

Public Document Pack

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

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE
- REPORTS TO FOLLOW & ADDITIONAL REPORTS

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

In addition to those matters previously notified to you, the following item(s) will also be considered at the meeting to be held at 9.30 am on Friday, 18th September, 2026.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

2. **Restricted Items**

- (e) Leisure Update (Pages 1 - 12)

4. **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (c) Northern Ireland's Draft Artificial Intelligence Strategy - Consultation (Pages 13 - 30)

5. **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

- (d) Pitches Update (Pages 31 - 38)

6. **Finance, Procurement and Performance**

- (c) Response to Department of Finance consultation on Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating (Pages 39 - 68)
- (d) Request for Funding - Halloween event in City Centre (Pages 69 - 72)

8. **Operational Issues**

- (b) Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality (Pages 73 - 78)
- (d) Request for the use of Botanic Gardens (Pages 79 - 82)

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

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Subject:	Belfast City Council Draft Response to Consultation on the Northern Ireland Public Sector AI Strategy
Date:	18 September 2026
Reporting Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Corporate Services
Contact Officer:	Mark McCann, City Innovation Manager, Paul Gribben, Head of Digital Services, Deirdre Ferguson, City Innovation Programme Lead

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒								
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. Insert number ☐ 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime									
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;">☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;">☐</td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	☐	After Council Decision	☐	Sometime in the future	☐	Never	☐
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Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To provide Members with an overview of the Northern Ireland Draft Public Sector AI Strategy and to seek approval for Belfast City Council's draft response to the consultation - which closes on 7 October 2026 . The Council's response seeks to strengthen the Strategy through greater recognition of local government, stronger adoption mechanisms, improved collaboration and a

	continued focus on inclusive growth, environmental considerations, trust and responsible innovation.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: 1. Approve the draft response to the Northern Ireland Draft Public Sector AI Strategy.
3.0	Main report
3.1	In August 2026, the Northern Ireland Executive published its Draft Public Sector AI Strategy for consultation. The Strategy establishes a framework for the responsible adoption of Artificial Intelligence across Northern Ireland's public sector and sets out a series of principles, governance arrangements and priority actions intended to guide future implementation. On-line responses are requested by 7 October 2026.
3.2	The Strategy is built around eight principles intended to guide how AI is developed, procured and deployed across public bodies while maintaining public trust and ensuring AI is used responsibly and ethically. Principle 1 – Human Oversight: AI projects should have a human oversight team to ensure accuracy, prevent bias, integrate citizen perspectives and values, and question outputs. Principle 2 – Accountability & Redress: Clear lines of responsibility should be documented and cover data, algorithms, project design and project outcomes. Principle 3 – Data Governance: Policies and processes must protect personal data, and data used should be subject to the highest standards of data governance. Principle 4 – Technical Safety & Security: Public sector AI must be safe, secure, and resilient to threat, with a ‘no harm’ approach to humans and the environment. Principle 5 – Fairness and Transparency: All uses of AI should uphold values of fairness and inclusivity without discrimination or bias against any demographic or individual, or to propagate misinformation. Principle 6 – Environmental Sustainability: AI should be deployed to support sustainable solutions in energy or to monitor and model our natural environment. AI use must consider energy sources and efficiencies across all stages of the AI lifecycle. This includes ensuring the development of AI is proportionate and does not place excessive demands on our energy and water infrastructure at the expense of communities. Principle 7 – Societal Benefit: AI systems must be used to enhance productivity and efficiency in the public sector, improve the citizen experience, and support better decision-making. Every initiative must demonstrate measurable benefit for citizens or public services. Principle 8 – Training & Literacy: This involves working with a proposed AI Workforce Observatory to futureproof for the longer term, while providing safe spaces for experimentation to increase confidence and trust. It includes public sector training in areas such as AI

	technologies, applications and ethical implications, support for those leading on strategic integration of AI, new career pathways and support for Human Oversight Teams.
3.3	Implications for Belfast AI has the potential to improve service delivery, reduce administrative burden, enhance data-driven decision making and support more efficient use of resources. Northern Ireland departments are already identifying opportunities in areas such as transport management, environmental monitoring, housing and healthcare. The Council is also progressing a number of initiatives which align strongly with the objectives of the Strategy, including: • Development of Council-wide Generative AI policy and staff training programme. • Establishment of a Data & Analytics Board to oversee data and AI governance. • Delivery of the Belfast: Inclusive Futures event series, examining the societal implications of AI and highlighting the need for inclusion and responsibility. • Development of potential support for businesses and local government to ensure responsible AI adoption. With this in mind, the draft response is broadly supportive of the overall direction of travel set out within the Strategy and the potential it presents to enhance public services, support innovation and deliver societal benefit. However, as the strategy also states this must happen within a framework that promotes safety, environmental responsibility and inclusion.
3.4	Proposals to Strengthen the Strategy a) Role of Local Government The important role of local government is not sufficiently reflected in the draft Strategy. Councils deliver a broad range of citizen-facing services and are likely to be significant adopters of AI technologies across areas such as planning, environmental services, regeneration, economic development and customer services. The response therefore recommends formal local government representation within future AI governance and implementation structures. b) Innovation and Economic Opportunity The Council's response highlights the opportunity for AI to support inclusive economic growth, productivity and innovation. It also recommends stronger support for SME adoption and practical pathways that connect Northern Ireland's research strengths with business and public sector adoption. The draft Strategy should provide a clearer framework for translating these assets into place-based economic growth, business adoption, productivity improvement and regional benefit, with local government recognised as a key delivery partner alongside Invest NI, academia and industry

	c) Public Trust and Inclusion The response strongly supports the Strategy's emphasis on human oversight, accountability and transparency. It also recommends additional focus on citizen participation, digital inclusion and ensuring that AI adoption supports wider societal benefit rather than solely efficiency gains. Public trust is viewed as a critical enabler of successful AI adoption.
3.5	Summary of Recommendations Officers have therefore proposed several areas where the draft Strategy could be strengthened. These include: a) Formal recognition of local government as a key delivery partner in AI governance, innovation and implementation - to share learning, capability and best practice. b) Greater emphasis on AI adoption and diffusion across public services, SMEs and communities to support inclusive growth and regional competitiveness. c) Greater emphasis on digital inclusion, AI literacy and workforce transition. d) Stronger commitment to supporting conditions for Northern Ireland to lead in promoting inclusive and place-based AI innovation - with living laboratories and regulatory sandboxes available to build capability across all sectors and support responsible innovation. e) Promotion of challenge-led innovation programmes that connect public sector organisations with AI solution providers to address real-world service challenges. f) Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Environmental Sustainability and agrees that the environmental impact of Artificial Intelligence should be considered alongside its economic and societal benefits. With this in mind, the public sector would benefit from an AI procurement framework to support ethical, transparent, sustainable and consistent procurement practices.
3.6	Financial & Resource Implications None
3.7	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment None at present. Successful programmes will be subject to individual Equality screenings.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Draft NI AI Strategy Response

The AI Principles for NI

1. To what extent do you agree with the proposed AI principles for NI?

9/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed AI principles and their focus on trust, environmental sustainability, accountability and societal benefit. AI should be used to augment staff capability, improve services and deliver better outcomes for citizens.

With this in mind, the Strategy should place greater emphasis on AI adoption across the economy and public services, recognising that the key challenge is diffusion and implementation rather than capability creation.

Belfast City Council notes that AI adoption is already well underway across the workforce and broader economy. Evidence suggests that significant numbers of people are already using generative AI tools and expect their use to increase substantially over the coming years. The key policy challenge is therefore no longer whether AI will be adopted, but ensuring adoption is inclusive, responsible, well-governed and supported through appropriate skills, training and organisational capability.

Belfast City Council believes the Strategy should explicitly recognise local government as a key delivery partner in Northern Ireland's AI ecosystem. Councils are already leading collaborative work on AI adoption, service transformation and organisational readiness through programmes such as the Belfast Region City Deal AI Adoption Programme. The Strategy should therefore support the role of local authorities in translating national strategy into place-based implementation, experimentation and adoption.

2. To what extent do you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 1: Human Oversight)? 9/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports Human Oversight as a foundation of responsible AI. AI should enhance, not replace, human judgement and accountability. Oversight arrangements should be risk-based, with greater scrutiny of high-risk applications. Citizens should be able to understand, challenge and seek review of AI-supported decisions. Local government should be represented in oversight arrangements.

