which is subject to the consideration of the 11 councils on an individual basis;
  - b) Consider options regarding the future delivery of the Animal Welfare Service from April 2027 onwards, in advance of the 2027-28 rates setting process, and when the funding position is clarified by the DAERA Minister.
- 3.9 Officers are now aware that a letter from the Minister / Permanent Secretary was tabled at the AERA Committee on Thursday 16 April 2026. The letter advised the Committee that DAERA does not intend to provide funding to councils for Animal Welfare Services in 2026/27 due to budget constraints. Members of the Committee raised a query around the budget and requested further explanation as to why the budget changed, why the Department was deciding now when budget was not yet finalised and also asked if the Department had made a bid for the funding in 2026/27.
- 3.10 Members are asked to consider whether they wish to write to the AERA Committee setting out the Council's position in advance of the Departmental response to the questions raised and any further debate about funding.
- 3.11 On 18th February 2026, the Minister outlined that officials would now take forward legislation to require sellers and suppliers of puppies, and sellers of kittens, under six months of age, to register with their local council. The registered seller and/or supplier will be required to meet specified conditions of registration.

- 3.12 Whilst officers welcome any steps to improve animal welfare it has been stressed to Departmental officials that councils do not have the capacity to implement this legislation and therefore there needs to be appropriate assurance around the resources which will be provided to councils to deliver this additional function.
- 3.13 The Department has indicated that the registration scheme would be self-financing. Officers have asked for evidence to demonstrate that would be the case. To date this additional, supporting financial information has not been provided by the Department.

**Financial & Resource Implications**

- 3.14 The annual cost of operating the basic shared Animal Welfare function within Belfast City Council is approx. £210k. Since funding ceased this has been met from reserves.

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

- 3.15 No equality or good relations implications envisaged.”

During discussion, the City Protection Manager advised that officers would be writing to SOLACE on the matter also.

After discussion, the Committee agreed the recommendations as outlined in the report.

**Call for Evidence by Criminal Justice Committee**

The Committee was reminded that, on 3 March 2026, the Justice Minister had introduced a draft Criminal Justice (Sentencing etc) Bill. The Bill was in response to a review that was undertaken by the Department of Justice in respect of sentencing in criminal matters in Northern Ireland.

It was reported that, as a result of the review, the Department had identified a number of areas that needed to be addressed, one such area was the need to legislate for a new offence of assaulting a public worker.

The City Solicitor highlighted that the new offence was very important to the Council as it was the first time that there was a differentiation in the legislation acknowledging public workers. The proposed offence identified the vital role that public workers, whether employed or engaged, have to ensure the delivery of public services and that all public workers should be able to carry out their functions without fear of violence, abuse or intimidation.

The proposed Bill included the new offence at clause 37, assault of a public worker who was exercising one of their functions. The public worker can either be paid or unpaid

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and was defined as someone employed or engaged to a) provide a service to the public, b) perform a public duty, or c) deliver a public service.

Clause 37 would deal with assaults that would fall within the threshold of common assault but under the new offence there was a higher sentencing maximum of 12 months custodial sentence as opposed to 6 months for common assault. Under the proposed Bill, assaults on public workers would be deemed to be indictable triable summarily offences and therefore were not subject to a summary only time limit of 6 months from the date of the offence for a prosecution to be laid before the court.

It was reported that the draft Bill made provisions for an allegation of aggravation by reason of being committed against a public worker to be specified alongside a charge of a specified offence. If the offence and the allegation are proven, then the court must specify so and record the aggravation in the conviction.

Any offender that was convicted and their offending was accepted to be aggravated by the fact that it was on a public worker would result in the seriousness of the offence being increased and this should be acknowledged by the sentencing court when sentencing the offender by explaining how this aggravation had affected the sentence imposed.

The proposed offence of assault on a public worker and the provision for aggravation where an offence was committed against public workers were welcomed steps for the protection of public sector workers, including Council staff.

The Council employs over 2000 workers that were required to deliver a wide range of public services on a daily basis, and the proposed legislation, if enacted, would only serve to strengthen the Council's zero tolerance approach to assaults on staff whilst the increase in sentencing powers would act as a further deterrent to any potential offenders.

The City Solicitor advised that submissions had been drafted for consideration in response to the Bill in relation to Part 6, draft Clauses 37-39 in respect of assault on public workers. She also highlighted that the provision within the Bill on aggravated events where the person was vulnerable should also be commended.

During discussion, one Member questioned the potential for the powers to include the seizure of illegal e-scooters. The City Solicitor advised that this would be reviewed.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Approved the draft submission (Appendix 2), as the Council's formal response.
- Endorsed the Council commending the provision within the Bill on aggravated events where the person is vulnerable.
- In relation to the potential of the Justice Bill to grant statutory powers to seize illegal e-scooters, the Committee delegated authority to the City Solicitor to include in the aforementioned response, if appropriate.

### **Summer Scheme Small Grant Funding 26/27**

(The Committee agreed to consider this item alongside 3.b) Requests for Funding)

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in May, the People and Communities Committee had received an update on summer programmes supported by Neighbourhood Services, which included an update on funding provided through the Summer Scheme small grant programme. Following discussion, the Committee agreed that; ***'the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 22nd May, be requested to provide the maximum Summer Scheme Small Grants award to all organisations which had scored over 50 within the original assessment'***.

It was reported that the total budget required to award all applicants scoring over 50 100% of their requested eligible costs would be £214,418. This would require an additional budget of £45,874 and Neighbourhood Services did not have any available budget that could be used to cover this additional cost.

During discussion, in response to a Member's question regarding transportation to youth schemes, the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services advised that a report would be submitted to the People and Communities Committee once evaluation of this year's summer schemes had taken place.

After discussion, the Committee agreed that the additional budget required of £45,874 to award all applicants scoring over 50 100% of their requested eligible costs be approved from the Discretionary Fund Reserve.

### **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

#### **Physical Programme Update**

The Committee:

#### ***Capital Programme***

- **Waterfront Hall - Chiller Units** – Noted that a satisfactory tender return had been received; that the Director of Finance had confirmed that this project was within the affordability limits of the Council; and agreed that a maximum of £545,000 be allocated.
- **Waterfront Hall - Smoke Curtains** – Noted that this project was being removed from the Capital Programme.
- **Drumglass Park SuDS Project** – Noted that this project with DfI be added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow the project to be developed.

#### ***Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund***

- Noted the update regarding NRF projects as outlined at 3.6 of the report.

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**Local Community Ownership Fund**

- Noted that the £1.5m Local Community Ownership Fund was launched on 20th May and that the Expressions of Interest process was currently open.

**Finance, Procurement and Performance**

**Contracts Update**

The Committee:

- Approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 1**)
- Approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 2**)
- Approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 3**)
- Noted the award of retrospective STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 4**)

**Table 1: Competitive Tenders**

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Supply and delivery of uniforms, footwear and PPE	Up to 5 years	£1,500,000	S Grimes	This is a recurring contract for supply and delivery of specific uniforms, footwear and various PPE to BCC stores that are required throughout BCC for services to carry out their daily operations. The contract will include clauses that will ensure the provision of agreed corporate branding and logos.	Y	N	N

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Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Measured Term Contract for specialist fencing contractors to supply and install new various metal fencing	Up to 4 years	£300,000	S Grimes	To support the Property Maintenance Unit with installing fencing requirements at BCC sites in line with emerging programmes of work.	N	N	N
Mobile Catering at BCC parks/open spaces	Up to 3 years	Concession Contract (Income)	D Sales	Covers the provision of mobile catering across a number of BCC parks/open spaces. Concession contract – approx. £65k per annum income.	Y	N	N
Corporate Health and Safety IT System	Up to 3 years	£31,000	P Gribben	The Corporate Health and Safety 'H&S' IT system supports the Council's established H&S management arrangements. The Council's Corporate H&S Unit uses the system to monitor the effective implementation of H&S arrangements through audits, inspections, and fire risk assessments.	N	N	N
NI Entrepreneurship Support Service (NISS/Go Succeed) – Telehandling Service	Up to 4 years	£500,000	D Martin	The telehandling service is vital to the effective running of the NISS/Go Succeed and ensuring that support is available to new and existing entrepreneurs, businesses, and	N	N	Y

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Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
				social enterprises across the region.			
Framework A – NIESS/Go Succeed - Enterprise Support Solutions	Up to 4 years	£26,000,000	D Martin	The framework will provide capacity to future proof the delivery of agile and responsive enterprise support solutions to individuals, entrepreneurs and businesses, adding value to the existing enterprise and business support provision in place across the region. BCC taking the lead in procurement exercise on behalf of all NI councils.	N	N	Y
Framework B – NIESS/Go Succeed – Specialist Mentoring Services	Up to 4 years	£6,000,000	D Martin	The framework will provide capacity to future proof the delivery of agile and responsive specialist mentoring services to individuals, entrepreneurs and businesses, adding value to the existing enterprise and business support provision in place across the region. BCC taking the lead in procurement exercise on behalf of all NI councils.	N	N	Y

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Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Framework agreement for the provision of marketing and communications services	Up to 5 years	£5,000,000	E McConville	A framework of suppliers with marketing and communications services expertise is an effective way of meeting Marketing and Corporate Communications service requirements where, on occasions, the scope and timing of required outputs cannot be specified. In certain circumstances the framework would be utilised where the skills and expertise are not available in house to deliver services required.	Y	N	N
Supply and delivery of goalposts and associated accessories and equipment	Up to 3 years	£48,900	S Leonard	Supply of a range of goalposts and related accessories and equipment for installation at new facilities and upgrade of existing sports pitches within OSS/CNS department	N	N	N
A benchmarking exercise on tourism project operators to support BRCD projects	Up to 6 months	£37,000	S McNicholl	To appoint a provider to conduct a benchmarking exercise on tourism project operators to support BRCD projects	N	BRCD Executive Board	Y

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**Table 2: Single Tender Actions**

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason	Other Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
The repair, deployment, filling and storage of 20 beacons	Up to 5 years	£850,000	D Sales	<p>A recent open tender exercise for this requirement did not provide a suitable bid. The original tender was for a 3+2 year contract subject to annual review.</p> <p>The Procurement Act permits switching to a Direct Award (STA) should no responses or suitable responses be received following an advertised procurement exercise.</p> <p>The Dept have confirmed this is Works contract; therefore, it is considered a below threshold contract under the Procurement Act (£5.3m threshold value for Works).</p>	Logwood Plant Centre LTD	1	N	N

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Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason	Other Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Distribution for City Matters and any other bespoke maildrops	Up to 2 years	£100,000	E McConville	Following a previous a tender exercise where no bids received were received and further market research it has been determined that Royal Mail Door to Door are the only supplier who can provide the service required.	Royal Mail Door to Door	3	N	N
To deliver collaborative research and development project - Belfast Region City Deal	Up to 12 months	£90,000	S McNicholl	This is a proposed collaborative research and development project with the Connected Places Catapult to co-design and pilot a methodology to support SMEs involved in City Deal innovation projects. CPC are contributing 50% of budget costs.	Connected Place Catapult	6	N	Y - CPC are contributing 50% of budget costs.
Removal, Storage and Retrieval of Office Records T629(a)	Up to 6 months	£28,000	Nora Largey	STA is required to ensure the continuity of services required to ensure the safe storage	Morgan Document Security	11	N	N

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Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason	Other Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
				of records for the Council. This requirement has been out of contract for a significant period of time. Progress on re-tendering has been delayed due to the continued critical staffing levels and exceptional demand on IGU resources. Plan now in place with Dept to progress and award a replacement tender by December 2026.				

**Table 3: Modification to Contract**

Title of Contract	Original Duration & Value	Modification Required	SRO	Description	Supplier
Provision of Traffic Management Services (T2578)	Up to 5 years & £200k	Additional £300,000	D Martin	At the time of the tender (Q1 FY25/26), in advance of the scope of road closures, logistics and Park and Ride requirements being understood in	TCMC Crowded Space Ltd t/a The Traffic Management Company

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Title of Contract	Original Duration & Value	Modification Required	SRO	Description	Supplier
				<p>detail, it was envisaged that the traffic management requirements for Fleadh 26 could be delivered through the new T2578 contract under the contract option to cover 'Other events'.</p> <p>However, following engagement with statutory agencies, detailed planning and the need for additional measures, including security considerations, a final draft plan and costings has been prepared and there is a need to extend the overall contract by up to £300k.</p> <p>This represents a procurement risk as this level of overspend under the contract could be considered a material change under the Public Contracts Regulations 2015. However,</p>	

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Title of Contract	Original Duration & Value	Modification Required	SRO	Description	Supplier
				<p>given the complexities of the plan, timescales and the statutory requirements e.g. in relation to road closures, it was considered essential to be able to proceed using the existing contract. To help mitigate this risk work is underway to put in place a new tender to cover traffic management requirements for Fleadh 27.</p>	
Provision of Autodesk Software Subscription (T2440)	Up to 3 years & £74k	Additional 1 year and £30,848.50	S McNicholl	<p>A 1 year extension and increase in value will allow for the Council to carry out a corporate review of the licenses in 2027 to align with a re-tender and contract award in December 27 and avail of a significantly discounted rate for 1 year.</p>	Pentagon Solutions Ltd

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**Table 4: Retrospective Single Tender Actions**

Title of Contract	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason	Other Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Removal, Storage and Retrieval of Office Records T629(a)	Up to 6 months	£28,000	Nora Largey	Further to STA request above this is retrospective STA approval to cover services from 01 Dec 2025 to 31 <sup>st</sup> May 26.	Morgan Document Security	11	N	N

**Diversity Mark Summit 2026 – Sponsorship**

It was reported that approval was sought to sponsor the Diversity Mark Summit 2026 taking place at Titanic Belfast on 7th October, 2026.