Belfast City Council believes local government should be explicitly recognised as a key delivery partner for Human Oversight. Councils deliver a broad range of citizen-facing services and are well placed to contribute practical experience in

balancing innovation, governance and public accountability. Oversight arrangements should therefore include local government representation and be supported through multidisciplinary expertise, training and knowledge-sharing networks.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Creation of Human Oversight Teams
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Framework for operation of Human Oversight Teams
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Human Oversight Disclosure Plans
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports Human Oversight Teams, common frameworks and disclosure plans. Arrangements should be proportionate and aligned with existing governance structures, with clear guidance on accountability, training and escalation.

3. **To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 2: Accountability & Redress?** 9/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Accountability and Redress. Public trust in Artificial Intelligence will depend on clear accountability arrangements, transparency regarding how AI is used, and effective mechanisms for addressing issues when things go wrong. Citizens should have confidence that public bodies remain accountable for decisions and outcomes, regardless of the technology used to support them.

Clear accountability is essential to maintaining public confidence and there is a need for consistency of approach across the sector. Citizens must understand who remains responsible for decisions supported by AI systems and how concerns can be raised and resolved.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Definition of redress mechanisms
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Designation of accountable officers
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Process for identification and disclosure of errors

Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports accountable officers, redress mechanisms and error reporting. Processes should promote transparency, learning and continuous improvement while remaining accessible and understandable to citizens.

4. **To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 3: Data Governance?** 9/10

The Council strongly supports Data Governance as a prerequisite for trusted AI adoption. The Strategy should recognise ongoing public sector challenges around data quality, information governance, legacy systems and organisational maturity. Investment in data and information management capability is essential.

We would also encourage recognition of the resource implications associated with these proposals. Many public sector organisations, particularly within local government, have limited specialist capacity across Data Protection, Information Governance, Records Management, Information Compliance and Data & Analytics functions. The introduction of additional governance, monitoring and assurance requirements for AI must be accompanied by practical guidance, shared frameworks, training and support mechanisms.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Amendment of DPIAs to integrate AI principles
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Requirement for data governance logs
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Visibility of organisational DPOs
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Document validation and verification
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Public-facing database of FAQs
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports incorporating AI considerations into DPIAs and maintaining governance records. Guidance, templates and reporting requirements should be proportionate and supported by shared frameworks and practical tools.

5. **To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 4: Technical Safety & Security?** 9/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Technical Safety and Security. AI governance should align with existing cyber security, risk management and assurance frameworks. Public confidence depends on secure, reliable and resilient AI systems.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Embedding of deep technical expertise in oversight teams
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Adoption of appropriate public sector standards
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Design and declaration of consistency testing
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Implementation of approaches for verification of AI systems
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council welcomes the emphasis on technical expertise, standards, testing and verification. Public bodies will require shared guidance, standards and support to develop the necessary capabilities alongside wider data and governance maturity.

Public sector organisations should not be expected to become AI-ready before they are data-ready, governance-ready and cyber-ready. These capabilities are mutually dependent and should be developed in parallel.

6. **To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 5: Fairness & Transparency** 9/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Fairness and Transparency. Organisations should be open about how AI is used and demonstrate that appropriate safeguards and accountability are in place. AI systems should be monitored to identify and mitigate bias.

Public trust will be fundamental to the successful adoption of AI across the public sector and can only be achieved where organisations are open about how AI is being used, where appropriate safeguards are in place, and how accountability is maintained.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Ensuring bias detection methods are built into AI models
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Creation of a repository for all AI projects
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Design of comms materials for AI projects
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports bias detection measures, AI project repositories and communication materials. Transparency should focus on both how AI is used and the benefits delivered for citizens and communities. We welcome the proposal to establish repositories and registers of AI projects to strengthen transparency, encourage collaboration and reduce duplication across organisations.

7. To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 6: Environmental Sustainability 9/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Environmental Sustainability and agrees that the environmental impact of Artificial Intelligence should be considered alongside its economic and societal benefits.

As the use of AI expands across the public sector, organisations should seek to understand and minimise environmental impacts while ensuring that AI is used to deliver positive outcomes for citizens and communities.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Requirement to detail how AI projects contribute to a sustainable future
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Disclosure of energy source and usage for all AI projects
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Reporting of mitigations to support environmental sustainability
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports sustainability reporting and mitigation measures. Requirements should be proportionate and reflect the limited visibility many organisations have of supplier infrastructure. Greater emphasis should be placed on sustainable procurement, supplier transparency and wider environmental benefits enabled by AI.

For example, AI may support more efficient public services, reduce unnecessary travel, optimise resource allocation, improve asset management, support climate resilience initiatives and enable better evidence-based decision-making

8. To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 7: Societal Benefit? 10/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Societal Benefit and believes it should be a central consideration in the design, deployment and evaluation of all AI initiatives across the public sector. The ultimate measure of success for AI should not be whether it has been implemented, but whether it demonstrably improves outcomes for citizens, communities and society as a whole. AI should be adopted to enhance public value, improve services and support the delivery of better social, economic and environmental outcomes.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Integration of a cost-benefit matrix into all AI projects
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Inclusion of metrics to measure efficiency, experience and outcomes for AI projects
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Production of impact summaries at project completion
Agree Disagree Don't know

Belfast City Council welcomes the proposal for organisations to assess benefits and impact measures. Evaluations should include accessibility, inclusion, service quality, productivity, sustainability and wider societal outcomes.

To support accountability and public trust, organisations should clearly articulate the intended benefits of AI projects at the outset and evaluate whether those benefits have been realised. The publication of impact summaries is therefore welcomed, provided a proportionate and consistent approach is adopted across the public sector.

9. To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for Principle 8: Training & Literacy? 10/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Training and Literacy. Skills initiatives should focus on practical implementation, organisational readiness, change management and knowledge sharing, alongside technical skills.

Greater emphasis should be given to SMEs and smaller organisations, where adoption levels often lag larger organisations. Skills programmes should be complemented by mentoring, peer learning, financial support, SME procurement and innovation opportunities, demonstrator projects and opportunities to learn from practical implementation experience with measurable SME adoption targets.

Knowledge transfer and organisational learning should become explicit objectives of public sector AI programmes. Successful pilots and projects should generate practical insights that can be shared across organisations to accelerate capability development and reduce duplication of effort.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions?

- Training for all public sector staff on AI basics
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Development of AI-specific career pathways within the public sector
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Integration of training development leads and trainees into Human Oversight Teams
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Inclusion of training assessment and development plan into all public sector AI projects
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Establishment of a Public Sector Skills Academy
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Establishment of AI Workforce Impact Observatory
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports training, career pathways, skills academies and workforce monitoring. The Strategy should place greater emphasis on digital inclusion, SME adoption and ensuring all communities can benefit from AI.

There is a risk that existing inequalities could be reinforced if access to technology, skills and opportunities develops unevenly. Public services should therefore remain inclusive and accessible while targeted interventions help ensure all communities can participate in and benefit from an increasingly AI-enabled society

Belfast City Council supports the establishment of a Public Sector Skills Academy and to support sharing good practice, reduce duplication, improve consistency and accelerate capability building across Northern Ireland.

The Council further welcomes consideration of workforce impacts associated with AI adoption. Monitoring how AI affects roles, skills requirements and workforce planning will help organisations prepare for change, identify emerging skills gaps and ensure that the benefits of AI are realised in a way that supports employees and improves public services.

AI Governance

10. To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for AI Governance? 9/10

The Council strongly supports the proposed approach to AI Governance. Governance should enable responsible innovation while maintaining accountability, transparency and public trust. We also support the development of an AI Governance Framework and Code of Practice that provides practical guidance on oversight, accountability, transparency, workforce engagement, risk assessment and responsible deployment.

The Strategy would benefit from clearer implementation arrangements and delivery mechanisms. Consideration should be given to establishing a dedicated delivery mechanism with responsibility for coordinating activity, monitoring progress, supporting adoption and reporting on outcomes. Strong governance should be complemented by clear ownership, delivery milestones and appropriate resourcing.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions?

- Development of a governance framework and tool for public sector use with AI projects
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Establishment of a cross-sectoral AI governance board for public sector projects
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Production of internal inventories of AI projects across all public sector bodies
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Delivery of bite-sized AI governance training for public & private sector leaders
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports a common governance framework, governance board, AI inventories and leadership training. Governance responsibilities extend beyond technical specialists and require senior leaders, elected representatives and managers to understand both the opportunities and risks associated with AI adoption. Developing leadership capability will be essential to achieving responsible and effective use of AI.

Governance should be risk-based, integrated with existing structures and supported by multidisciplinary expertise.

AI & Infrastructure

11. To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for AI & Infrastructure? 8/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed vision for AI and Infrastructure. Successful AI adoption depends on strong digital infrastructure, high-quality data and effective information sharing.