It was highlighted that the investment required for this sponsorship was £3000, which included ten places at the summit and a seat at the Steering Committee, and would be met from the existing Organisation Development budget.

The Committee agreed to the sponsorship of the Diversity Mark Summit 2026.

**Equality and Good Relations**

**Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting of 6th May, 2026**

The Committee approved the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 6th May, including:

***Members Update – Red Cross Presentation***

- Shared City Partnership recommends that members note the presentation.

***Good Relations Interface Programme***

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report and agree the proposed approach detailed in the Shared City Partnership Minutes.

***Asylum Funding Update***

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee notes the contents of the report.

***TEO Framework for Race Relations Consultation – BCC Response***

- The Shared City Partnership agreed the draft response and recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report and approve the draft response for submission to the Executive Office.

The Committee noted that, in line with the consultation closing date of 3rd June, this would be submitted as a draft response, subject to ratification by Council on 1st June and any further comments or amendments at Council would be forwarded to the Executive Office.

***PEACEPLUS – Local Community Action Plan Secretariat Update***

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

***Peace Plus Thriving and Peaceful Communities Thematic Update***

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

***Peace Plus Celebrating Culture and Diversity Thematic Update***

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

***Community Regeneration and Transformation Thematic Update***

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

***Any Other Business***

- The Shared City Partnership thanked Mr. Gunn for his contributions to the Partnership and wished him well in his retirement.

**Operational Issues**

**Minutes of the Party Group Leaders  
Consultative Forum of 14th May, 2026**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 14th May, 2026.

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**Requests for use of the City Hall  
and the provision of Hospitality**

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1 of the report:

<b>NAME OF ORGANISATION</b>	<b>FUNCTION DATE</b>	<b>FUNCTION DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>CRITERIA MET</b>	<b>CHARGES</b>
Shankill Baptist Church	21 August 2026	<b>130<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Commemoration and Celebration</b> for local congregation who work in the community assisting in local nursing homes, running summer football camps, children's events, providing a safe space for young people of the Shankill  Numbers attending - 70		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NO ROOM HIRE</li> <li>• Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></li> </ul>
British Council	5 November 2026	<b>British Council Schools Connect - COP31</b> - The debate engages students (aged 16-18) from approx. 30 schools in Northern Ireland to debate live and topical COP31 issues through a climate negotiation simulation.  Numbers attending - 150		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room Hire of £1250</li> <li>• Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></li> </ul>
MDSG (Mineral Deposits Studies Group)	5 January 2027	<b>MDSG Winter Conference Dinner</b> - Conference showcases the latest scientific research in economic geology, attended by academic staff, PhD students and personnel from government and industry.  Numbers attending - 160	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room Hire of £1250</li> <li>• Any applicable additional charges</li> </ul>

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGES
The Open University	8 March 2027	<p><b>Open University Council Dinner</b> – Tours, reception, dinner and entertainment to mark a quarterly meeting of the University’s executive governing body in Belfast</p> <p>Numbers attending - 70</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room Hire of £450</li> <li>• Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></li> </ul>
QUB School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering	24 March 2027	<p><b>Emerald Isle Conference Dinner 2027</b> – Reception, dinner and entertainment as highlight of social activities for conference exploring sustainable chemistry and engineering.</p> <p>Numbers expected; 200</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room Hire of £1250</li> <li>• Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></li> </ul>
British Poultry Council Ltd	13 April 2027	<p><b>President’s Gala dinner</b> - Reception, dinner and entertainment to close 3 day international poultry industry conference being held at the Europa</p> <p>Numbers attending; 225</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Room Hire of £1250</li> <li>• Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></li> </ul>

The Committee also agreed to the request for filming of the John Luke mural by the Ulster Scots Commissioner.

**Minutes of the Language Strategy  
Working Group of 27th April, 2026**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Language Strategy Working Group of 27th April, 2026.

**Request for use of City Hall grounds  
for Summer Cinema 2026**

The Committee considered the request from Belfast One to hold two 'Summer Cinema' events on City Hall lawns on Sunday, 19th July and Sunday, 26th July, 2026

The Committee:

1. Authorised the use of City Hall grounds on dates noted above;
2. Authorised the events to take place on the basis of submission of an event management plan and risk assessment to ensure delivery of safe public events; and
3. Delegated Authority to the City Solicitor to agree an alternative date with Belfast One, if required, should issues arise for the 26th July screenings.

**Request for long term loan of Strand Cinema Key**

The Committee was advised that a request had been received for a longer-term loan from Mimi Turtle, Chief Executive of The Strand Arts Centre for the loan of the Strand Cinema opening commemorative key and presentation box.

It was reported that the key was not on general display in the City Hall and was currently in storage. The key was not believed to be of significant financial value but of course is of interest from a social historical perspective and was one of a number presented to Lord Mayors during the picture house boom of the 1920s and 30s in the collection.

The Strand Arts Centre had confirmed they will have a museum grade cabinet in place for the display of historic artefacts and so the items display would be both appropriate and secure.

The Committee approved the request for the loan of the Strand Cinema opening commemorative key and presentation box by the Strand Arts Centre, subject to a legal agreement.

The Committee also noted that an update would be provided in relation to the Council's letter to the Department for Communities regarding the funding for Strand Cinema.

**Issues raised in advance by Members**

**Safety Issues in the City Centre**  
**(Councillor Nelson to raise) (RESTRICTED)**

Councillor Nelson raised the issue of ongoing safety concerns in the City Centre. Several Members highlighted concerns regarding staff safety, business continuity, regeneration models and the need for engagement with communities, voluntary sector and government agencies.

The Chief Executive noted that meeting with key stakeholders was scheduled to discuss the issues which had been raised.

The Committee noted the concerns which had been raised regarding safety in the City Centre and the plans to address the issues.

**Eternal Funding for Pre-Accession Assistance**  
**(Councillor de Faoite to raise)**

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,  
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the Committee agrees to write to the EU Commission and the British and Irish Governments to request that Northern Ireland be granted access to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for the ability to draw down on the available funding.

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

Chairperson

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## People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 12th May, 2026

### MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Cobain (Chairperson);  
Alderman Copeland; and  
Councillors Abernethy, Black, Bower,  
Bradley, R. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan,  
Collins, M. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran,  
Flynn, Garrett, Magee, Murray, McKeown  
and Verner.
- In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and  
Neighbourhood Services;  
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;  
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Open Spaces,  
Resources, Fleet and Transport;  
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood  
Services;  
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building  
Control; and  
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

### Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Maghie.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 14th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 5th May, subject to the amendment of the decision under the heading 'Integrated Advice Partnership and Community Support Funding 2026/27' to reflect that the Committee had agreed to support 'Option 1', as opposed to 'Option 2', in respect of the dispersal of the 'uplift funding'.

### Declarations of Interest

Councillor Doran declared an interest in respect of the item 'Summer Scheme Programme' in that he was associated with groups in receipt of funding under the terms of the programme. He left the meeting whilst the matter was under consideration.

### Restricted Items

**The information contained in the report associated with the following three items was restricted under Part 1, Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.**

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as

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described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

**Market Development Association**

The Committee considered correspondence which had been received from the Market Development Association (MDA) requesting that the Council consider entering into a process to enable the transfer of the management of the Market Community Centre to the MDA through a Community Asset Transfer arrangement.

The Committee agreed that officers, supported by staff from the Estates Management Unit, would engage further with the MDA to support the development of a business case. It was noted that a report outlining a range of options would be submitted for consideration in due course.

**Dog Fouling Programme/Update re: Mechanical Sweepers**

The Committee considered a report in respect of the above-mentioned matter, together with several appendices related to the report.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Flynn,  
Seconded by Councillor R. Brooks and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations as set out within the report, with the exception of 2.1, insofar as it relates to the provision of litter bins. Such a deferral would enable a report to be submitted providing further information and data. In addition, the Committee notes the growth proposals outlined within the report and the process by which they will be considered as part of the rate-setting process; and requests that a report be submitted to detail any capital costs associated with adapting additional areas within the Council's estate for the purposes of emptying and cleaning compact sweepers and dog waste collection machines.

**Benview Community Centre**

The Committee acceded to a request which had been received from representatives of Benview Community Centre to provide £800 in rental costs to enable the holding of a two-week summer scheme to be delivered by the Council's Play Development Team.

**Council Matters/Motions**

**Motion re: Public Acts of Remembrance**

Further to the decision of the Standards and Business Committee of 28th April, the Committee considered a Motion in respect of the above-mentioned matter, which had been proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor Maghie. The Motion is set out hereunder:

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“This Council recognises the profound importance of public acts of remembrance for people grieving for friends and family members across Belfast. This Council wishes to support those who have experienced loss and encourage safe and environmentally friendly acts of public remembrance within its spaces. Accordingly, the Council resolves to bring back a report that will:

- explore implementing designated memorial spaces in all parks;
- consider environmentally friendly ways for remembrance events, including 'ascent' style events, such as permanent or bookable bubble stations, kite festivals, and native butterfly releases; and
- map out how to enhance the support council gives to grieving families, for example, by developing a downloadable remembrance guide to include ideas of eco-friendly ways to mark their loss personally or publicly.”

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Bower,  
Seconded by Councillor Abernethy and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to adopt the Motion and agrees further that options relating to the planting of wild flowers and the provision of pet memorials be explored also within a report to be considered at a future meeting.

**Committee and Strategic Issues**

**2025/26 Committee Plan**

The Committee noted the contents of the year-end progress report relating to the agreed actions contained within the 2025/26 Committee Plan.

**2026/27 Committee Plan**

The Committee approved the Committee Plan and its associated actions and priorities for 2026/27.

**Operational Issues**

**Dual Language Street Signs – Monthly Report**

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at Caffrey Drive, River Close, Summerhill Walk, Lagmore View Manor, Ludlow Square, Serpentine Gardens, Glencolin Park and Blacks Court.

**Dual Language Street Signs –  
Review of Data Survey Process**

The Committee considered the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

At the SP&R meeting on 20th March 2026 officers were asked to provide a report to review the data collection process for conducting surveys associated with dual language street sign applications and to consider alternatives to increase inclusiveness.

**2.0 Recommendation**

Members are asked to consider the process for data collection for conducting surveys in relation to dual language street sign applications and to agree that the current process for domestic properties utilizing the electoral list is continued.

**3.0 Main Report**

3.1 Members are advised of the request by the SP&R Committee in March for a report to review how data relating to dual language street sign surveys is collected and to consider options to make the process more inclusive. Concerns were raised regarding occupants, not on the electoral roll, being unable to participate in street surveys, and individuals receiving two surveys for their household.

**Purpose of Street Survey**

3.2 Both the legislation and policy regarding dual language street signage requires Council to have regard to the views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street.

3.3 The legislation states: *‘In deciding whether and, if so, how to exercise its powers [to erect a nameplate expressing the name of the street in a language other than English] in relation to any street, a council shall have regard to any views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in that street.’*

3.4 Specifically in relation to the policy it states, *‘Where fifteen percent or more of the Occupiers of that street have indicated that they are in favour of the erection of a second language street sign, then such a sign may be erected, subject to the residual discretion of the Council’*. The policy further provides the following areas that may be considered when making this decision.

3.5

- (a) the views of the Occupiers of the street;
- (b) the results of the initial assessment for the application, including any identified potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs;
- (c) consideration of the local context of the application;
- (d) any other Council policies or strategies related to the application; and

(e) all material considerations relating to the application

Current Survey Process

- 3.6 The dual language street signs policy requires officers to canvass 'Occupiers' of a street to seek their views on the request to erect a street sign in a second specified language.
- 3.7 In line with the policy 'Occupiers' are any person whose name appears in the current Electoral Register (over the age of 18) plus the owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises, but not employees in such premises.
- 3.8 In addition, the policy requires that each survey should have a unique identifying number and that each survey response received by the Council for that application should be cross-referenced against that unique identifier. The policy indicates that Council may choose to audit certain responses to surveys.
- 3.9 For each survey, officers will visit the electoral office to obtain information on the numbers of occupants residing in each domestic property for a specific street. Using this information surveys will be prepared, giving each survey a unique reference number. This process allows officers to record the surveys being issued to a property and then to correlate that data with those being returned. Residents must provide a name and address on the returned survey to be a valid response as this allows checking of the address and return against the unique identifier. Names are not currently collected from the electoral register for this process. The full register is published annually and the most up to date register is used to collect survey data.
- 3.10 Surveys have been conducted using the electoral list since 1998 when the first Belfast City Council policy was developed and adopted. However, the use of a unique identifier was introduced in the 2022 policy to make the process more robust. At least 7 of the other councils in Northern Ireland with a Dual Language Street Signs Policy use electoral register data for surveying domestic residents and the one council issues one survey per property.
- 3.11 Using the electoral register information as the basis for surveys is considered to be the most robust way of identifying the numbers of residents who reside on the street and linking those numbers to individual properties for survey purposes. It also allows all individuals (not just households) to be surveyed by providing robust information on how many adults live within each housing unit.
- 3.12 Domestic properties without residents on the electoral list will not receive any survey under the current process.

- 3.13 As there is no electoral register equivalent for non-domestic properties, they are provided with one survey per address/business. The Land and Property Services (LPS) 'Pointer' data set is currently used in to establish numbers and addresses for such surveys supplemented by on site checks if required.

**Alternative Survey Options**

**One survey per dwelling**

- 3.14 There are no alternative sources of data, officers have identified, that would allow occupant numbers within residential properties to be quantified and/or associated with a particular street.
- 3.15 The 'Pointer' address database contains the common standard address for every property in Northern Ireland. LPS maintains the database with help from local councils and Royal Mail and Belfast City Council have access to this data through the NIMA agreement.
- 3.16 A position could be taken whereby every domestic address on the 'Pointer' database is sent a single survey. This would be an alternative to using the electoral list but would mean that one survey is issued per property and residents as a collective within each property would get a single vote. This may cause discontent within such properties with differing views of occupants who would all be entitled to vote under the current process if registered on the electoral list.
- 3.17 As an example of how this change could impact survey numbers for a specific street, the following real case scenario is provided. A street recently surveyed which had 41 domestic property addresses on the 'Pointer' dataset would result in 41 surveys being issued under the proposal as opposed to the actual 83 surveys issued to 39 properties based on the electoral list. (Two properties had no residents on the electoral list).
- 3.18 Whilst this approach may prove to be more inclusive in relation to properties on a street receiving a survey, it risks excluding many more individuals in households where there is more than one adult. In the example provided 42 people would not be given a vote
- 3.19 Officers would also point out that whilst Pointer is the definitive address dataset for NI it will not be 100% accurate and some properties may still not get a survey if they are not on the list. This would require supplementation with onsite checks against Pointer.

**The use of ratepayer or land registry information**

- 3.20 Councils do not currently have access to either of these datasets and for the reasons set out below consider information from both

these sources would be of limited value in relation to conducting surveys.

- 3.21 Ratepayer information held by LPS relates solely to the individual who has responsibility or is nominated to pay property tax and would not be an indicator of residency or land ownership. It is understood that Council would require a data sharing agreement with LPS to access such information and a lawful basis under GDPR giving us authority to be a recipient of such data. As with the option for one survey per household above, this option limits a survey response to only one individual who may live within the property, with no guarantee that this is their primary residence.
- 3.22 In relation to land registry information LPS also hold the 'Land Registry' for Northern Ireland and this data would prove ownership but not residency or tenancy. Searches of the Land Registry have a cost associated with them and not all properties are registered requiring further searches on the Registry of Deeds. In addition, this work would be administratively burdensome with the data obtained being of limited use in the establishment of survey data relevant to street residency.

#### Supplementing Electoral Register information

- 3.23 Officers could supplement the current process using the electoral list by offering a further single survey to any domestic dwelling where there are no residents on the electoral list. This would be in addition to sending surveys to all residents on the electoral list. For the street example above this would result in 2 additional surveys being issued, 1 each, to 2 properties being properties on the Pointer address list which had no occupants on the electoral list. There would be an additional administrative burden in the survey process if this were adopted. In addition, this approach would not provide equity as residents not on the electoral list would be treated differently, depending on whether someone else in the same dwelling was on the list or not.

#### Conclusion

- 3.24 The electoral list is used by at least 7 of the other Councils in NI with a Dual Language Street Signs policy, to conduct surveys of residents in relation to dual language street sign applications. It is the only mechanism by which the number of individuals residing in a domestic property can be determined.
- 3.25 Moving to a process of providing one survey per property would mean a much lower number of surveys being issued. In the example provided 50% reduction from 83 to 41 and occupants within properties would have to agree a collective response.

- 3.26 Similarly, whilst moving to a process of supplementing the electoral register with an additional survey for houses with no one listed would ensure that all properties receive at least one survey, this would create further complexity in the process. It may lead to criticism from other residents not on the electoral list who would not get a survey due to the fact they reside in a property with others who are.
- 3.27 Other data sources i.e., ratepayer and land registry information are not currently readily available and are also not reliable indicator of residency. The electoral register is the only data source that can be used to verify the numbers of individuals who are resident of the street being surveyed.

**Financial and Resource Implications**

- 3.28 There are no direct financial or resource implications in relation to maintaining current survey process.

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

- 3.29 None.”

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Abernethy,  
Seconded by Councillor Murray,

That the Committee agrees, in addition to issuing surveys to individuals listed within streets on the electoral register, that surveys be issued also to dwellings where no residents are listed on the electoral register; and that a report outlining any additional costs associated with such a decision be submitted for consideration.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Verner,  
Seconded by Councillor Doran,

That the proposal be rejected and, accordingly, the Committee agrees to adhere to the current process, that is, that data from the electoral register be used solely for domestic properties in relation to surveys for dual language street sign applications.

On a vote, fourteen Members voted in favour of the amendment and five against and it was declared carried. Accordingly, the amendment was adopted as the substantive motion without recourse to a further vote.

**Dual Language Street Signs – University Street  
and Streets Not Reaching 15 Per Cent Threshold**

The Committee considered the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

- 1.1 This report is provided in response to a request from a member at the P&C Committee meeting on 14th March 26 for more details to be provided for the dual language street sign application at University Street to review the decision taken to close the application.

In addition, following the meeting of council on 5th May, survey figures are provided for all applications that did not meet the 15% threshold in favour of a proposal to erect dual language street signs, the list of which was provided at April P&C Committee.

**2.0 Recommendation**

**University Street**

**2.1**

1. Members are asked to consider the information provided and the survey results for the dual language street sign application for University Street which failed to meet the 15% threshold at street survey and either: -
- (a) Agree the application should remain closed; or
  - (b) Advise officers on any other course of action with regard to this application.

**2.2**

2. Members are also asked to note:
- (a) the results of the surveys that have been closed for all other applications failing to meet the 15% threshold of those in favour of a dual language street sign.
  - (b) that applications failing to meet the 15% threshold will be included in future standard reports for information where applications are being considered by members.

**3.0 Main Report**

**University Street**

- 3.1 The dual language street sign application for University Street requesting a second language in Irish was received on 22nd September 2022. The request was made by Cllr McKeown who is member for the District Electoral Area of Botanic. A further application was received for the same street on 4th April 2025 from Cllr McKay.

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3.2 The survey of occupiers on the street was conducted between 23rd January 2025 and 7th February 2025.v

3.3 The full results of the survey are detailed in the table below with additional breakdown between domestic and non-domestic surveys as this was an issue raised in the discussion at Committee:

-

Property Type	Surveys Delivered	Surveys returned	For	Against	No Preference
Domestic (Residents on the electoral list)	90	14	12	2	0
Non-Domestic	36	10	6	1	3
	Total	24	18	3	3
	Percentage		14.28%	2.38%	2.38

3.4 The policy on dual language street signs states as follows: -

*'If the minimum threshold of fifteen percent is not met, the Applicant will be given two weeks to advise the Council of any special circumstances in relation to the application. If such special circumstances relate to the processing of a survey, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy, in conjunction with the City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services will determine whether such exceptional circumstances exist to refer the matter to Committee. Where exceptional circumstances relate to matters other than the processing of a survey, the matter will be referred to Committee. If there are no special circumstances, the application will end.'*

3.5 In accordance with the policy the applicant was advised by letter that the street failed to meet the 15% threshold and the applicant was given two weeks to provide details of any special circumstances pertaining to the application. This correspondence was issued on 27th February 2025 with a deadline of 14th March 2025. No correspondence detailing any special circumstances was received and the applications were closed.

3.6 Members are further advised that the current policy states

*'The Council will retain a residual discretion to decide to erect or not to erect a street sign in a language other than English in certain circumstances. This will be done on a case-by-case basis. It may be appropriate to depart from the procedures in this policy when there are clear reasons for doing so. This may include considering:*

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- (a) the views of the Occupiers of the street.*
- (b) the results of the initial assessment for the application, including any identified potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs;*
- (c) consideration of the local context of the application;*
- (d) any other Council policies or strategies related to the application; and*
- (e) all material considerations relating to the application'*

**Other applications where support for the erection of dual language nameplates was less than 15%**

- 3.7 In the report provided to People and Communities Committee in April a list of streets was presented where the support for the erection of dual language nameplates was less than 15%. For noting, these are listed below at 3.10 and the results of the surveys carried out are provided for information.
- 3.8 Officers followed the policy for each of these applications, including consideration of any exceptional circumstances presented by a small number of applicants following the procedure as described in paragraph 3.4 above.
- 3.9 None of these were deemed to be exceptional circumstances, and as such all applications were closed.

Street	Language	Surveys Issued	For	Against	No Preference
Belmont Avenue	Irish	121	10 (8.26%)	38 (31.40%)	2 (1.65%)
Belvedere Park	Irish	119	13 (10.92%)	33 (27.73%)	0
Burmah Street	Irish	70	10 (14.28%)	6 (8.57%)	0
Cherryvalley Gardens	Irish	83	6 (7.22%)	43 (51.80%)	1 (1.20%)
Clovelly Street	Irish	18	0	5 (27.77%)	0
Colinvale	Irish	246	35 (14.23%)	0	0
Cooke Mews	Irish	4	0	0	0
Eliza Street	Irish	1	0	0	0
Fortwilliam Grange	Irish	65	5 (7.69%)	10 (15.38%)	4 (6.15%)
Friendly Way	Irish	30	4 (13.33%)	0	0
Hawthornden Road	Irish	91	1 (1.09%)	46 (50.54)	7 (7.69%)
Isoline Street	Irish	78	3 (3.85%)	23 (29.49%)	0 (0%)
Kent Street	Irish	42	2 (4.76%)	1 (2.38%)	0
King Street	Irish	76	3 (3.9%)	0	0
Knightsbridge Park	Irish	95	8 (8.42%)	47 (49.47%)	3 (3.15%)

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Leganoe Street	Irish	6	0	0	0
Lismain Street	Irish	53	7 (13.20%)	11 (20.75%)	0
Lloopland Drive	Irish	148	17 (11.48%)	63 (42.56%)	1 (0.67%)
Magdala Street	Irish	24	1 (4.16%)	0	0
Marsden Terrace	Irish	12	1 (8.33%)	0	0
McAuley Street	Irish	101	10 (9.90%)	0	1 (0.99%)
Melrose Street	Irish	91	7 (7.69%)	3 (3.29%)	0
Mill Pond Glen	Irish	83	8 (9.63%)	0	0
Mount Merrion Avenue	Irish	362	33 (9.12%)	120 (33.15%)	4 (1.10%)
Queens Road	Irish	339	16 (4.71%)	11 (3.24%)	2 (0.58%)
Ravenhill Reach	Irish	35	2 (5.71%)	4 (11.42%)	0
Shaftesbury Avenue	Irish	90	13 (14.44%)	0	0
Skegoneill Avenue	Irish	242	29 (11.98%)	43 (17.76%)	1 (0.41%)
Stewart Street	Irish	77	6 (7.79%)	0	1 (1.29%)
Sunningdale Gardens	Irish	145	3 (2.07%)	64 (44.14%)	0
Victoria Road	Irish	173	7 (4.05%)	64 (36.99%)	1 (0.58%)
Wellesley Avenue	Irish	123	9 (7.32%)	3 (2.44%)	1 (0.81%)

3.10 It is proposed that any applications where the 15% threshold has not been met will now be included for information on an ongoing basis in future dual language street sign reports being brought to People and Communities Committee.

3.11 It should be noted that following deferral from the Committee in April 2026, a further report on how any duplicate applications for dual language street signs for the same streets that have been closed will be brought to the next committee in June.

**Financial and Resource Implications**

3.12 There are no financial or resource implications if the decision is taken to confirm the current closure of this application. There may be financial and resource implications on any other decision dependent on the decision taken.

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

3.13 The application for University Street was subject to an initial assessment and an elected member notification process to identify any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs in relation to the carrying out of the survey.

**3.14 The initial assessment and elected member notification carried out for the application did not identify any potential adverse impacts to prevent the survey being carried out.”**

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Verner,  
Seconded by Councillor Doran,

That the Committee agrees that the application for a dual language street sign for University Street remain closed since the application has failed to meet the 15 per cent support threshold as set out within the policy; that no special circumstances relating to the results of the survey have been drawn to the attention of the Council; and, as such, there exists no reason for the Committee to deviate away from the agreed policy.

**Amendment**

Moved by Councillor Magee,  
Seconded by Councillor M. Donnelly,

That the proposal be rejected and, accordingly, the Committee agrees to exercise the residual discretion set out within the policy and approve the dual language application for University Street; and, in addition, exercise further the residual discretion and approve the applications for the following streets, viz., Colinvale, Friendly Way, McAuley Street, Mill Pond Glen, Shaftesbury Avenue and Stewart Street, given that none of the residents within the streets surveyed expressed opposition to the erection of dual language street signs within the responses received.

On a vote, ten Members voted in favour of the amendment and nine against and it was declared carried. Accordingly, the amendment was adopted as the substantive motion without recourse to a further vote.

**Proposals for the Naming of a New Street and Continuation of an Existing Street**

The Committee agreed to the naming of Kavanagh Court as a new street and to the naming of Haddo Place as a continuation to an existing street.

**One Million Trees Initiative and Community Orchards**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the progress achieved since the introduction of the 'One Million Trees' initiative in 2020. It was reported that the Council, in conjunction with its partners, had planted a total of 293,516 new trees and 4,232 linear metres of hedging had been created since the programme began and the initiative remained on target to achieve the key aim of providing 30% tree canopy coverage across Belfast by 2050.

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In relation to the Motion regarding the provision of Community Orchards, which had been adopted in March, 2026, the Council had established several small community orchards within Ardoyne, one of which lay within the grounds of a local day nursery, and one at a neighbouring community centre. Furthermore, a small community orchard had been established in the east of the city in conjunction with the L'Arche organisation, a group which worked directly with a network of communities and people with and without learning difficulties.