Through Council's City Innovation Office, Economic Development Department, Innovation City Belfast, and the Belfast Region City Deal. Belfast is also well positioned to support place-based AI experimentation and demonstration projects that could be scaled across Northern Ireland. Support for test-bed, experimental environments will help to de-risk investments and build capabilities.

The Strategy should also provide guidance on AI procurement and innovation procurement approaches, helping organisations access emerging technologies while maintaining high standards of value for money, transparency, ethics and accountability.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions?

- Development of an integrated data strategy for NI including data sharing infrastructure
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Identification of high value datasets across sectors for open publication
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Legislation for sharing datasets across sectors
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Development of a regional data centre
Agree Disagree **Don't know**
- Provision of sufficient high-performance compute facilities
Agree Disagree **Don't know**

- Creation of a central unit to enhance AI capability across the public sector

Agree

Disagree

Don't know

The Council particularly welcomes the proposal to develop an integrated data strategy and strengthen data sharing arrangements across sectors. We welcome the proposal for a central unit to support AI capability across the public sector. However, its role should extend beyond AI and recognise the wider ecosystem of data governance, analytics capability, information management and digital transformation that underpins successful AI adoption.

The Council believes that infrastructure investments should ultimately be judged by their contribution to public value. The objective should not be to build AI infrastructure for its own sake, but to create the conditions that enable organisations to use data and AI safely, responsibly and effectively in the delivery of better outcomes for citizens and communities.

AI & Skills

12. To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for AI & Skills? 10/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed vision for AI & Skills and believes that people, skills and organisational capability will be fundamental to the successful adoption of AI across Northern Ireland.

While the Strategy places welcome emphasis on capability development, Belfast City Council believes there should be a stronger focus on accelerating AI adoption amongst SMEs, the voluntary and community sector and indigenous businesses. Targeted support combining expert advice, grant support, mentoring and demonstration projects could help accelerate adoption and improve productivity.

The Council also recommends a stronger emphasis on workforce transition. Monitoring workforce impacts and supporting adaptation should be treated as a strategic priority alongside technical skills development.

Alongside technical skills development, organisations require support in change management, service redesign, workforce adaptation and adoption planning. Invest NI is likely to play a key role with its client companies but this is currently absent from its strategy.

Skills interventions should be closely linked to practical adoption support, helping public bodies and businesses understand where AI can create value, how risks can be managed and how organisational benefits can be realised.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions?

- Audit of educational provision across the region
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Scoping of AI needs for community and voluntary sector
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Further integration of AI use into teacher training provision
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Development of region-wide guidance for use of AI in schools
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Roll-out of public awareness campaign promoting access to freely accessible basic skills training
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Integration of basic AI training into new staff inductions across sectors
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Creation of mechanisms for mentorship, sharing best practice, and peer advocacy for organisational leaders
Agree Disagree Don't know

The Council supports efforts to improve AI literacy among citizens, schools, community organisations and public sector staff. Access to training should be inclusive and help ensure that the benefits of AI are available to all sections of society.

Belfast City Council believes skills development should also focus on the uniquely human capabilities that become increasingly important in an AI-enabled workplace. Critical thinking, ethical decision making, communication, creativity, professional judgement, relationship building and citizen engagement are all likely to become more valuable as AI takes on routine and administrative activities.

The Council welcomes the proposed emphasis on leadership development, mentoring and sharing good practice. Public sector leaders need sufficient understanding of AI to govern its use effectively, make informed decisions and identify opportunities to improve services while managing associated risks.

AI & Public Sector Transformation

13. To what extent to you agree with the overarching vision for AI & Public Sector Transformation? 9/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed vision for AI and Public Sector Transformation. AI should be viewed as an enabler of better services and outcomes rather than an end in itself. Local government can play an important role in piloting and scaling responsible AI innovation.

Local authorities are particularly well placed to support testbeds for responsible AI innovation due to the breadth of services they provide and their close relationships with citizens and communities. Place-based pilot programmes can generate valuable learning to support transformation and can subsequently be scaled across the wider public sector.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Use of a Citizens' Panel for feedback and positive change
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Identification of potential use cases and targets for public sector AI transformation
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Provision of guidance on quantifiable measurements of success or failure
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Publication of quarterly registry of all AI projects across the public sector
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Establishment of CAIR establish 'CAIR' (Collaborative AI Resource) to provide training across government departments
Agree Disagree Don't know

Council supports use-case development, measurement frameworks, project registries, citizen engagement and collaborative capability initiatives. However, we would encourage the final Strategy to place a stronger focus on benefits realisation and service transformation. Success should be measured through improvements in service quality, accessibility, productivity and public value.

The Council also welcomes the proposal to establish collaborative capability through the CAIR model. Given the current shortage of specialist expertise across AI, Data & Analytics, Information Governance and Cyber Security disciplines, collaborative approaches have the potential to reduce duplication,

improve consistency and accelerate learning across public sector organisations throughout Northern Ireland.

AI & Citizens

14. To what extent do you agree with the overarching vision for AI & Citizens? 10/10

Belfast City Council strongly supports the proposed vision for AI & Citizens and agrees that public trust, transparency and citizen engagement must be central to the successful adoption of Artificial Intelligence across Northern Ireland. The long-term success of AI will depend not only on technological capability but on public confidence that AI is being used responsibly, ethically and in a manner that delivers genuine benefits for individuals, communities and society.

Specifically, what is your opinion of the following priority actions for the public sector?

- Development of an awareness-raising campaign to showcase public sector AI projects and benefits
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Creation of a publicly available AI Register of Systems
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Establishment of an AI Citizens' Panel
Agree Disagree Don't know
- Evaluation of benefits of an AI Charter
Agree Disagree Don't know

Belfast City Council welcomes proposals to increase transparency regarding public sector use of AI. A publicly available AI Register has the potential to strengthen trust, improve accountability and provide citizens with clear information about how AI is being used. Such a register should focus on explaining what AI is being used for, what benefits are expected, what human oversight arrangements exist and how concerns or complaints can be raised. Information should be accessible and understandable to non-technical audiences.

The Council supports awareness campaigns, AI registers, citizens' panels and exploration of an AI Charter. The Strategy should place greater emphasis on digital inclusion to ensure no citizens are disadvantaged by increasing adoption of AI.

15. Do you have any further comments?

Belfast City Council welcomes the development of a Northern Ireland AI Strategy and supports its ambition to establish a responsible, human-centred and trustworthy framework for AI adoption.

The Council believes the final Strategy would be strengthened through:

- a) Formal recognition of local government as a key delivery partner in AI governance, innovation and implementation - to share learning, capability and best practice.
- b) Greater emphasis on AI adoption and diffusion across public services, SMEs and communities to support inclusive growth and regional competitiveness.
- c) Greater emphasis on digital inclusion, AI literacy and workforce transition.
- d) Stronger commitment to supporting conditions for Northern Ireland to lead in promoting inclusive and place-based AI innovation - with living laboratories and regulatory sandboxes available to build capability across all sectors and support responsible innovation.
- e) Promotion of challenge-led innovation programmes that connect public sector organisations with AI solution providers to address real-world service challenges.
- f) Belfast City Council strongly supports the principle of Environmental Sustainability and agrees that the environmental impact of Artificial Intelligence should be considered alongside its economic and societal benefits. With this in mind, the public sector would benefit from an AI procurement framework to support ethical, transparent, sustainable and consistent procurement practices.

Belfast City Council's overarching view is that our challenge is increasingly one of AI diffusion, adoption and implementation rather than capability creation alone. The final Strategy should therefore combine strong governance and ethical principles with practical mechanisms that support organisations, businesses and communities to adopt AI safely, responsibly and at scale.



Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Pitches Update
Date:	18 th September 2026
Reporting Officer:	David Sales – Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services Sinead Grimes – Director of Property & Projects
Contact Officer:	David Sales - Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services Sinead Grimes – Director of Property & Projects

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.	
Insert number ☐	
1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	<u>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</u>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the work ongoing in respect of pitches including the Pitches Strategy.