The Committee noted the information and congratulated officers on the progress made to date relating to the One Million Trees Initiative and Community Orchards project.

**Playground Improvement Programme**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the Playground Improvement Programme for 2025/26, and an outline of the work proposed for 2026/27. It was noted that the improvement work on each playground, which had been prioritised through an independent Play Value and Accessibility Audit, would be funded through the capital programme, with an allocation of £580,000 earmarked for each of the four sites.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that refurbishment work be undertaken at the following playgrounds under the Playground Improvement Programme 2026/27, viz., Mount Eagles, Lemberg Street, Willowbank and Browns Square.

**Playground Accessibility - Update**

The Committee noted the information set out within the above-mentioned report.

In addition, it was agreed that officers would consider further proposals to improve 'play value' and accessibility across the city and to enhance the distribution of facilities. It was agreed further that officers would examine the costs associated with producing an online map showing accessibility to Council-maintained playgrounds and would link in with Playboard NI regarding the creation of a regional map.

**Requests for the Use of Parks**

The Committee agreed to grant permission for the hosting of the EID Festival in the Botanic Gardens, subject to the applicants adhering to all of the stipulations set out within the report. In addition, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the recommendations presented for the allocation of specific days for the delivery of tours at Friar's Bush Burial Ground to enable further discussions to be undertaken with the two groups concerned.

**Summer Programmes**

The Committee noted the information as set out within the above-mentioned report.

Arising from discussion, the Committee agreed that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 22nd May, be requested to consider providing additional funding to ensure that the maximum Summer Scheme Small Grant be awarded to all organisations which had scored 50 or over within the original assessment, the costs in respect of which would be outlined within the subsequent report.

## **European City of Sport 2026 Programme**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

- 1.1 To provide members with an update on proposals to deliver two funding programmes in partnership with sports organisations that will support delivery of the City of Sport Strategy and increase participation in sport and physical activity. The Funding will also help meet the outcomes of the Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy

### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report and;

- Note that £80,000 underspend from the Support for Sport Fund (Tranche 2) is reallocated to the City of Sport Funding pot;
- Agree that the total funding pot for the City of Sport Funding Programme £220,000 which includes £140,000 already approved by members and is allocated as follows
- Showcase Events - £100,000 is allocated to sporting organisations for showcase event, with whom they have submitted proposals.
- Members approve the funding for the showcase events already included in this report
- Members approve that officers work with other sporting organisations and allocate the remaining showcase event budget following any relevant due diligence process is followed.
- Grassroots Programme - £120,000 is allocated through a closed call expression of interest process with sporting bodies engaged directly to make applications up to a maximum of £10,000.

### **3.0 Main report**

- 31 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 provided by Belfast City Council along with the rich sporting heritage of the city.
- 3.2 Following a successful community launch weekend in late January 2026, 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.

**3.3 Obligations to ACES as a designated European City of Sport for 2026.**

It is important to note that as a European City of Sport, Belfast must comply with the general regulations as set out by ACES for successful cities these in summary include:

**3.4 Quarterly reporting submission of reports to ACES commencing from 1 Apr 2026 and focusing on the noted requirements. Each report should include:**

- A summary of the activities carried out,
- Photographic material,
- Media coverage and press impact.

**3.5 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. Therefore, it is important that we ensure the application is followed with clear, tangible actions that will meet the aims of the programme which, more importantly, will have a positive outcome for our residents.**

**3.6 One of the most important aspects of the City of Sport implementation plan is working in close collaboration with our sporting partners, these are the organisations who have expertise in working with grassroots clubs and associations to provide excellent programmes and activities across all ages and abilities.**

**3.7 A report was submitted to March's SP&R Committee, members agreed to allocate a non-recurrent budget of £140,000 for programmes that will be delivered by our partners.**

**3.8 As part of yearly Sports Development Programme, Member are advised that the Sports Development team have completed this first open call for our yearly small and medium grants through our Support for Sport programme which have now allocated funding to 72 organizations. Members are advised that not all the budget was allocated and are requesting that the remaining budget of £80,000 will be aligned to the European City of Sport, this will provide an overall funding budget of £220,000.**

**3.9 Officers are recommending that this overall budget is aligned to two streams of work as follows**

- 1) Grassroots programmes to build participation - Total Budget £120,000.
- 2) Events to showcase the sporting talents of Belfast – Total Budget £100,000.

3.10

1) Grassroots Programme (£100,000)

Officers are seeking approval from members to undertake a closed call expression of interest application process for Sporting Bodies to receive funding of up to £10,000. The programme will be worked up in more detail by officers; however, the criteria will require that any successful applicant will have to show how their programme aligns to the outcomes included in the physical activity and sports development strategy to increase participation and showcase events. Due to the challenging timelines, we are seeking approval to award funding on completion of the assessment process and report back to members to update on progress of successful projects.

3.11

2) Showcase Events (£120,000)

Current Requests for Funding - As part of our work to making a successful application to be awarded City of Sport status, officers have been working with partners on potential showcasing events that will form part of our implementation plan. A summary of four potential events are outlined below, members are asked to consider funding request from the named organisations who will showcase events align with the European City of Sport outcomes required from ACES.

3.12 Cricket Ireland will be hosting three international events within Belfast over the next 3 months; these key fixtures include:

Ireland vs New Zealand Test Match (27–30 May 2026)

- The second Test match ever held in Northern Ireland
- Featuring the top-ranked Test team in the world

Ireland vs India

- Expected to be the highest-profile cricket event ever hosted at Stormont
- Previous fixtures between Ireland and India attracted over 100 million viewers
- Presents a unique opportunity to engage Belfast's Indian and wider South Asian communities

Ireland vs Afghanistan (ODI Series)

- A five-match series, with three matches scheduled at Stormont

- 3.13 **Boxing Ireland** (seeking £50,000) will be hosting a Commonwealth games international camp in Belfast which will see over 100 competitors from across the world stay in our city to prepare for the Commonwealth games.

Boxing Ireland want to brand the camp as part of the European City of Sport and invite boxers from across the city to attend the elite sparring sessions and engage with the boxers to promote the support.

The cost of the camp will be around £300,000 and Boxing Ireland have requested £50,000 from Belfast City Council.

- 3.14 **Athletics Northern Ireland** (seeking £8,000) have organised a celebration programme for the 50th Anniversary of the Mary Peters Track and to be part of and support the City's status as European City of Sport. The events will involve:

An International Athletics Competition to be held at the Mary Peters Track on Saturday 23rd May, which incorporates the prestigious British Milers International events, and Lagan Valley Athletics Club's supplementary events programme which is a tribute to the 50th Anniversary of the Track. VIP's and athletes who competed in 1976, along with School children who were involved in the original Opening Ceremony have been invited to attend the celebrations.

In addition, organisers are hoping to hold a special Throws Events weekend as part of the 50th Celebrations, with a 'Masterclass' and seminar attracting international Throws coaches. This will give athletes the opportunity to compete at the International on Saturday 23rd May and then participate in the Specialised Coaching and Seminars on Sunday 24th May.

This year is exciting for Athletics with high profile media coverage at the weekend with the World Indoor Athletics Championships. World Class athlete Kate O'Connor who regularly trains at the Mary Peters Track won a World Indoor Bronze Medal breaking the Irish National Record in the Pentathlon.

The amount requested for these events is £8,000.

- 3.15 Members are advised that as work on the City of Sport implementation progresses other sports bodies may request financial support from Belfast City Council for showcase events. We are seeking approval that officers will assess relevant applications via an expression of interest form which will capture future events, costs and outcomes and the Director of Neighbourhood Services will have delegated authority to award funding.

### **3.16 Financial Implications**

If members agree to the reallocation of £80,000 from our Support for Sport Programme the City of Sport has an overall budget of £220,000. This is included in current revenue budgets

### **3.17 Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment**

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.”

The Committee agreed that an £80,000 underspend from the Support for Sport fund be reallocated to the City of Sport funding programme; and agreed that the total fund for that programme be set at £220,000, including the £140,000 previously approved, and that it be allocated as follows:

- That £100,000 be allocated to sporting organisations for showcase events, for which proposals had been submitted and assessed against the relevant criteria;
- That funding in the sum of £20,000 be approved for the Cricket Ireland showcase events, that is, a series of upcoming internationals;
- That officers be authorised to work with other sporting organisations in the allocation of the remaining showcase event budget, subject to the due diligence process; and
- That, in respect of the grassroots programme, £120,000 be allocated for a closed call expression of interest exercise with sporting bodies engaged directly with eligible to submit applications up to a maximum of £10,000.

### **Consultations - Construction Products Reform White Paper**

The Committee approved responses (1) and (2) to the above-mentioned consultations and to their onward submission to The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. The responses can be accessed [here](#).

### **Consultations - Responses to Consumer Product Safety Public**

The Committee approved responses (1), (2) and (3) to the above-mentioned consultation exercised and to their onward submission to The Office for Product Safety and Standards. The responses can be accessed [here](#).

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**Belfast Healthy Cities - Annual Business Meeting**

The Committee considered correspondence which had been received from Belfast Healthy Cities Network inviting the Chairperson, or his nominee, to attend the European Healthy Cities Network Annual Business Meeting in Viana do Castelo, Portugal, from 16th to 18th June.

The Committee agreed that the invitation be drawn to the attention of the incoming Chairperson and authorised their attendance, or their nominee, at the meeting, the costs in respect of which were estimated to be in the region of £1,000.

**Pitch Partner and Facilities  
Management Agreements**

The Committee agreed to defer, to its meeting in June, consideration of the above-mentioned report to enable officers to consider the feasibility of the Council entering into three-year pitch partnership agreements and the impact, if any, such an amendment might have upon the Pitches Strategy.

**Issues Raised in Advance**

**Reuse of Parks Plants**

At the request of Councillor McKeown, the Committee agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting outlining how the Council currently disposes of excess plants which could be recycled and/or re-used. The report would explore also how local communities might access and reuse such plants and how they could be used to support initiatives such as 'Belfast in Bloom' and the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann. Officers would consider also how local 'Men's Sheds' initiatives might avail of fallen wood or trees from to support their activities.

**Playpark at Short Strand**

At the request of Councillor R-M Donnelly, the Committee agreed that officers would examine the feasibility of entering into a key-holding agreement with the Short Strand Community Forum to manage the locking of gates at Mountford Play Park.

Chairperson

## City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 13th May, 2026

### MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Chairperson);  
Alderman Lawlor; and  
Councillors Black, de Faoite, S. Douglas,  
Duffy, Groogan, Lyons, McCabe, McCallin,  
McCormick, McKay, R. McLaughlin,  
Meenehan, Nelson and Ó Néill.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;  
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and  
Development;  
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;  
Ms. M. McKay, Enterprise and Business Growth Manager;  
Ms. E. Clark, Creative Producer, Culture Tourism and  
Events; and  
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

#### **Apologies**

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf on Councillors Bunting, Hanvey, McAteer and McDonough-Brown.

#### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 15th April, 2026, were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 5th May, 2026.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in relation to the item 'Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update' in that her employer was in receipt of a grant through the scheme. Councillor Groogan also declared an interest in relation to the item '2 Royal Avenue Update' in that she had recently engaged with organisations which had expressed an interest in respect of the long-term use of 2 Royal Avenue's ground floor. The Member was not required to leave the meeting for either item.

In relation to the item 'Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme', Councillor Groogan declared an interest in that her employer was referenced within the report and she left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in relation to item 'Request to Present - Belfast City and Region Place Partnership' in that he was on the Board of the

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Belfast Harbour Commissioners. As this item did not become the subject of discussion or debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor Black declared an interest in relation to the item 'Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann Update' in so far as her employer was partnered with Queen's University Belfast who presented at the Bank of Ideas event but was not required to leave the meeting.

**Restricted Items**

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

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

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

**Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the Vacant to Vibrant Programme and which sought approval for recommendations from the Vacant to Vibrant assessment panel following the receipt and assessment of recent applications.

The report also recommended an extension to the programme's Match Maker Service and an amendment to the eligibility criteria section of the Vacant to Vibrant Guidance Notes.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update in relation to the Vacant to Vibrant Programme which would be supporting up to 82 businesses/organisations to locate or expand into long term vacant units;
- ii. agreed the extension of the Match Maker Service provision;
- iii. agreed the recommended citywide grant awards as outlined within the report; and
- iv. agreed the recommended amendment to the eligibility criteria within the Vacant to Vibrant Guidance Notes as outlined the report.

## **2 Royal Avenue Update**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on the expression of interest process for the future long-term use of 2 Royal Avenue's ground floor and outlined proposed next steps for Stage Two of the process.

The Committee was reminded that at its meeting in April, 2026, it had agreed to defer consideration of the proposed next steps for Stage Two of the process to enable further engagement to be undertaken, and that Stage One of the process be closed following the Council meeting in May and the associated call-in period. The Director advised that Stage One would close in line with the agreed timeline and that further engagement had taken place with Members, including a roundtable discussion on 23rd April, 2026.

The Director set out the proposed next steps for Stage Two of the process which would include a request for businesses/organisations to submit detailed proposals and business plans. She also provided the Committee with an overview of the proposed scoring and assessment criteria.

She highlighted the limited timeframe for Stage Two of process given the key interdependent timelines for the various activities associated with 2 Royal Avenue which would include the completion and outworkings of the building's condition survey, the expiration of the current meanwhile use contract and the PEACEPLUS funded works to the first floor of the building.