2.0	<u>Recommendation</u>
2.1	The Committee is asked to note: - the update on the Pitches Strategy Consultation - the update on current minor pitch improvement projects and agree the proposed projects for this year as outlined at 3.5 - that a rolling programme of condition surveys is being commissioned to inform the development of a costed maintenance programme; - that a detailed report will be brought to Committee next month with further detail on the £1m Partner Enhancement Fund, Pitches Implementation Plan and Events Space - that a response has been received from the Minister for Communities regarding the requirements under the new Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League criteria and agree that officers meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Pitch Strategy 2026 - 2036 Consultation</u>
3.1	At its meeting on 30th April 2026, the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee noted the contents of the draft Pitches Strategy 2026 – 2036 and approved that the draft Strategy would be subject to formal consultation which would also consider any equality implications. Members will be aware of the significant consultation and engagement that has been undertaken as part of the work on the Pitches Strategy and on the agreed overarching Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy. The former included co-design, online surveys, as well as further focused surveys, public consultation events and interviews.
3.2	Members are asked to note that it is anticipated the consultation will open for 8 weeks via the Yoursay platform in mid-October, closing in December 2026. An equality screening document will also accompany the consultation along with a FAQ document.
3.3	It is estimated that feedback from the consultation will be brought back to Members in February 2027.
	<u>Pitch Projects – Developments already undertaken or planned for 2026/2027</u>
3.4	Alongside the development of the Pitches Strategy, officers have progressed a number of initiatives which have previously been agreed by Members. These are designed to improve pitch provision across the city, using the Pitches Programme budget allocated. These include: - Clarendon Playing Fields: Installation of two 6m x 30m long ballstop fences at the grass soccer pitch. Works were completed in March 2026.

	- Fall Park: Installation of 1.2m high spectator fence, 6m high ballstop sections and spectator hardstanding at grass soccer pitch. Works are progressing well, completion expected by end of September 2026. - Wedderburn Playing Fields: Installation of 2.4m high boundary fence and 1.2m high spectator fence. Works are programmed to commence in October 2026, with completion expected by December 2026. In this regard, a meeting for local councillors will be organised for the end of September with consultation sessions at the start of October. - Marrowbone 3G Pitch: Installation of 1.0m high ballstop netting system to the existing ballstop fence. Fencing is now on order with works programmed to commence in November 2026, completion is expected by mid-December 2026.
3.5	Furthermore, the following projects are proposed to be taken forward utilising the allocated Pitches Programme budget. Again these are small scale works designed to improve pitch provision across the city. - Woodlands Playing Fields: Creation of additional junior GAA pitch, installation of 3no. ballstop nets, 1.2m fence to car park and new player access ramp to the pitch area. - Cherryvale Park: Surface improvement work to existing grass GAA training pitch and installation of dugout areas. - Henry Jones Playing Fields: Installation of 2no. player dugouts. - Loughside Playing Fields: Installation of 4m high ballstop fence to boundary of small sided, grass soccer pitch. - Westlands Soccer Pitch (Waterworks Upper): Construction of new spectator hardstanding at grass soccer pitch. - Dixon Park: Installation of additional 1.2m high spectator fencing with ballstop section and new car park kerbing. - Strangford Playing Fields: Installation of ballstop nets. - Brook 4G – following a condition survey of the playing surface at Brook, a re-crumbing exercise will be completed to improve the playing surface. Members are asked to agree the minor pitch improvement projects outlined above. If agreed works will be carried out by end of March 2027.
	<u>Partner Enhancement Fund – Update</u>
3.6	At February 2026 Committee, Members agreed to ringfence £1million from the current Pitches Programme budget towards a Partner Pitch Enhancement Programme. This Fund is aimed at supporting partner organisations, who can demonstrate projects with community benefits, that will provide increased pitch availability to help address the deficit of pitch hours, as outlined in the Pitches Strategy. Work on this is being finalised and Members are asked to note that further

	detail will be brought back to Committee next month, outlining the open-call application process, eligibility criteria and assessment process.
	<u>Condition Surveys</u>
3.7	Members will be aware that a rolling programme of condition surveys is being carried out across the Council's buildings with surveys currently underway of all the community centres. This is to inform the development of a full evidence based planned maintenance programme. To ensure that the Council has a full understanding of all future maintenance requirements it is proposed that a programme of condition surveys of the Council's pitches both grass and 3G is undertaken.
3.8	A spec for this work is currently being finalised and an update on the timeline will be brought to Committee as part of a future update.
	<u>National Conference League – DFC response</u>
3.9	Recent proposals presented by new Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League facility criteria, was discussed at the special SP&R (30th April 2026). The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to engage the IFA in relation to the impact on football clubs on the level of pitches available that meet this criteria and request that interventions are made.
3.10	A response has been received from the Minister for Communities, indicating that whilst he does not have any direct influence over the structures, criteria or regulations governing leagues, he will support the continued engagement with Irish FA and league operators, around the impact of the onerous and challenging facility requirements introduced. A copy of this is attached at Appendix 1. It is proposed that officers meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.
	<u>Next Steps</u>
3.11	Members are asked to note the work that has been ongoing in respect of pitches and note that it is proposed to bring a detailed update to Committee next month covering - Pitches Strategy – Implementation Plan – proposed next steps following the outcome of the feasibility studies - Proposed procurement strategy - Update on the Event Space - extensive work on this piece of work has been undertaken and extensive engagement with promoters and other key stakeholders has taken place, with continued dialogue ongoing. - Continue to engage with Minister for Communities and Northern Ireland Amateur Football League regarding new requirements under the Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League and officers to meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.

	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.12	None in relation to this report.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.13	The legislation requirements have been met including screening. All physical projects are designed for people and are inherently inclusive and accessible.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Correspondence received from Minister for Communities re Belfast Playing Pitches

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From: The Minister

Eilish McGoldrick
Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator
Belfast City Council

Via email: mcgoldricke@belfastcity.gov.uk

Dear Eilish

BELFAST PLAYING PITCHES AND OUTDOOR SPORTS FACILITIES STRATEGY

Thank you for your letter of 15 May 2026.

I recognise the seriousness of the situation you raise whereby that some clubs and ground operators, including Belfast City Council, may not be able to comply with the requirements of the new Northern Amateur Football League National Conference League, as part of the wider restructuring of the football pyramid for Northern Ireland.

Whilst neither I nor my Department has any direct influence over the structures, criteria or regulations governing leagues administered by the Irish FA, the Northern Ireland Football League or the Northern Amateur Football League, I have asked my officials to continue to

engage closely with the Irish FA and league operators. Future investment through the Northern Ireland Football Fund, including the ongoing development of the Grassroots Facilities Programme, will consider facility needs across all levels of the game.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lyons', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities



Belfast
City Council

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Subject:	Response to Department of Finance consultation on Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating
Date:	18 th September 2026
Reporting Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is for Members to consider and endorse responses by Council to the Department of Finance consultation on Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant rating

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to agree the response to the consultation included in Appendix 2.
3.0	Main report
3.1	On 29 June 2026, the Minister of Finance announced that a further public consultation is being taken forward on two measures relating to the non-domestic rating system: - a Business Growth Accelerator, providing temporary, targeted relief for businesses taking practical steps to expand; and - Non-Domestic Vacant Rating, including how any increases in liability levels should be introduced.
3.2	The closing date for responses is 23 rd September 2026 and this report is to consider Council's proposed response, which if agreed will be submitted subject to Council ratification.
3.3	Business Growth Accelerator Proposal In relation to the Business Growth Accelerator proposals, the current position is that improvements to business premises immediately increase rateable value and rates liability arises as soon as works are completed. Under the new proposals within the consultation, increases would be delayed for a defined grace period (e.g. 12 months), and businesses would continue to pay rates based on the pre-improvement valuation during that grace period. Qualifying improvements under consideration within the scope of the policy may include extensions or enlargements, refurbishment, works that increase rateable value, and improvements to capacity or productivity. The proposals focus on existing properties, not new builds. The rationale for the proposal is that this would be a temporary intervention designed to: • reduce upfront financial pressure on businesses making investment in property; • allow businesses to recoup investment costs; and • encourage development that might otherwise not proceed. Full liability would apply after the grace period, maintaining fairness while supporting investment. The policy thus secures medium to long term revenue streams. The consultation questions and Council's proposed responses are detailed below:
3.4	Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability Currently owners of non-domestic properties which become vacant receive a 3-month 100% rate relief and thereafter a 50% rate relief whilst the property remains vacant. There are currently 4,700 properties across Northern Ireland in receipt of the relief at a cost of £19.7m annually (borne by both the NI Executive and Councils in proportion to each's Council's District Rate and Regional Rate split).

3.5	The relief is at odds with the domestic sector where vacant rate relief was removed previously. The relief, as was the case in the domestic sector previously, creates a disincentive on the owner to do anything with the property and could be a contributing factor to increasing dereliction of non-domestic properties around the country, as was the case with domestic properties.
3.6	The new consultation proposes introducing a phased increase to the 50% rates relief in liability for vacant commercial property, initially through a Stage 1 increase to 75% and subsequently in Stage 2 to 100%. It is believed that a phased approach would allow monitoring of behavioural responses, assessment of avoidance risks, and alignment with wider interventions. The initial three-month exemption would remain as well as existing exclusions (e.g. insolvency, listed buildings). The rationale is that the current 50% rate, lower than that which applies in other jurisdictions, is perceived as reducing incentives to bring property back into use. The proposed change aims to: • encourage occupation; • reduce long-term vacancy; • align more closely with other jurisdictions; and • increase revenue (estimated up to £20 million annually). For Members information, it will be noted that the follow categories of property are excluded and not subject to any charges whilst vacant: - - Low Net Annual Value (NAV): Properties with an NAV under £2,000 receive a 100% reduction and do not pay vacant rates. - Listed Buildings: Properties that are officially listed buildings or subject to a preservation notice are often exempt from empty rates until reoccupied. - Prohibited Occupation: Buildings where occupation is forbidden by law or by the action of a public authority. - Insolvent or Legal Estates: Properties managed by a company in administration, liquidators, personal representatives of a deceased person, or subject to a bankruptcy order. - Charities and Community Clubs: Empty properties owned by a charity or a Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) may qualify for zero rating if the next use will be wholly charitable or for the club. - Industrial Properties: Certain vacant industrial premises or factories may receive specific exemptions or extended relief periods assessed on a case-by-case basis.
3.7	The consultation questions and Council's proposed responses are detailed in appendix 2.
	Next Steps
3.8	None
	Financial & Resource Implications

3.9	There are no Financial implications with this report, however, the introduction of the policies will may have a positive impact on the council's rate income.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.10	Rating policy is the responsibility of the Department of Finance and the Department will be responsible for carrying out all required equality and rural needs screening associated with any new policy measures
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Consultation Document Appendix 2 – Council response



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Consultation Paper

Business Growth Accelerator / Non-Domestic Vacant Rating Liability

July 2026



Contents

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Foreword

Minister of Finance

In my time as Finance Minister, I have progressed a sustained programme of reform to deliver a more responsive and progressive rating system. This consultation document represents the next step in that process.

The paper seeks views on two policy initiatives designed to complement existing measures such as the Back in Business scheme and Small Business Rate Relief to continue to support business activity and the vitality of our town and city centres.

The proposals have two core objectives:

- to support business growth by reducing barriers to investment and expansion; and
- to help address the persistent issue of vacant commercial property.

These policies are intended to work together and alongside wider interventions both within the rating system and across central and local government. If implemented effectively, they can stimulate investment, increase occupancy, support regeneration, and grow rating revenue sustainably over the medium to long term.

Both proposals arise from the Strategic Reviews of Small Business Rate Relief and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating conducted in 2025–26. In November 2025, I set out my intention to bring these policies forward in my statement to the Assembly.

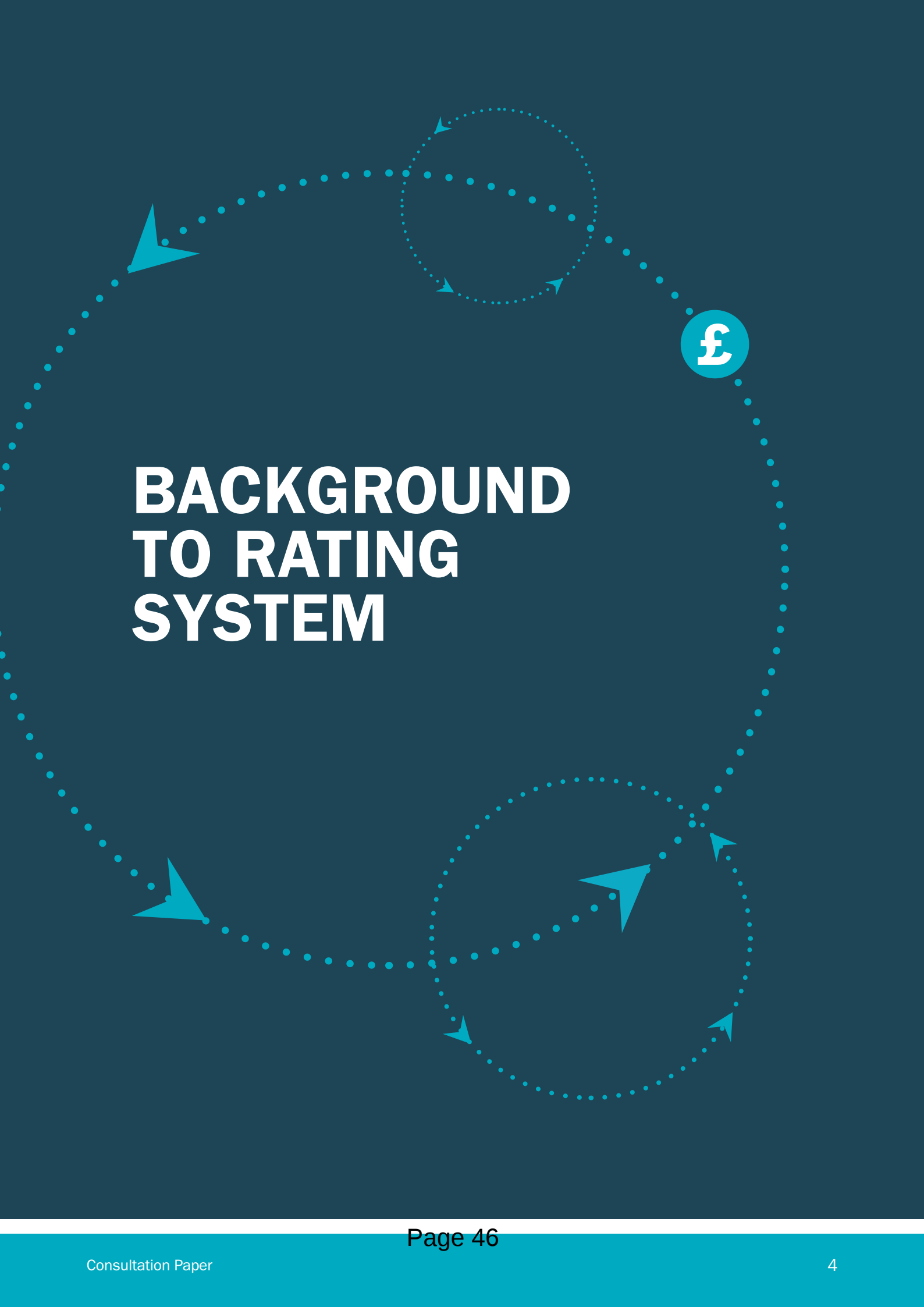
The first proposal is a Business Growth Accelerator, similar to the model in Scotland. This would delay increases in rates liability following property improvements or expansion, helping remove a barrier to investment.

The second proposal is the phased increase in Non-Domestic Vacant Rating liability. At present, vacant properties are liable for up to 50% of occupied rates. This consultation proposes increasing that liability to encourage re-use of vacant space.

I encourage all interested parties to engage fully with this consultation. Delivery will depend on partnership across the Executive, the Assembly and local government.

These proposals build on existing measures and respond to local challenges with practical, locally developed solutions. I welcome your views.

John O'Dowd
Finance Minister



BACKGROUND TO RATING SYSTEM

Background to the Rating System

The rating system is a devolved tax with two elements: domestic rates (largely residential) and non-domestic rates (largely commercial).

It currently raises over £1.7 billion annually, with just under 55% raised from non-domestic properties. This revenue funds key services including education, health, roads and local council provision. Regional rates alone account for around 4% of the Executive's spending power.

Land & Property Services administers the rating and valuation systems within a statutory framework, guided by caselaw.

Reliefs and exemptions are a core feature, allowing the system to support economic, social and environmental policy. However, all rate supports carry a cost either reduced revenue or a higher burden on other ratepayers. Every pound foregone reduces funding available for local public services.



CONTEXT TO CONSULTATION

Strategic Review Process

In November 2025, the Finance Minister updated the Assembly on the Strategic Review of the Rating Supports and set out the next steps for reform.

Four policy reviews have been completed under that process, with all remaining supports to be reviewed by 2027–28. Priority areas are being taken forward sooner.

The Minister's focus is to:

- deliver progressive reform;
- increase revenue sustainably; and
- incentivise behaviours that grow the tax base.

Two priority policy areas for consultation identified during the 2025/26 Strategic Reviews were:

- the introduction of a **Business Growth Accelerator**; and
- increased **Non-Domestic Vacant Rating liability**.

Building on Existing Measures

These proposals build on existing interventions, particularly the Back in Business scheme¹, which incentivises occupation of long-term vacant premises through reduced rates in early years.