The Committee:

- i. agreed the proposed next steps for Stage Two of the Expression of Interest process for the future long-term use of the ground floor of 2 Royal Avenue, as set out within the report, including the request for detailed proposals and business plans, and the proposed scoring assessment and criteria;
- ii. noted the proposed timelines for the Stage Two of the process as set out within the report; and
- iii. noted the interdependent timelines for the various activities associated with 2 Royal Avenue including the duration of the current meanwhile use; completion and outworkings of the condition survey; and the PEACEPLUS funded works for the first floor, which would all underpin the criticality for timely decision making in relation to the ground floor long term use.

## **Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme**

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the continued development of neighbourhood tourism within the city. The report set out the draft findings from the development work on Tourism Development Plans for North and South Belfast and

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highlighted the ongoing work in respect of a Development Plan for the Greater Shankill area. The report also set out the proposed strategic direction and delivery approach for 2026/27, which would include funding to support delivery through EastSide Partnership and Fáilte Feirste Thiar, subject to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee's approval of funding for neighbourhood tourism at its meeting in May, 2026.

During discussion, the Senior Manager for Culture and Tourism answered questions from the Members in relation to the Tourism Development Plans for North and South Belfast, and the Greater Shankill area.

In response to a Member's request, the Senior Manager advised that further information would be provided to Members in respect of the stakeholder engagement which helped inform the development of the plans for North and South Belfast.

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Duffy,  
Seconded by Councillor Ó Néill, and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees to:

- i. defer consideration of the proposed strategic direction and phased delivery approach as set out within the Tourism Plans for North and South Belfast to enable further information to be provided to Members; and
- ii. that approval be sought from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the funding of £300,000 for neighbourhood tourism.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the report, which included progress to date on neighbourhood tourism development and the findings from the Neighbourhood Tourism Investment Programme;
- ii. agreed to defer consideration of the proposed strategic direction and phased delivery approach as set out within the Tourism Plans for North and South Belfast;
- iii. agreed that approval be sought from the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for the funding of £300,000 for neighbourhood tourism;
- iv. agreed that the approach to support neighbourhood tourism delivery would be outcome based and consistent with the existing approach adopted in East and West Belfast, with the delivery aligned to the Council's neighbourhood tourism and cultural investment programmes and local area plans; and

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- v. approved the continuation of funding to EastSide Partnership and Fáilte Feirste Thiar to support neighbourhood tourism delivery, coordination, and capacity building across the city.

**Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann Update**

The Committee was provided with an update on a range of operational matters, including programming and engagement, for the delivery of the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

During discussion, Council officers answered a range of Members' questions in relation to resourcing for street cleansing across the city, parking, accommodation, signposting and street dressing, and the development of the citywide fringe programme to ensure activity would extend beyond the city centre into neighbourhoods and communities.

**Proposal**

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,  
Seconded by Councillor Lyons, and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees that a report be submitted to a future meeting which would explore the potential to expand participatory budgeting in respect of community arts and culture events.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the progress to date on the development of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann; and
- ii. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting which would explore the potential to expand participatory budgeting in respect of community arts and culture events.

**Request to Present**

**Belfast City and Region Place Partnership**

The Committee acceded to a request for representatives of the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) to present at its meeting in June, 2026.

**Growing Business and the Economy**

**External Markets Approval**

The Committee considered a report which sought approval for a market licence to be granted to Urban Events to hold a Titanic Quarter Night Market Evening on 6th and 7th August, and a Titanic Quarter Food Festival on 8th and 9th August, 2026, as part of a programme of complementary activity during the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, and

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to hold a series of Sunday markets in Writers' Square from 28th June to 30th October, 2026.

The Committee approved:

- i. an external market within the Titanic Quarter as part of the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann; and
- ii. a series of Sunday markets at Writers' Square.

**Enterprise and Business Growth Support Update**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

**The purpose of this report is to advise members of a range of activity undertaken in 2025/26 to support the development of new and existing businesses across the City. The report sets out key priority areas of work for the 2026/27 financial year, seeking approval of activity to support the delivery of the targets under the ‘Our Economy’ pillar of the Belfast Agenda.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- **Note the work undertaken and outputs delivered in the financial year to date**
- **Agree the priority work areas presented for the 2026/27 financial year and approve the allocations from the existing 2026/2027 Enterprise and Business Growth budget as set out in sections 3.4-3.10**
- **Note and endorse the financial contribution to support the ongoing development of the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (work to be coordinated through Newry, Mourne and Down District Council) up to a maximum of £45,000**
- **Note and endorse the contribution to support the ongoing delivery of the Northern Ireland Entrepreneurship Support Service (Go Succeed) and the achievement of the Council’s statutory target up to a maximum of £317,415.**

**3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 2025/26 Update**

Members will be aware that within the 2026/27 period, the Enterprise and Business Growth team has been working to develop and deliver a range of activity to support the growth and development of new and existing businesses across the city, aligned with the 'Our Economy' pillar of the Belfast Agenda.

**3.2** Since April 2025, the team has been working with partners to develop and deliver interventions that address the City's challenges in relation to low levels of business start-up, innovation, competitiveness, and productivity. Some of the key achievements in 2025/26 include:

- **Enterprise awareness activity:** engaged 1258 individuals through community outreach activity targeting under-represented groups including people with disabilities, individuals who are economically inactive, females and young people providing them with tools to overcome barriers to take positive steps to starting a business. We also enabled test trading opportunities for 48 new businesses through our dedicated start up space at St George's Market and many of those are seeking to trade at the market on a more regular basis or are exploring alternative retail outlets for their products.
- **Start a business activity:** 900 individuals recruited onto the 'Start' stage of Go Succeed availing of nearly 5,000 hours of 1-1 mentoring support focused on business plan development and business fundamentals.
- **Support for Social Enterprises and Co-Operatives:** 54 organisations were supported with one-to-one mentoring, advice, and guidance. We again delivered the Social Economy Incentive Fund in late 2025, with an available pot of almost £90,000 to support social economy businesses to bring forward their business growth plans. There were 49 eligible applications for the SEIF, with 22 applicants invited to pitch for funding, 17 applicants were successful with just under £90,000 awarded to support growth goals.
- **Growing a business:** 435 existing Belfast businesses supported on the 'Growth' and 'Scaling' stages of the Go Succeed service availing of nearly 5,500 hours of 1-1 mentoring support tailored to support business growth aspirations. Through the service we have also

successfully awarded and administered grants to businesses to remove barriers to growth, with 127 Belfast businesses receiving Go Succeed grants in the 26/27 year to a value of £285,220.57.

- **Innovation Factory:** overall performance against targets at the centre improved significantly in the 2026/27 year. Centre occupancy is now at 94% occupancy (with a final average occupancy for the year at 72%) against a 90% target. Throughout the year we have been working through a reprioritisation change in the contract enabling performance targets to be amended to streamline reporting and to be more reflective of the current market.

### 3.3 2026/27 Business Plan

Building on these achievements, the proposed work programme for the next financial year will include a number of new work areas including:

- ### 3.4 Starting a Business: Key to meeting the Local Government (Performance Indicators and Standards) Order of 2015 is the continued delivery of the Go Succeed service. The service aims to foster a culture of entrepreneurship, attract more people into the 'pipeline' and to help more high-growth potential start-ups to get the help they need to grow and scale. The ability to attract more people into the 'pipeline' will require innovative approaches, particularly where there is a need for cultural change amongst under-represented groups. It is expected that this will support the creation of 271 new businesses and 209 new jobs. To support delivery of the numbers highlighted above, Belfast City Council will make a payment of £317,415 in match funding towards service delivery.

**Community Outreach:** Crucial to the success of our business support interventions is the fostering of an entrepreneurial mindset and creation of a pipeline of entrepreneurs in Belfast. This activity involves actively targeting under-represented groups including people with disabilities, individuals who are economically inactive, females and young people providing them with tools to overcome barriers to take positive steps to starting a business. A budget of £80,000 is allocated to this area of work; activity will include delivery of our young entrepreneurs to watch initiative, our fearless event targeting people with a disability, as well as a range of female focussed interventions and Community partnerships. We will also continue with our test trading offering at St George's Market.

**Social Enterprise and Cooperative Development:** In the next financial year, we will refine our social economy action plan based on research conducted in the 25/26 year and engagement with appropriate sector partners. A continued area of focus is the administration of the Social Economy Incentive Fund (SEIF) with a budget of £90,000 however we will also be working with a co-design group to develop a roadmap for the SEIF to progress against the strategic goals in the Belfast Agenda action plans. In addition to the SEIF, a budget of £90,000 has been set aside for dedicated social enterprise and co-operative support. This will cover a range of support interventions including mentoring, workshops, and events via our Go Social delivery. Go Social delivery is complementary to Go Succeed, encouraging a pipeline of social entrepreneurs progressing into Go Succeed support.

- 3.5 **Growing a Business:** The Go Succeed Service has proven successful over the past two years in providing flexible, tailored growth support for existing businesses. It is expected that through the service we will engage with 323 businesses and directly lead to the creation of 102 new jobs. We will also work to deliver a series of workshops and events on issues such as financial planning and forecasting, E-commerce essentials, Sales and Marketing, accessing finance, Writing a Winning bid, Strategy and Business Planning and Employee legal considerations. Go Succeed grants will continue to support this stream of work with the target for 2026/27 to be confirmed.

Whilst our main area of support for established businesses is Go Succeed, we also ensure we are responsive to the needs of our business community. Work is currently under way on a range of new development projects including support for high growth sectors, place-based activity where there is demand and a focus on the Fleadh Cheoil opportunities to businesses. Alongside our colleagues in Culture and Tourism, we are leading on the business engagement aspect of the Fleadh Cheoil. This includes ensuring businesses are fully informed on the opportunities available to them through the Fleadh but also of the aspects which may impact them including licensing and road closures. Activity to date has included information sessions disseminating relevant information to businesses in the City Centre and beyond as well as gathering information from the businesses on what they need to get 'Fleadh ready'. An overall budget for these additional 'Growing a Business' support activities is set at £282,614. Where new interventions require specific approval, additional details will be brought back to the Committee for approval if required.

- 3.6 **Supporting events:** The Enterprise and Business Growth Team is regularly asked to sponsor/financially support events and conferences in areas that – to a greater or lesser extent – are associated with the unit’s priorities, as set out above. While these events can often act as a useful promotional vehicle for Council interventions and can help secure referrals to programme activity, many of these tend to be last-minute requests for relatively small amounts of money and provide little measurable return. In order to assess the impact of the requests, officers have developed a process to measure and score these requests based on their alignment to the ‘Our Economy’ pillar of the Belfast Agenda, the contribution to the work of the team as set out in this report and the potential to profile the Council activities and generate interest and demand for the services. The total budget to support contributions to events and conferences in this financial year is £73,000 and it is proposed that each application for support will be capped at a maximum of £10,000. Objectives and outputs will be agreed through a funding agreement with the event organisers. This approach has been effective in the past and has helped ensure that our resources are focused on areas of maximum return. Any events that will have wider corporate impact will be brought back to the relevant Committee for consideration and endorsement.
- 3.7 **Scaling Support and Innovation:** The ‘Our Economy’ pillar of the Belfast Agenda identifies the need to focus on educational inequalities, jobs and skills and sustainable and inclusive economic growth. A key part of sustainable economic growth is the focus on key growth sectors and emerging technologies; these include Creative and Digital (Virtual Production, Immersive), Fintech and AI.

This year we will continue to build upon our work with the City Innovation and Culture and Arts team, working to build capacity among local businesses. Work will include supporting businesses to grow and scale, provide knowledge and connections within SMEs to access export opportunities, challenge funds and alternative funding sources, including those coming from the Belfast Region City Deal. We will also continue to work with key partners including Digital Catapult, Ulster University, Queen’s University and Invest NI to increase the number of innovation driven enterprises and businesses with scaling potential.

This work also directly aligns with the DfE funded Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) within which proposed outcomes include higher productivity, wages and

employment rates. Members agreed a series of activities to be take forward using LEP funding at the 11 March Committee meeting. Numbers of businesses in highest productivity sectors (aligned with those identified above with a focus on Studio Ulster), number of businesses who export and percentage employment in Invest NI supported companies will all be metrics used to monitor progress. A budget of £100,000 has been allocated to this area of work.