The Business Growth Accelerator extends this approach by supporting investment in existing occupied properties, while vacant rating reforms aim to increase re-use of empty space. Together, these measures are designed to:

- promote better use of commercial property;
- support business activity; and
- expand the non-domestic tax base.

¹For further information on the Back in Business scheme see <https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/business-support/back-business-scheme>



ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

Who can respond

This consultation is open to all individuals, businesses, organisations and representative bodies.

Purpose

The proposals will directly affect businesses and property owners. This consultation seeks views to inform final policy design.

Duration

The consultation will run for **12 weeks**, closing on **23 September 2026**.

How to respond

Responses can be submitted:

- online via Citizen Space (preferred); or
- by email to: ratingpolicy@finance-ni.gov.uk

Respondents should indicate whether they are replying as an individual or on behalf of an organisation.

Key principles

Our key consultation principles as a Department are:

- consultation at a formative stage;
- clear explanation of proposals;
- sufficient time for response; and
- timely publication of outcomes.



PROPOSAL 1: BUSINESS GROWTH ACCELERATOR

Overview

This part of the consultation proposes introducing a **Business Growth Accelerator** to delay immediate increases in rates following property improvements.

Stakeholders have identified the immediate increase in rates after expansion as a barrier to investment. This proposal aims to address that issue.

How it works

Currently:

- improvements increase rateable value immediately; and
- rates liability rises as soon as works are completed.

Under these proposals:

- increases would be delayed for a defined **grace period** (e.g. 12 months); and
- businesses would continue to pay rates based on the pre-improvement valuation during that period.

Example:

- Pre-improvement rateable value: £50,000.
- Post-improvement rateable value: £75,000.
- Higher liability applies only after the prescribed grace period expires.

Rationale

This would be a temporary intervention designed to:

- reduce upfront financial pressure on businesses making investment in property;
- allow businesses to recoup investment costs; and
- encourage development that might otherwise not proceed.

Full liability would apply after the grace period, maintaining fairness while supporting investment. The policy thus secures medium to long term revenue streams.

Scope

Qualifying improvements under consideration within the scope of the policy may include:

- extensions or enlargements;
- refurbishment;
- works that increase rateable value; and
- improvements to capacity or productivity.

The policy focuses on existing properties, not new builds.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS - BUSINESS GROWTH ACCELERATOR

General principles

- Do you support a Business Growth Accelerator?
- Does the current system discourage investment?
- Would this policy incentivise new activity, or mainly defer valuation increases that would already be occurring?
- What is the appropriate grace period that could be adopted?
- Should enhanced support apply where vacant property units are brought back into use? (e.g. as part of any extension or improvement work)

Scope and eligibility

- How should “qualifying improvements” be defined?
- Should minimum or maximum thresholds apply within the policy?
- Are any property types best excluded? (e.g. publicly owned property, utilities, etc)

Delivery and administration

- How can administrative burden be minimised?
(This question refers to the impact on the applicant, however views can also be submitted on how the proposal can best align with the current rating and valuation system).
- Should advance notification be required from an applicant before any extension or improvement works commence?
- How should the policy align with the completion notice process that applies within the rating and valuation system?
- What economic benefit (if any) would result from this policy proposal?
- Are there more effective alternatives to achieve the same policy goals?



PROPOSAL 2: NON-DOMESTIC VACANT RATING

Overview

This part of the consultation proposes introducing a phased increase in liability for vacant commercial property, replacing the current 50% rate.

Proposed approach

- **Stage 1:** increase liability to 75%.
- **Stage 2:** increase to 100%.

The following would remain unchanged:

- the initial three-month exemption; and
- existing exclusions (e.g. insolvency, listed buildings).¹

Rationale

The current 50% rate, lower than that which applies in other jurisdictions, is perceived as reducing incentives to bring property back into use.

The proposed change aims to:

- encourage occupation;
- reduce long-term vacancy;
- align more closely with other jurisdictions; and
- increase revenue (estimated up to £20 million annually).

Implementation

A phased approach would allow:

- monitoring of behavioural responses;
- assessment of avoidance risks; and
- alignment with wider interventions.

¹For a full list of exclusions see:

<https://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/content/non-domestic-vacant-rating>

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS - NON DOMESTIC VACANT RATING LIABILITY

- Do you support increasing non-domestic vacant rating (NDVR) liability to 75% and 100%?
- Should current NDVR exclusions remain?
- What is the appropriate timing for introducing any increased NDVR liability locally?
- Are alternative approaches preferable aside from increasing rating liability?
- How should this change align with the rating and valuation system?
- What complementary measures are needed to promote occupancy?
- What do you see as the behavioural impacts associated with the policy proposal?
- Are additional anti-avoidance measures required prior to implementation?
- Should treatment vary by sector or property type?
- How can collection be maximised upon introduction of the policy?
- Should mitigation measures apply in cases of market failure?
- Should increases depend on duration of vacancy?
- What wider impacts do you foresee as a result of this proposal?
(Impacts may include social, economic, rural, environmental, s75 etc.) wider impacts



SUMMARY

Summary

This consultation brings forward two targeted reforms:

- A **Business Growth Accelerator** to support investment and expansion
- Increased **Non-Domestic Vacant Rating liability** to encourage use of commercial property

Together, they aim to:

- remove barriers to growth;
- reduce vacancy;
- support regeneration; and
- strengthen the revenue base.

Your views will directly inform final policy design.



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Belfast city Council Response to the Department of Finance consultation on Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating

It is important that any changes in the structure of the rating system linked to improvement and investment should be designed to efficiently achieve their objective without creating any unintended consequences and are designed to create an environment that delivers meaningful support that stimulates economic activity in all local authority areas. Currently there are various forms of exemption, relief and fiscal adjustment which support the level of economic activity. The challenge is to ensure any changes in approach deliver "real" incentives which are coordinated to achieve maximum impact. There is a strong argument to bring together the various schemes and create a longer-term package of support which targets specific geographic areas and various types of economic activity. This radical approach would encompass small business rate relief, the back in business scheme and the proposed business growth accelerator.

Business Growth Accelerator

The Business Growth Accelerator is a form of improvement relief. There are three schemes currently operating in Scotland, England and Wales. If this is seen as an effective form of support for ratepayers who invest in projects to stimulate business activity it is important that any scheme has an effective administration process to manage take up of the relief. Having analysed the three schemes both in terms of take up volume and delivery we have created an approach which we believe would maximise take up. This is outlined in bold below: -

The Business Growth Accelerator (BCA) will ensure that no ratepayer will face higher business rates bills where the increase in the bill was due to making certain improvements to a property. The relief will last for a grace period of 24 months (rather than the 12 months mentioned in the consultation) from when the improvement works were completed.

To qualify, the improvements to the property must:

- ***increase the rateable value of the property,***
- ***be completed on or after the start date of the scheme,***
- ***meet an occupation criterion, this means that the ratepayer must have occupied the property during and after the improvement works.***

Qualifying improvement works include:

- ***a physical extension or enlargements***
- ***a new building within a larger hereditament***
- ***Where the building is a shop, the removal of a structural wall which increases zoning***
- ***works such as the addition of lining to an old industrial unit to improve insulation***
- ***improvements to capacity or productivity such as the addition of a structural mezzanine floor in an industrial unit***
- ***works which result in a reconstitution such as a split or merger – where qualifying works are undertaken***
- ***works that increase rateable value***

You will not qualify for BCA relief if the works are due to:

- ***a new hereditament,***
- ***a redevelopment scheme which has taken a property out of the valuation list,***
- ***a change of use where no qualifying works have been undertaken,***
- ***repair works***

Ratepayers should not need to apply for BCA relief. LPS will automatically consider this when they are notified of changes to your property.

If the alterations are qualifying works, the ratepayer will receive a certificate from LPS. The Revenues Directorate will automatically apply the relief and send a revised bill assuming the occupation requirements are met.

There should be a right to make representations if the ratepayer has carried out qualifying improvements, but no BCA relief has been awarded.

Non-Domestic Vacant Rate Relief

With vacant non-domestic rate set at 50% it is still regarded by those liable as a relief simply because it is a lower charge than the occupied levy. The behaviour of the ratepayer has generally been passive with collection being relatively straight forward and avoidance limited to applications for exclusions and applications to reduce the value. The latter is triggered by

actions which render the property uninhabitable. In recent years other jurisdictions in the United Kingdom have increased vacant rate liability to 100%. This decision has resulted in numerous “mitigation” schemes to either reduce or remove the levy. These schemes were adopted by legitimate chartered surveyor companies and others created to promote specific schemes. These entities built their activity on the “Ramsey Principle” and the creation of strategies for rate mitigation. A typical example follows a situation where a property becomes vacant, it becomes liable for non-domestic rates after an initial period of relief. The ratepayer is then faced with three options, to either pay the liability, create a case for an exclusion application or employ strategies to mitigate liability. These forms of mitigation can involve various actions to bring the property within the statutory rules of exclusion or exemption. Until recently these “schemes” have been successful. However, decisions in the courts in England and legislative action in the devolved governments (Wales and Scotland) have begun to curb activity.