- 3.8 **Innovation Factory:** Members will be aware that the Innovation Factory is the council-owned innovation centre located in Forthriver Business Park on Springfield Road. The Enterprise and Business Growth Team is responsible for the contract management of the Innovation Factory. This role includes management and monitoring of the performance of the Service Provider in operating the Innovation Factory in accordance with the performance regime of the Contract. On occasion this area of work requires guidance from subject matter experts on both contractual and commercial matters. A budget of £15,800 is allocated to this within the current estimates.
- 3.9 **Research and development:** The programme of work set out in this report is informed by an ongoing series of research and insights work, undertaken in collaboration with our Business Research and Development team. This ensures that our programmes are receptive and responsive to the changing needs of the local economy and helps track the impact and outcomes against high level strategic commitments. This will include continued research of the key growth areas, gaps in existing provision and challenges in the local economy as well as a continued subscription to the Beauhurst platform ensuring informed intelligence. A budget of £50,000 is allocated to this area of work and individual research and services will be commissioned appropriately as part of this overall budget allocation.
- 3.10 **Belfast Business Promise:** The inclusive growth city charter is a key commitment in the Council's Inclusive Growth strategy and the Belfast Agenda. Co-created with businesses, it was designed to provide an assessment framework to enable employers to look at their current practices and identify where they could make changes which would have a beneficial impact on inclusive growth in the city. Driven by the Council's Social Policy Working Group (SPWG), the charter has been operationalised as the Belfast Business Promise (BBP) since April 2023 and delivered by a cross-council team, led by the Strategy, Programmes and Partnership and Economic

**Development teams, with support from Corporate HR, CPS and Climate teams.**

**A report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in March outlined a series of operational and structural changes to the service and these were endorsed as a way forward for the coming year. In order to support delivery, a budget of £50,000 is allocated to Belfast Business Promise and this year will focus on further development/refinement of the business promise, with potential development of a CRM which will enable greater potential to scale and manage the programme.**

**4.0 Financial and Resource Implications**

**4.1 The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2026/27 budget for the Enterprise & Business growth section of the Place and Economy departmental budget that was approved as part of the 2026/27 estimates process.**

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

**5.1 Each of the proposed projects referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. Considerations given to equality and good relations impacts at the initial stages of project development and monitored throughout delivery. Officers will work closely with the Equality and Good Relations Team on this activity.”**

The Committee:

- i. noted the work undertaken and the outputs delivered in the financial year to date;
- ii. agreed the priority work areas for 2026/27 as set out within the report
- iii. approved the allocations from the existing 2026/27 Enterprise and Business Growth budget as set out within the report;
- iv. approved a financial contribution, up to a maximum of £45,000, to support the ongoing development of the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (work to be coordinated through Newry, Mourne and Down District Council); and
- v. approved a financial contribution, up to a maximum of £317,415, to support the ongoing delivery of the Northern Ireland

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Entrepreneurship Support Service (Go Succeed) and the achievement of the Council's statutory target.

Chairperson

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# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 27th May, 2026

## SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Chairperson);  
Alderman Lawlor; and  
Councillors Black, Bunting, de Faoite,  
S. Douglas, Duffy, Groogan, Hanvey,  
Lyons, McCabe, McCallin, McCormick,  
McDonough-Brown, McKay, R. McLaughlin,  
Meenehan, Nelson and Ó Néill.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and  
Development;  
Ms. P. Conway, Development Manager, City Centre  
Regeneration; and  
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

### Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was received from Councillor McAteer.

### Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

### Restricted Items

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

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

Members were also reminded that the content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

### Presentation

#### **Department for Communities and Northern Ireland Housing Executive - Housing Association Grant (HAG)**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development reminded the Committee that, at its meeting in November, 2025, it had agreed to invite the Minister for Communities and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to attend a future meeting to discuss

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the rationale for changes to the Housing Association Grant (HAG) and Total Cost Indicators (TCI) for the delivery of new social housing, which had been announced by the Minister in October, 2025. Accordingly, the Director advised that officials from the Department for Communities (DfC) and the NIHE were in attendance to outline the rationale for the changes and the potential impact on social housing delivery within the city.

The Director also reminded the Committee that, following its request in November, 2025, for a comprehensive assessment of the changes, work had been undertaken by the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) to analyse the impact of the changes. She advised that the UUEPC analysis was currently being finalised and it was intended that it would be submitted to the Committee's meeting in June. She provided a brief overview of the draft analysis report's key points. The Director advised that the NIHE was leading a Subsidy Review by DfC and that it was proposed that the UUEPC analysis be forwarded to the NIHE by the end of May, as requested by the NIHE. It was reported that the analysis would help inform DfC's review and ensure that the city's unique delivery context was reflected. She advised the Committee that a Members' workshop would be held, as previously agreed, with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) and the relevant Housing Associations to consider the UUEPC analysis and help understand the challenges which face the sector and what DfC's Subsidy Review should address. She suggested that, following the Members' workshop and the completion of DfC's Subsidy Review, the Committee might wish to consider inviting officials to attend a future meeting to present the findings of the review.

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. David Polley, Director of Housing Supply Policy (DfC), Mr. Paul Price, Deputy Secretary, Housing and Sustainability Group (DfC), and Ms. Lysay Magill, Head of Development Services, Land and Regeneration (NIHE).

Mr. Price provided the Committee with background information on how the Department worked with partners to deliver the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP), which was used by the Department to inform social housing funding investment decisions.

Mr. Price reminded the Committee that, in October, 2025, the Minister had announced a number of changes to increase the delivery of new social homes across Northern Ireland. He explained that the grant paid to support social housing development was determined by two complex calculations, namely, the Total Cost Indicators (TCI), which was the assumed cost of building a new social home, and the Housing Association Grant (HAG) rate, which was the contribution made by the Department to Housing Associations for new social housing. He advised that, as part of the changes, the TCI benchmark costs had increased on average to take account of changes to construction costs, inflation, rent levels and interest rates. In respect of the HAG associated with the development of new social housing, it was reported that it had reduced on average from 54.2 percent of the total cost to 46.5 percent. Mr. Price provided the Committee with further information in relation to the impact of the TCI and HAG rates in respect of Belfast.

Mr. Price outlined that, in order to achieve the Minister's aim of delivering more social homes across Northern Ireland, the methodology supported the decision to update the TCI and HAG rates to ensure better value for money and assist in the delivery of more social homes from the budget available.

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It was reported that, in recognition of the challenges facing the Housing Associations, the changes would govern the Department's support for social housing new build from 1st December, 2025 until the end of the 2026/27 financial year to provide certainty and stability. Mr. Price also reported that the Minister had announced a Subsidy Review to look at how the grant funding system was being operated, and a Design Standards Review which would look at the minimum quality standard of social homes. Mr. Price stated that both reviews aimed to help Housing Associations to deliver as much social housing as possible per pound of grant.

During discussion, several Members highlighted the significant level of housing need within Belfast and the potential implications of the HAG rate change on the delivery of social housing in the city. The Members also highlighted the need for a bespoke TCI and HAG rate for the city centre which would take into account and help address issues such as the higher costs associated with land, development constraints, engineering and logistical issues, and which would also help support efforts to meet the city's exceptionally high level of housing need.

The officials from DfC and the NIHE answered a range of Members' questions in relation to the rationale for the changes, the significant housing need within the city and the potential impact that the changes would have on social housing delivery across the city, the engagement which had taken place in advance of the Minister's announcement, the viability gap in social housing, design standards for social homes, and the potential impact on Housing Association rents.

In response to Members' questions in relation to DfC's Development Standards Review and the potential impact on the quality of social homes, the officials stated that the aim of the review was not to reduce standards but to take on board feedback from the Housing Associations and tenants to deliver better social housing for the best value. The DfC officials advised that the Terms of Reference for both the Development Standards Review and the Subsidy Review would be sent to the Committee for its information.

In response to a Member's question regarding engagement with the Housing Associations and the methodology which informed the decision to reduce the HAG rate, officials advised that, in advance of the Minister's announcement, the Department and NIHE had engaged with the Housing Associations and that a presentation from DfC and NIHE which outlined the methodology and how the HAG rate was determined, would be shared with the Committee for its information.

A Member also requested that, following the completion of the Subsidy Review, officials attend a meeting of the Committee to present its findings.

The Chairperson thanked the officials for attending and they left the meeting.

During further discussion, the Committee agreed that the independent analysis which had been undertaken by the UUEPC, and which was currently being finalised, would be submitted to the NIHE, as lead for DfC's Subsidy Review, by the end of May, 2026. The Director advised that the analysis report would be submitted to the Committee's next meeting in June, 2026, and would also form the basis of the proposed Members' workshop which had been previously agreed by the Committee.

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After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the information which has been provided by the DfC and NIHE officials and that, where relevant, further information would be provided on the issues raised;
- ii. noted that the UUEPC analysis was currently being finalised and would undergo internal review before being submitted to its next meeting in June, 2026;
- iii. agreed that the UUEPC analysis would be submitted to the NIHE by 29th May, 2026, and that it would form a key evidence base for DfC's Subsidy Review, which was scheduled to be completed by October, 2026;
- iv. noted the wider programme of engagement which would lead up to DfC's Subsidy Review, including a workshop for Members to understand the challenges which face the sector and what the Subsidy Review should address; and
- v. noted that following the Council's request to DfC for further detail on the TCI and HAG rates to inform the UUEPC review, DfC had confirmed that the information was currently only available to the housing sector and would not be available externally.

**Standing Order 14 - Submission of Minutes**

The Committee agreed that, in accordance with Standing Order 14, as the meeting had been held later than seven clear days before the meeting of the Council, the minutes of the meeting would be submitted to the Council on 1st June, 2026, for ratification.

Chairperson

## Licensing Committee

Wednesday, 20th May, 2026

### MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Doran (Chairperson);  
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Doherty;  
Aldermen McCullough and Rodgers; and  
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bradley,  
R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Carson,  
M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, D. Douglas,  
McCann, McDowell, McKay, McKeown and Smyth.

In attendance: Mrs. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;  
Mr. S. Hipkins, Building Control Manager;  
Ms. H. Morrissey, City Protection Manager;  
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning); and  
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

### Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor McAteer.

A Member, on behalf of the Committee, congratulated Councillor McAteer on the recent birth of her baby.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd April 2026, were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 5th May.

### Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

### Delegated Matters

### THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN PURSUANCE OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT UNDER STANDING ORDER 37(d)

#### Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee noted the licence applications which had, since its last meeting, been issued under the Scheme of Delegation.

**Licensing Committee,  
Wednesday, 20th May, 2026**

**Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority**

The Committee noted a list of applications for licences which had, since its last meeting, been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

**Application to provide outdoor musical entertainment beyond 11.00 pm at City Hall**

The Building Control Manager provided the Committee with the details of the application. He explained that the City Hall had a 7-Day Annual Outdoor Entertainments Licence during which entertainment may be provided both outdoors and in a marquee, Monday to Sunday, from 11.30 am to 11.00 pm.

The Members were advised that the following Special Conditions were attached to both the Marquee and Outdoor Entertainments Licences:

- Maximum numbers will be agreed at the discretion of the Building Control Service and will vary depending upon individual concert set up proposals;
- Prior to any event taking place the promoters are required to demonstrate evidence of early consultation and have in place a robust system of dealing with any complaints, which has been agreed in advance with the Council;
- Any requests to provide entertainment later than 11.00 pm must be considered by the Licensing Committee and therefore must be made at least 3 months in advance of the proposed event; and
- Should an application to provide entertainment beyond 11.00 pm be granted and the Council then receive a significant number of complaints regarding noise or the complaint is of such significant impact, authority is granted to the Director of Planning and Building Control, in consultation with the City Solicitor, to reduce the finishing time for any subsequent nights of the event, in which case the promoter will be required to make contingency arrangements.

As the application was not to vary the terms of the Outdoor licence, rather a request for the Council's permission to extend the hours under an existing Licence Condition, there was no requirement for public advertisement.

The event organiser had indicated that outdoor music events were scheduled for the following nights: Sunday 2nd, Thursday 6th, Friday 7th, Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th August 2026. The request was to provide entertainment to 1am on those nights.

The Police had been contacted by the Service in relation to the event, however, a response had not yet been received. He explained that, should the Committee be minded to approve the extended hours requested, it should be subject to a satisfactory response from the PSNI on the matter.

**Licensing Committee,  
Wednesday, 20th May, 2026**

Officers had engaged with the event organisers and colleagues in the Fleadh events team in relation to the events and would participate in pre-event meetings. An Event Management Plan for the Fleadh had been received and was being evaluated by the Service.

Regarding noise issues, a significant consideration for the Environmental Protection Unit (EPU) would be the proposal to provide outdoor entertainment after 11.00pm. The noise mitigation strategy would be discussed at the pre-event meetings.

The Committee was advised that the event organisers would be required to engage with an acoustic consultant and requested to document a noise mitigation strategy for each night of entertainment. The purpose of the strategy would be to demonstrate that noise from the event would not cause unreasonable disturbance to commercial and residential premises. Once received by the Service, the strategy would be provided to EPU for appraisal.

The organisers would also be required to produce a suitable residents pre-notification letter containing a nominated event organiser contact that residents could refer concerns or make complaints to. The extent of the letters distribution, which would take place prior to the event, would be agreed with the event organiser by the Service in consultation with EPU officers.

The event organisers would be reminded of the standard licence condition that receipt of significant complaints may lead to further late nights being curtailed. However, it can be impracticable during the festival to curtail further nights at short notice, and as complaints are not all received on the nights that are the subject of the complaint a full picture does not emerge until all complaints are collated, by which time the events can be concluded.

A Member raised concerns regarding the amplification of sound from the "Gig Rig", which would be situated on the West Lawn of the City Hall grounds, and concerns that further details of the programme were not available. The Director of Planning and Building Control advised the Committee that the Noise Mitigation Strategy would be in place in order to control any amplified noise.

Moved by Councillor Carson  
Seconded by Councillor McKeown and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to extend the hours of entertainment and, subject to all technical requirements being met and a satisfactory response from the PSNI, entertainment be permitted to take place beyond the standard hours of licence, to 1.00 am, on the following five nights of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann:

- Sunday 2nd, Thursday 6th, Friday 7th, Saturday 8th and Sunday 9th August, 2026.

**Licensing Committee,  
Wednesday, 20th May, 2026**

**Application for the Variation of 7-Day  
Annual Entertainments Licence for Muriel's**

The Building Control Managed outlined that an application had been received for the variation of a 7-Day Annual Indoor Entertainments Licence to extend the hours during which entertainment may be provided at Muriel's and to increase the occupancy of the indoor area.

The Committee was advised that the days and hours during which entertainment may be provided under the terms of the current indoor Entertainments Licence were:

- Monday to Saturday: 11.30am to 2.00am the following morning, and
- Sunday: 12.30pm to 2.00am the following morning.

He explained that the variation application related to a proposed extension to the hours during which entertainment could be provided, Monday to Sunday, to 3.00am the following morning, and he reminded the Committee that applications to provide entertainment beyond 1.00am were subject to Committee consideration.