To ensure LPS have sufficient legal powers to deliver this vacant rating reform serious consideration should be given to introducing appropriate statutory rules to discourage mitigation activity. It is important that the rules are framed in such a way to prevent avoidance schemes from being "adjusted" to circumvent any legislation. In Scotland and Wales, the regulations have been specific to the mitigation activity which has created problems in enforcing the rules. With the benefit of hindsight, a better solution would have been the introduction of a non-specific GAAR (General Anti Avoidance Rules) like the current powers in England used by the Treasury. Unfortunately, these rules only cover taxes under the direct control of HMRC which has left local authorities in England without any anti-avoidance powers.

There is no doubt that increasing the levy to either 75% or 100% in Northern Ireland will result in the use of mitigation schemes. Our main concern in relation to this change will be the pressure it places on LPS. To date there has been limited challenges to liability and these appear to have been resolved without litigation.

The Council is sure it will encourage occupation of vacant buildings, but we suspect a large proportion of that use will be linked to mitigation strategies such as snail farms, faith rooms, art exhibitions, warm rooms and other non-economic occupation. As part of the reform process consideration should be given to developing policies in partnership with the landlords of the vacant properties to significantly reduce rents to a level where they achieve meaningful economic occupation. This could be developed at a UK wide level by tax

concessions being offered by the Treasury. Belfast could offer to pilot a scheme in partnership with the DOF and the Treasury.

Long term vacancies will only be reduced by the adoption of a coordinated and targeted rate relief programme linked to the development policies in partnership with the landlords of the vacant properties to significantly reduce rents to a level where they achieve meaningful economic occupation. This could be developed at a UK wide level by tax concessions being offered by the Treasury. Belfast could offer to pilot a scheme in partnership with the DOF and the Treasury.

This change will have considerable “unintended consequences”. Logic would expect a doubling of the levy to result in a significant increase in revenue however existing liabilities based on the 50% charge would immediately trigger a defensive response from existing ratepayers which would result in the revised liabilities being challenged. Rather than seeing an immediate increase in revenue there may be a period of retrenchment where existing ratepayers will seek advice on the current liability and the increase which may result in a loss of the existing levy and the increase.

There is a need to look at day to day rating administration. The losses on collection due to delays in billing new liabilities, growth in arrears and write-offs are having a significant impact on the rate product.

Questions on the Business Growth Accelerator

Q) Do you support a Business Growth Accelerator?

A) Yes, providing it follows the suggestions in the model outlined above.

Q) Does the current system discourage investment?

A) Belfast City Council does not hold the data to enable a meaningful answer to this question.

Q) Would this policy incentivise new activity, or mainly defer valuation increases that would already be occurring?

A) Belfast City Council believes this will incentivise new activity. Significant investment often requires an extensive payback period and initial cashflow challenges for businesses which could often result in the investment not being progressed.

Q) What is the appropriate grace period that could be adopted?

A) The grace period should be at least two years to give the ratepayer the opportunity to develop their business model in the improved property.

Q) Should enhanced support apply where vacant property units are brought back into use? (e.g. as part of any extension or improvement work)

A) The support should be holistic and encourage activity that brings empty properties back into use. See the qualifying improvements in my model scheme above.

Q) How should “qualifying improvements” be defined?

A) They should be defined in the regulations and have a degree of flexibility. See the model scheme above.

Q) Should minimum or maximum thresholds apply within the policy?

A) No, thresholds would damage the flexibility of the scheme.

Q) Are any property types best excluded? (e.g. publicly owned property, utilities, etc)

A) Yes. Belfast City Council believes that public sector owned properties/ utilities should be excluded from any proposals. The schemes objectives are to stimulate economic activity.

Q) How can administrative burden be minimised? (This question refers to the impact on the applicant; however, views can also be submitted on how the proposal can best align with the current rating and valuation system).

A) Belfast City Council believes the scheme should be aligned to building control and planning which should minimise administration for the business.

Q) Should advance notification be required from an applicant before any extension or improvement works commence?

A) Belfast City Council believes the scheme should be aligned to building control and planning which would remove the need for advanced notification.

Q) How should the policy align with the completion notice process that applies within the rating and valuation system?

A) Belfast City Council believes that providing the requirements are met the scheme should deliver the relief. We cannot see the completion notice process preventing this.

Q) What economic benefit (if any) would result from this policy proposal?

A) Belfast City Council believes that providing the scheme is sufficiently flexible and given effective publicity it should generate increased economic activity. There are good examples of positive outcomes of cases in England

Q) Are there more effective alternatives to achieve the same policy goals?

A) Belfast City Council believes there is a strong argument to bring together the various schemes and create a longer-term package of support which targets specific geographic areas and various types of economic activity. This radical approach would encompass small business rate relief, the back in business scheme and the proposed business growth accelerator and could be underpinned by a profit related element linked to income and corporation taxes.

Questions on non- domestic vacant rating liability

Q) Do you support increasing non-domestic vacant rating (NDVR) liability to 75% and 100%?

A) Yes, Belfast City Council supports increasing the NDVR Liability, providing the administration has sufficient legislative tools to deal with the challenges from ratepayers.

Q) Should current NDVR exclusions remain?

A) Yes, Belfast City Council believes the current NDVR exclusion should remain, but the awarding process needs to be rigorous.

Q) What is the appropriate timing for introducing any increased NDVR liability locally?

A) Belfast City Council believes as the change to the level of the vacant rate levy only requires secondary legislation therefore the 1st of April 2028 would give sufficient time to pass the regulations, amend software and train staff.

Q) Are alternative approaches preferable aside from increasing rating liability?

A) Belfast City Council believes that the introduction of an increased rating liability will be the most effective measure in addressing the development and occupation of vacant properties.

Q) How should this change align with the rating and valuation system?

A) Belfast City Council believes that the proposals should seamlessly align as the system implementation should be nothing more than an adjustment of parameters.

Q) What complementary measures are needed to promote occupancy?

A) No Comment

Q) What do you see as the behavioural impacts associated with the policy proposal?

A) Belfast City Council believes it will encourage occupation of vacant buildings, but we suspect a large proportion of that use will be linked to mitigation strategies and other non-economic occupation.

Q) Are additional anti-avoidance measures required prior to implementation?

A) Belfast City Council believes to ensure LPS have sufficient legal powers to deliver this vacant rating reform serious consideration should be given to introducing appropriate statutory rules to discourage mitigation activity. It is important that the rules are framed in such a way to prevent avoidance schemes from being "adjusted" to circumvent any legislation. In Scotland and Wales, the regulations have been specific to the mitigation activity which has created problems in enforcing the rules. With the benefit of hindsight, a better solution would have been the introduction of a non-specific GAAR (General Anti Avoidance Rules) like the current powers in England used by the Treasury. Unfortunately, these rules only cover taxes under the direct control of HMRC which has left local authorities in England without any anti-avoidance powers.

Q) Should treatment vary by sector or property type

A) No, Belfast City Council believes a uniform scheme will avoid confusion. The introduction of different levies for either a sector or property type would have little impact on the Ministers objectives

Q) How can collection be maximised upon introduction of the policy?

A) Belfast City Council believes this change of policy will increase the administrative burden on LPS particularly at the decision-making level. There will be concerted attempts to avoid liability and reduce the impact on rate payers. The level of challenge and complexity is illustrated by the volumes of case law in the other jurisdictions together with the introduction of avoidance legislation. Collection will become more demanding.

Q) Should mitigation measures apply in cases of market failure?

A) No, Belfast City Council believes any such proposal would be exploited by those wishing to avoid liability.

Q) Should increases depend on duration of vacancy?

A) No, Belfast City Council believes it is best to stick to a uniform approach and not consider increasing liability that is linked to duration of the vacancy.

Q) What wider impacts do you foresee because of this proposal? (Impacts may include social, economic, rural, environmental, s75 etc.)

A) Belfast city Council foresees the following as the wider impacts of this proposal:

- Attempts to convert office blocks into domestic housing units.
- Quicker decisions by owners to demolish properties particularly those on development sites.
- Creating smaller commercial units of occupation.
- Attempts to convert retail units in secondary areas into residential units.
- Removal of key elements of a building to make it unfit for occupation.