The licensee had requested to extend the permitted hours until 3.00am, indicating that the premises was an integral part of Belfast's nightlife and that the proposed changes in hours were to keep them in line with similar venues in the vicinity, allowing them to compete within the sector.

The Members were advised that building works were ongoing at the premises to increase the area of the public bar on both the ground and first floors. They wished to increase the occupancy by around 60 persons. It was pointed out that the works were being inspected by the Building Control service and the final occupancy would be agreed by the Licensing Surveyor on completion of the works.

The Members were advised that no written representations had been lodged as a result of the advertisement of the application and that the PSNI and the NIFRS had both confirmed that they had no objections to the variation application. The Committee was advised that no noise complaints had been received by the Service in the past 12 months.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Ms. J. Kane, the applicant, was in attendance.

In response to a Member's query regarding the nearby Church, she confirmed that there had been no issues raised by the Church in the past and that it was her intention that the bar would stop serving alcohol at 1.30am, with music playing until 3am.

Moved by Councillor Carson  
Seconded by Councillor Anglin and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees to the variation of the 7-Day Annual Entertainments Licence to increase the indoor occupancy by 60 persons, subject to final agreement by the Licensing Surveyor on completion of building works, and to vary the hours during which entertainment may be provided as follows:

**Licensing Committee,  
Wednesday, 20th May, 2026**

- Monday – Saturday 11:30am to 3.00am the following morning; and
- Sunday 12:30pm to 3.00am the following morning.

Chairperson

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## Planning Committee

Tuesday, 19th May, 2026

### HYBRID MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers;  
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bell, Brennan,  
T. Brooks, Carson, Doran, D. Douglas,  
S. Douglas, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey, Magee,  
McCabe and McCann.

Also attended: Councillors Bower and Collins.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;  
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning);  
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management);  
Mr. D. O'Kane, Planning Manager (Plans and Policy);  
Ms. L. Walshe, Principal Planning Officer; and  
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

#### **Apologies**

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Whyte.

#### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 21st April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 5th May, 2026.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

#### **Committee Site Visits**

The Committee noted the site visits.

#### **Notifications from Statutory Bodies: Listing and De-Listing of Structures**

The Committee noted the undernoted notifications from statutory bodies:

- The proposed de-listing of Friar's Bush Graveyard;
- The proposed listing of 51 Malone Park; and

**Meeting of Planning Committee,  
Tuesday, 19th May, 2026**

- The confirmation of listing of the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, Gardner Robb Building and the Former Nurses' Home, Mater Hospital.

**Planning Appeals Notified**

The Committee noted the appeals decisions.

**Planning Decisions Issued**

The Committee noted the planning decisions issued in April, 2026.

**Live Applications for Major Development**

The Committee noted the list of live applications for major development.

**Committee Decisions that have yet to issue**

The Committee noted the list of Committee decisions which had not yet been issued.

**Miscellaneous Reports**

**Notice of Opinion from the Department for Infrastructure: application SPD/2023/0991/F section 54 application to remove condition 5 (restricting the number of daily Belfast to Dublin train services) on planning permission LA04/2017/1388/F for a new integrated Public Transport Interchange (the Belfast Transport Hub)**

The Committee noted the Notice of Opinion and advises DfI that the Council did not wish to appear before or be heard by the Planning Appeals Commission, or a person appointed by the Department for the purposes of a hearing.

**Response to NI Assembly Committee for Infrastructure Call for Evidence in respect of the impact of planning on regionally significant and capital infrastructure projects.**

The Committee agreed that officers would frame a response to the call for evidence in respect of the impact of planning on regionally significant and capital infrastructure projects.

**Planning Committee Review of Implemented Applications 2026**

The Committee agreed to the arrangements for site visits to implemented schemes in 2026 and that further suggestions for any other specific schemes would be directed to the Planning Manager (Development Management).

**Meeting of Planning Committee,  
Tuesday, 19th May, 2026**

**Local Applications subject to NI Water Objections**

The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control those Local planning applications to which NI Water had objected.

**Planning Applications**

**LA04/2025/2033/F - Variation of conditions, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 24, 25 and 27 of planning approval LA04/2023/2459/F to allow for phasing of the development - The Maynard Sinclair Pavilion Stormont Estate**

The Principal Planning Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the application and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of the development; and
- The impact of proposed phasing.

She reported that DfC: HED, DAERA, Environmental Health and BCC Trees had offered no objection to the proposed variation, subject to amendments to conditions. She added that one objection had been received that had raised concerns with regard to parking which had been addressed within the report.

She stated that, having regard to the development plan, relevant planning policies and consultation responses, it was considered that the application for variation of conditions be approved.

The Committee granted planning permission for the variation of conditions 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 24, 25 and 27 of planning approval LA04/2023/2459/F and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the conditions and to deal with any other matters which might arise, provided that they were not substantive

**LA04/2026/0393/F - Temporary planning approval for a caravan / campervan / motorhome site, with ancillary facilities including communal recreational spaces, toilets, showers, waste disposal points, food and drink area, site office, waste collection, lights, storage areas and all associated temporary structures and works - Lands at the Titanic Quarter, between Hamilton Road, Queens Road and Sydenham Road. Immediately NE, E and SE of Belfast Metropolitan College, approximately 150m SE of Titanic Hotel, 8 Queens Road**

The Principal Planning Officer summarised the report for the Committee and explained that DfI Roads had offered no objections, Environmental Health had requested a future noise assessment and that no third-party objections had been received.

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She stated that the application was compliant with policies TLC1, ENV2, ENV3, ENV5, TRAN1, TRAN2 and TRAN8 and that it was recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to resolve a final response from Environmental Health, finalise the wording of the conditions and deal with any matters which might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

**LA04/2024/1646/F - Demolition of existing dwelling (no. 50 Gilnahirk Road) to facilitate proposed extension and alterations to existing petrol filling station including extension of retail floor space, extension and realignment of carpark to provide 9 no. additional car parking spaces and pedestrian access, cycle parking, construction of retaining wall and associated landscaping - 46-50 Gilnahirk Road**

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of the proposed use;
- Proposed demolition of dwelling;
- Design;
- Impact on amenity;
- Impact on built heritage;
- Climate change;
- Health impacts;
- Access and transportation;
- Natural heritage;
- Environmental protection;
- Wastewater infrastructure; and
- Trees and landscaping.

She reported that statutory consultees had raised no objections, that the application had been neighbour notified and advertised in the local press and that 24 representations and a petition had been received.

She explained that the main concerns raised were an increase in traffic and deliveries, road safety, noise and light pollution and that a retail impact assessment had not been submitted.

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She stated that the concerns raised had been dealt with in the case officer's report and that, with regards to the traffic and road safety concerns, DfI Roads had confirmed that it was content with the proposal.

The Principal Planning Officer stated that, having regard to the Development Plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered to be acceptable and it was recommended that planning permission be granted.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Bower to the meeting who attended in objection the application.

Councillor Bower stated that she was speaking on behalf of a large number of residents who had contacted her with concerns about the application and felt that it raised a number of material planning concerns.

She explained that the proposal required the loss of an existing dwelling and whilst demolition itself would not require planning permission, the loss of housing was a material consideration as it was not a derelict or unusable home.

She stated that there were concerns around residential amenity in that the intensification of commercial activity immediately beside homes would increase vehicle movement, forecourt noise and general activity levels.

She added that pedestrian safety must be considered given that the area around the application site had no pedestrian crossing and DfI had no plans to install one.

She concluded by stating that these were policy relevant concerns that merit significant weight.

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. C. Heatley to the meeting, a local resident speaking in objection to the application.

Ms. Heatley stated that she was speaking on behalf of local residents in the Gilnahirk area who strongly opposed the proposed expansion. She explained that local residents had lodged numerous objections and a petition that highlighted their areas of concern.

She stated that she believed that the following areas of concern should be given further consideration:

- The size of the planned extension;
- Increased levels of traffic, noise and pollution;
- The local demand for the supermarket;
- Installation of five self-service tills would not create additional employment;
- Light pollution; and

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Tuesday, 19th May, 2026**

- Retail expansion into a primarily residential area.

Ms. Heatley asked the Committee to reject the planning application.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. E. Loughry from Inaltus and Mr. J. Maneeley, Clarman Architects, to the meeting, who were attending on behalf of the applicant.

Mr. Loughry stated that the applicant, Maxol, had undertaken a voluntary pre-application community consultation exercise and, as a result, had made a number of changes to its application before submission, that included provision of hedging and tree planting along the boundary, removal of previously proposed pedestrian access, deli counter, seating areas, provision of dedicated safer pedestrian access routes and provision of a pitched roof to the extension.

He stated that the proposal was a modest extension to the petrol station and associated shop that would replace the dwelling at 50 Gilnahirk Road. He explained that the extension would be single story with a pitch roof and similar to the height of the existing dwelling.

He stated that Maxol had served the local community for many years and was investing £2million into the proposal for the renewal and improvement of retail services and, whilst he was aware of the objections which had been raised, he didn't think they would support a refusal. He outlined how the proposal would not affect the privacy of any surrounding homes, would not erode residential character, that light spill would be controlled by condition, that the application satisfied planning policy and was supported by technical reports related to retailing, traffic, noise, drainage, ecology, demolition, climate change and design.

Mr. Loughrey asked the Committee to approve the application.

In response to a question from a Member with regard to community consultation, Mr. Loughrey stated that he had undertaken a leaflet drop, advertised in a local newspaper and that representatives from Maxol had attended a consultation event at the Stormont Hotel to address some of the concerns which had been raised by residents.

A number of Members asked questions with regard to increased traffic and parking and its impact on amenity. Mr. Loughrey responded by stating that there was no anticipation of the additional staff parking in the area, rather that they would travel to work by foot or public transport and that additional customers would be those from the local area undertaking additional top-up shops.

A Member asked the Principal Planning Officer how much weight was given to Members who had first-hand experience of the area over parking surveys and stated that it was evident from the recent Committee site visit that there was congestion in the existing traffic network in the area. The Principal Planning Officer responded by explaining that, when DfI undertake the parking assessments, they look at whether the parking within the site is in line with the parking standards within the proposal and that DfI had stated that the proposal met the standards and had no concerns.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,  
Tuesday, 19th May, 2026**

**Proposal**

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,  
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers,

“That the Committee refuses the application on the grounds that the proposal would result in the loss of an existing dwelling and would not be complimentary to the surrounding residential uses, the loss of character and the impact on existing residential amenity, contrary to Policy HOU3 a.”

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

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the reasons for refusal.

**LA04/2025/1661/F - Installation of a new floating pontoon to replace the existing wooden jetty - River bank approximately 150m north east of Shaws Bridge Car Park**

The Planning Manager summarised the application for the Committee and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of development;
- Impact on amenity; and
- Impact on the character and appearance of the area.

He reported that no objections had been received from consultees and that no representations had been received.

He stated that it was recommended that the application be approved, with conditions, subject to an outstanding response from the Historic Environment Division.

The Committee granted planning permission and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise, including any issues from the outstanding HED consultation response, provided that they were not substantive.

**LA04/2025/2090/F - Creation of hardstanding and widening of vehicular access to front of dwelling. (Retrospective) - 38 Hillhead Avenue**

The Planning Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application and outlined the following key issues:

- Design and impact on the character of the area;
- Impact on neighbouring amenity;

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Tuesday, 19th May, 2026**

- Road safety and car parking; and
- Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS).

He reported that seven letters of representation had been received from a neighbouring objector and the issues raised had been addressed within the case officer's report. He added that DfI Roads had been consulted and offered no objection to the proposals, subject to condition.

He stated that it was recommended that the application be approved with conditions.

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Collins to the meeting, speaking in objection to the proposal.

Councillor Collins stated that the objection neighbour had concerns with regard to water on her property. He explained that it was a health and safety issue as the water had the potential to cause the objectors driveway to become slippery due to excess water or ice.

He suggested to the Committee that it undertake a site visit before it considers the application.

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. A. McParland to the meeting, speaking in objection to the application.

Ms McParland explained that the works carried out had materially altered the ground levels, gradient and drainage patten of the site which had caused a direct impact onto her property.

She stated that, following the building works, an air vent on the front wall of the house sat flush with the new paving and was a clear indication that the level of the property had been raised significantly.

She stated that an impermeable asphalt area to the side of the property was not included in the submitted plans and that the change in gradient had resulted in direct runoff towards the shared boundary and her property. She explained that there were no proper integrated drainage measures on the site which had resulted in water flowing across the front of her gates and across the public footpath, instead of being managed within the site or directly safely to the road gully.

She refuted DfI's claim that a video she had submitted illustrating runoff problems had been taken during a yellow rain warning and stated that DfI undertaking remedial works was a clear indication that the works carried out by the applicant had caused runoff problems.

She concluded by stating that she had no issue with the applicant improving or enhancing their property, however, the volume of impermeable asphalt and artificially altered gradients had created health and safety concerns. She asked the Committee to refuse the application or defer consideration to allow for the Committee to undertake a site visit to the application site.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,  
Tuesday, 19th May, 2026**

The Committee granted planning permission and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

**Restricted Item**

**Draft SPG on Short Term Let Accommodation**

The Development Planning and Policy Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the draft Short Term Let Supplementary Planning Guidance which had been developed in response to the challenges faced by short term lets across the city.

The Committee agreed to publish the draft Supplementary Planning Guidance on short term let accommodation for public consultation.