Subject:	Request for Funding for Halloween event in City Centre
Date:	18 September 2026
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lesley-Ann O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture & Tourism

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐
☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The report details a request from BID One for part funding to support Halloween activities in the City Centre.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	Members are asked to consider the request.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	Belfast One is aiming to create a joined-up Halloween experience that is highly visible, accessible and enjoyable for residents and visitors, bringing the giant Halloween monsters back to landmark buildings across the city centre, alongside the Belfast One Pumpkin Patch, activities at 2 Royal Avenue, business promotions and community participation.
3.2	2025 Halloween experience The 2025 Halloween programme demonstrated the strong appeal of a coordinated city centre event. The giant monster installations created a highly visible trail across Belfast, encouraging people to explore the city, take photographs and share their experience online. The installations generated more than 1.2 million total views and reached approximately 500,000 people across social media.
3.3	At City Hall, the Belfast One Pumpkin Patch distributed 1,300 pumpkins and welcomed around 5,000 visitors. Visitors were also directed to other Halloween activities across the city centre by an interactive map, helping to extend their visit and encourage movement between locations.
3.4	The Spooktacular Activity Centre at 2 Royal Avenue welcomed more than 5,000 visitors over the weekend, with pumpkin painting, face painting, crafts and the Creepy Crawly Farm. Quiet sessions were also provided each morning for children with additional needs. Together, these activities created a fun, inclusive atmosphere while supporting footfall and engagement across Belfast City Centre.
3.5	Members are advised that the 2025 programme was part-funded by Belfast City Council with £50K from departmental budget and reserves created to support city animation. In 2024 £40K was provided through grant funding.
3.6	Proposed 2026 Halloween Experience The total proposal for 2026 BID One activity is a continuation of this activity with an estimated total delivery cost of £125K - 10 Giant inflatable monsters on buildings across Belfast City Centre, creating a strong visual attraction and encouraging visitors to explore and share content online. - A free, ticketed two-day Pumpkin Patch at City Hall, linked to pumpkin decorating and carving activities at 2 Royal Avenue.

	- Family-friendly creative and interactive activities, including storytelling, workshops and displays developed with local community and cultural organisations at 2 Royal Avenue - A Halloween trail map and participating business offers to encourage footfall and spend.
3.7	The two city centre shopping centres will also fund and deliver activity in their areas as part of the wider programme and the overall programme will be supported by marketing campaign involving promotion across digital, social media and other relevant channels.
3.8	BID One have identified the following expected outcomes and impact from the programme of activity: • Increase footfall across Belfast City Centre during Halloween. • Create a positive, safe and memorable experience for families, residents and visitors. • Support local businesses through increased visibility, visitor movement and promotions. • Generate strong social media engagement through highly visual installations. • Increase community and cultural participation. • Strengthen Belfast City Centre's reputation as a fun and family-friendly Halloween destination.
3.9	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> BID one are seeking financial support from BCC on par with 2025 of £50,000 to support the delivery of the programme Funding for city animation was included as a growth proposal for 2026/2027 but as Members will be aware, following the quarter 1 financial report, funding is not available to support further growth proposals at this time. It is understood that In the absence of funding from Belfast City Council whilst monster installations would still be delivered, potentially at a reduced level, the Pumpkin Patch would not go ahead and other elements of the programme would either be removed or be significantly scaled back.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.10	None associated with this report.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	None

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Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Requests for use of the City Hall
Date:	18 September 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Christopher Burns, Interim Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒								
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. Insert number 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime									
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Sometime in the future	☐								
Never	☐								

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	This paper, together with the attached appendix, contains the recommended approach in

	respect of each of the requests by external organisations for access to the City Hall function rooms received up to 4 September 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Approve the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background Information</u>
3.1	The current criteria for use of the function rooms used to review external applications is set out below.
3.2	Functions are invited for a range of purposes, including those: • which support other events in the city; are of demonstrable economic benefit to Belfast, • celebrate or commemorate a notable achievement or significant anniversary by an organisation or body with close links to the city or Northern Ireland or those, • organised by recognised local community or voluntary sector groups for non-profit and non-political purposes.
3.3	Functions that may not be allowed; • are those which have as their primary purpose the advancement of any political or religious cause or campaign or are otherwise potentially contentious or involve significant reputation risks for the council, • or private events or functions which have no compelling links to the council or the city specifically and which could instead use local private sector facilities.
3.4	<u>Key Issues</u> Committee will recall that at its meeting on 23rd January 2026 it considered an update on the City Hall Income Generation Project and subsequently agreed the revision of criteria for the use of Belfast City Hall and the provision of room hire fees and additional charges / recharges for event services. The events listed in the schedule of Appendix 1 have been reviewed against this new criteria and room hire prices applied on this basis.
3.5	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> None.
3.6	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u> None.

4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Schedule of function requests received up to 4 September 2026.

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SEPTEMBER 2026 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGES
The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)	10 December 2026	PEACEPLUS Prosperity Stakeholder Consultation – event for Greater Belfast voluntary community sector and any other interested parties on the PEACEPLUS successor programme 2028-2034 Numbers attending - 200	Yes	- ROOM HIRE OF £1250 - Any applicable additional charges
Confucius Institute at Ulster University	5 February 2027	Confucius Institute Chinese New Year Event is a celebration event with awards following a schools' competition, speeches, performances and lunch to celebrate the Chinese New Year Numbers attending - 220	Yes	- ROOM HIRE OF £1250 - Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Memory Stones of Love/ Cruse Bereavement Care NI	14 March 2027	Covid-19 National Day of Reflection , coinciding with the UK wide commemoration day this local group plans to remember all those who were lost during the pandemic with stories, poems and music. Numbers attending – 200	Yes	- NO ROOM HIRE - Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Ulster Obstetrical & Gynecological Society	4 June 2027	Ulster Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society 75th Anniversary , celebration event to mark historic anniversary with reception, dinner, speeches and live music. Number attending - 150	Yes	- NO ROOM HIRE - Any applicable additional charges

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Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Request for the use of Botanic Gardens
Date:	Friday 18 th September 2026
Reporting Officer:	Stephen Leonard, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Paula Irvine, Parks Events and Outreach Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒								
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Sometime in the future	☐								
Never	☐								

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The Committee is asked to note that Council has received a late request from the Belfast Film Festival to host an outdoor cinema screening at Botanic Gardens on the 03 rd October 2026.

	The request was received with no opportunity to include it within the request going to the September meeting of P&C.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to grant authority to the applicant for the proposed event on the date noted; subject to the completion of the appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City & Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers: I. resolves all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction; II. meets all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and III. shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.
2.2	Please note that the above recommendations are taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which is currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	If agreed, the event organiser will be required in advance of the event to submit an event management plan for approval by the Council and all relevant statutory bodies. This will include an assessment of how the event will impact upon the surrounding area and measures to mitigate these impacts.
3.2	Belfast Film Festival propose to host a Film Day in Botanic Gardens to Celebrate the 40 th anniversary of the popular film Little Shop of Horrors. The organisers plan to programme two further botanical plant related films with the others being the family orientated FernGully and Secret of Kells.
3.3	The Belfast Film Festival are in receipt of a BCC cultural multi annual grant to assist with the delivery of the event.
3.4	The choice of location beside the tropical ravine is to make the screening stand out as a special event and to encourage families to visit the ravine either before the screening or after. The screen and audience will be positioned on the grass area next to the tropical ravine.
3.5	All films will be PG rated.
3.6	Tickets to attend the screening will be priced as follows:

	Admission Based on the film choices: Fern Gully and Secret of Kells £6 per adult and £4 concession and under 16's - 2 and under FREE. Little Shop Of Horrors £8 per adult and £5 concession and under 16's - 2 and under FREE.
3.7	There will be food vendors at the event and the organisers will link in with the existing vendors on site to provide opportunities for them.
3.8	Belfast Film Festival have been delivering events in Belfast Parks and City Hall Grounds for many years.
3.9	<u>The Key Dates and times are as follows:</u> Set Up – Saturday 03rd Oct from 7.30am Screenings – Saturday 03rd Oct FILM SCREENING 1 starts 10:30am ends at 12noon FILM SCREENING 2 starts 1pm ends at 3:30pm FILM SCREENING 3 starts 4:30pm ends at 6:15pm De Rig – Saturday 03rd Oct by 10pm <u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.10	The organisers have received funding from Belfast City Council to deliver the event. There will be an admission charge for anyone wishing to attend. <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.11	There are no known implications.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None

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