Chairperson

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## Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 14th May, 2026

### MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor M. Donnelly (Chairperson)  
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);  
The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey);  
Alderman Copeland;  
Councillors Anglin, Bell, T. Brooks,  
Collins, P. Donnelly, S. Douglas,  
Ferguson, Groogan, Lyons, Magee,  
McCann, Meenehan and Walsh.

In attendance: Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;  
Mr. O. Crolly, Local Energy Systems Advisor;  
Ms. C. Shortt, Monitoring, Learning & Reporting Officer; and  
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

#### **Apologies**

An apology was reported from Councillor R. Brooks.

#### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 16th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 5th May.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Lyons declared an interest, in that he was a Member of a Wind Energy Co-operative. However, he did not feel that it was a conflict of interest given the nature of the discussions and therefore he did not leave the meeting.

#### **Scaling Rooftop Solar PV in Belfast**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

**1.1 To provide an update on the progress on solar PV.**

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to note that:**

- I. there are currently 1,311 domestic solar PV installations across Belfast contributing a total of 8.6**

- MW of renewable electricity against a potential generation of 1.1GW;
- II. 24 council buildings have been assessed (desktop) for their potential to host rooftop solar PV including five buildings which have had a more in-depth site assessment;
  - III. one of these assessments was used to secure €51,120 from the Shared Island Fund to install solar PV on Donegal Pass Community Centre which reduces carbon emissions by 13 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh annually saving £7000 per year;
  - IV. an Expression of Interest will be submitted to GB Energy to secure capital funding to support the installation of solar PV on selected Council buildings and to extend an interactive solar map developed in partnership with the Department for the Economy and GIA to create a web-based information portal to enable businesses and residents to see how much money they can save by installing solar PV; and
  - V. further market testing and modelling of a rooftop solar portfolio PPA business model has demonstrated the potential to provide generators with an export revenue (encouraging them to size solar systems to maximise available roof space and thereby increase total solar deployment) and enable local businesses to access competitively priced renewable electricity.

### 3.0 Main report

#### Background

- 3.1 Solar PV represents the main opportunity for generating renewable energy within the city boundary due to the abundance of rooftops across the City. However, rooftop generation is still quite low in Belfast - there are currently 1,311 domestic solar PV installations across Belfast contributing a total of 8.6 MW of renewable electricity to the local supply. However, the potential generation is around 1.1GW. Rooftop solar Photovoltaic (PV) is therefore identified as a low regret option for decarbonisation in the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP).

### 3.2 Analysis of rooftop solar PV potential of selected BCC buildings

Belfast City Council (BCC) has been involved in a number of studies which have sought to assess the potential solar PV generation on selected buildings across the City. In December

2022, 11 of BCC's high consuming buildings were included in a DfE funded study whereby Gordon Ingram Associates (GIA) analysed the solar PV potential of over 50 properties (both domestic and non-domestic) in the Belfast area.

- 3.3 In 2023, Belfast City Council partnered with Cork City Council on a Shared Island funded feasibility study that assessed the solar PV potential on a number of high consuming council sites in both Cork and Belfast. In Belfast, the potential solar PV generation for a further 10 council owned buildings was estimated against the electricity consumption for each building. Five buildings were also assessed in more detail through site visits including City Hall and Duncrue. In all, 24 council owned buildings were included across the three studies.

3.4 Installation of rooftop solar on Donegall Pass Community Centre

The results of the studies were then used to complete a joint application with Cork City Council last summer to access capital funding to install solar PV on one community centre in Belfast (Donegall Pass Community Centre) and two in Cork (Fairhill Fairfield Community Association and St. Vincent's Hurling and Football Club). These community buildings were selected due to their high potential solar PV generation and high energy consumption levels identified in the earlier study. A further application secured additional funding to install batteries to store excess electricity generated during times of high generation and low usage.

- 3.5 The panels have the potential to generate 37,898kWh/year against a current energy consumption of approximately 19,000kWh/year (ie the panels will produce approximately double the amount of energy currently used). This reduces carbon emissions in the city by approximately 13 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e/kWh annually (equivalent to charging a smart phone 120,000 times) and will save around £7000 per year on the electricity bill. The aim is to use the Donegal Pass Community Centre to test the solar array and battery storage and explore its potential on other council sites across the estate. Since installation, the site has not used any electricity from the grid on 85% of the days (46 days out of 54 days).

3.6 Web-based portal for analysis of rooftop generation potential

DFE has also funded GIA to undertake a second phase of research into the solar PV potential of properties within the UP2030 area which represents 79% of the total roof-space

within the wider City Centre designated boundary and 29% of Belfast's total electricity consumption per year. This project analysed an amalgamation of roof tops to see if it was possible to identify areas of high generation potential across 862 blocks of buildings located within 25 Data Zones in Belfast which included a mix of both domestic and non-domestic properties. 23 of the 25 Data Zones assessed in this project were located within the Botanic District Electoral Area (DEA) of Belfast while the remaining two Data Zones were located in the Court DEA. Botanic and Court DEAs geographically represent 25 of the 35 DEAs located within Belfast City Council's City Centre boundary (outlined in the Local Development Plan).

- 3.7 The total installation sizes estimated as part of this project are subject to further on-site detailed assessments, such as structural assessments, system configuration assessments, and mounting kit layout assessments. The results demonstrate the potential application of this methodology to develop a web-based information portal to enable businesses and residents to see how much money they can save by installing solar PV.

3.8 **Funding opportunity: GB Energy**

The Climate Team is partnering with the Energy Manager and GIA to submit an Expression of Interest to GB Energy to extend the solar PV potential map across the city and also to avail of capital funding to install solar PV panels on high consuming sites within the Council estate. Money saved (from reduced energy costs) can be used to fund other local community initiatives such as longer opening hours, local employment opportunities and new resources.

- 3.9 GBE funding is available to local government, other public sector organisations and community energy groups to unlock key projects and deliver pipelines of local renewable energy projects. GBE is dedicating up to £1bn throughout the rest of the Spending Review period, with N Ireland included as recipients. In N Ireland, GBE will work with the Northern Ireland Executive to design a tailored approach that reflects its energy landscape and ambitions in its upcoming Community Energy Policy Framework.

3.10 **Scaling rooftop solar through a portfolio Power Purchase Agreement (PPA)**

Under the recent Innovate UK project 'Enhancing Low Carbon Heat Networks', research and modelling were undertaken by the Energy Systems Catapult to understand the opportunity

and appetite for a business model which aggregates excess solar generation in Belfast and sleeves it across the local electricity network to an off-taker, facilitated by a portfolio manager and a licensed energy supplier.

- 3.11** The Portfolio PPA business model was developed in the previous phase of funding from Innovate UK. The basic concept is to incentivise the owners of buildings with large rooftops to install rooftop solar, so that excess generation can be aggregated into a portfolio and dispatched through a PPA agreement to a single off-taker.
- 3.12** The model has the potential to provide generators with an attractive, reliable export revenue stream, encouraging them to size solar systems to maximise available roof space and thereby increase total solar deployment. At the same time it would enable local businesses to access competitively priced renewable electricity.
- 3.13** This work examined its attractiveness to stakeholders, its feasibility in practice, and its potential commercial viability. This work also included a legal review of the business model, a hackathon with innovators and two workshops with suppliers. These activities are intended to give confidence to a potential 3rd party investor. The aims of the study were to:
- 1.** understand how the business model could operate in practice, speaking with the stakeholders essential to its implementation (eg virtual power plant operators, traditional PPA providers, aggregators, energy suppliers etc),
  - 2.** estimate the potential annual surplus solar generation available in Belfast, and to test whether the value proposition could be mutually beneficial to both the supplier and the energy centre.
- 3.14** A mini-‘hackathon’ was organised to explore how innovators in the market could deliver the model and improve the commercial viability. Reerve Energy were judged to have the most applicable solution by the panel made up by BCC and project partner officers. The solution put forward is to co-locate battery storage at the generation sites in order to capture surplus wind energy overnight. This method allows for a profile to be built with 70% wind and 30% sun, which closely matches the heat network demand profile.
- 3.15** The Reerve business model finances, installs and operates the solar and storage assets and recover the capital costs over time. Because Reerve would be between the generator and

offtaker, as intended by the Portfolio PPA model, they can make a margin in multiple revenue streams allowing value to be shared with all parties. With this model, electricity could be supplied at £0.14-0.15p/kWh, however barriers still remaining with clarity around the need for sub-metering, contractual terms and site recruitment.

**3.16** The key findings are summarised below.

- 1.** The top 100 non-domestic buildings in Belfast (by excess generation capacity) could host 95MW of solar PV, generating approximately 68GWh of annual surplus electricity. Most of this potential is concentrated in warehouses, shops, and education buildings.
- 2.** Oversizing rooftop PV systems can yield payback periods broadly comparable to conventional self-consumption systems, while delivering significantly higher net present value. It can also offer an indicative PPA price of 13.8-18.7p/kWh for the heat network.
- 3.** There is cross-sector interest in the Portfolio PPA model, but stakeholders also highlighted barriers. These include grid constraints, contractual complexity, high development and transaction costs, middle layer fees, the challenge of multi-party value sharing.
- 4.** innovators in the energy sector could help improve the commercial viability of the model through asset diversification and portfolio-wide coordination in the model. Market ready solutions capable of supporting these requirements already exist.

**3.17** To progress the model towards delivery, ESC recommend that BCC explores the potential for a proof-of-concept pilot to provide a more robust evidence base to inform whether and how the Portfolio PPA could be scaled across Belfast. The pilot would focus on identifying and progressing a shortlist of priority buildings with the most potential to generate surplus solar power and then undertaking a detailed financial assessment of the Portfolio PPA for the shortlisted sites.

**3.18** This pilot would allow the Council to test the model at a practical scale, validate key technical and commercial assumptions, and confirm whether surplus solar can be aggregated and supplied in a way that is commercially viable. The assessment of potential off-takers could also be widened beyond the heat network. Determining which off-taker offers the most complementary demand profile to the anticipated

**surplus generation would help mitigate imbalance risk and improve the commercial viability of the model.**

**4.0 Financial and Resource Implications**

**None at present**

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

**None.”**

In response to a Member’s question, the Local Energy Systems Advisor explained that, over the last five years, battery storage costs had decreased while the quality had increased, adding that the size of the storage had also reduced somewhat.

In response to a further Member’s query, the Monitoring, Learning and Reporting officer explained that the software had captured data by flying a drone over the city centre and that they hoped to include the rest of the city as time went on.

At the request of a further Member, the Climate Commissioner agreed to bring a case study on the work at the Donegall Pass Community Centre to a future meeting. The Committee also agreed to the Member’s request for Reverse Energy be invited to present to a future meeting.

The Committee subsequently noted the updates which had been provided.

**Restricted Item**

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

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

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

**District Heat Network Update**

The Climate Commissioner provided the Committee with an update on the progress which had been made to date with the District Heat Network, including heat mapping and initial feasibility assessment, market readiness, the Business model

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Thursday, 14th May, 2026**

analysis, route to market analysis, engagement of off-takers, development of a procurement strategy and community opportunities.

After discussion, the Committee noted that:

- the work had advanced the heat network project to a stage where approval would be needed to utilise the outputs of the work to date to move into a formal market engagement phase, lasting 6-12 months;
- the cost of utilising the outputs of the work to date to move into a formal market engagement phase lasting 6-12 months would be assessed with a paper brought back in due course;
- the Climate Team would work with the Director of Property and Projects and the Energy Manager to explore how readiness assessments of BCC buildings (to connect to a heat network) could be funded;
- the Climate Team would engage with Estates to explore options for Belfast City Council land for an energy centre;
- the Climate Team would continue to engage interested off-takers;
- the Climate Team would work with the energy manager to establish a protocol to progress lower temperature testing in the winter months (2026);
- the Climate Team would continue to explore funding opportunities through GB Energy, Shared Island Fund etc.;
- an alternative date was still being sought for a visit to the Leeds heat network; and
- the above next steps would be subject to approval by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at key stages throughout the programme.

Chairperson

## Standards and Business Committee

Tuesday, 26th May, 2026

### MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Flynn (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Lawlor and McCullough; and  
Councillors Bower, Bradley, Carson,  
de Faoite, P. Donnelly, D. Douglas,  
Long, Lyons, Magee, McCallin,  
McCormick, McDonough-Brown, McDowell,  
I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin and Murphy.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal  
and Civic Services;  
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance  
Manager; and  
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

#### **Apologies**

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor McAteer.

#### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 28th April, 2026, were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 5th May, 2026.

#### **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Long declared that an interest in the item 'Silent Fireworks' in that the Justice Department had been referenced within the motion and that his wife was the Justice Minister. Since the matter did not become subject to discussion nor debate, Councillor Long was not required to leave the meeting.

#### **Notices of Motions**

The Committee considered the following Notices of Motion and agreed to the course of action as set out:

#### **Embedding Community Food Growing in the Planning Process for New Housing Developments**

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Doherty and seconded by Councillor McCusker, be referred, in the first instance, to the Planning Committee.

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**Northern Ireland Housing Executive –  
Tenancy Succession Policy**

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Canavan and seconded by Councillor Black, be referred, in the first instance, to the People and Communities Committee.

**Policy Prohibiting Lock Boxes Associated  
with Short-term Holiday Lets**

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor McKay and seconded by Councillor Carson, be referred, in the first instance, to the People and Communities Committee.

**Silent Fireworks**

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Flynn and seconded by Councillor Smyth, be referred, in the first instance, to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee.

**Strengthening Disability Inclusion and  
Accessibility across the Council**

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor R. Brooks and seconded by Councillor Verner be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Chairperson