

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 10th November, 2020

MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Baker (In the Chair);
Alderman Rodgers;
The High Sheriff, Councillor Verner; and
Councillors Black, Bunting, Cobain, Michael Collins,
de Faoite, Flynn, Garrett, M. Kelly, Magee, McAteer,
McReynolds, Mulholland, Newton, Pankhurst,
Smyth and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. R. Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Ms. J. Wilson, Business Manager;
Mrs. A. Allen, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Miss. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Also In attendance: Councillors Kyle and O'Hara.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillor Corr.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 6th and 20th October were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Verner declared an interest in relation to item 5(b) on the agenda, Council Response to Department of Health 'Consultation on cross-departmental Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan' as a staff member of the Greater Shankill Partnership who worked with this sector of the Community. Councillor Smyth also declared an interest as he worked with vulnerable young people in his employment.

Schedule of Meetings 2021

The Committee approved the schedule of meetings for the People and Communities Committee as outlined below and agreed that all meetings would commence at 5.15 pm:

- Tuesday, 12th January
- Tuesday, 26th January – Youth Forum
- Tuesday, 9th February
- Tuesday, 2nd March – Housing
- Tuesday, 9th March
- Tuesday, 13th April

- Tuesday, 11th May
- Tuesday, 8th June
- Tuesday, 22nd June – Youth Forum
- Tuesday, 3rd August – Housing (Annual HIP Update)
- Tuesday, 10th August
- Tuesday, 7th September
- Tuesday, 5th October – Youth Forum
- Tuesday, 12th October
- Tuesday, 2nd November – Housing
- Tuesday, 9th November
- Tuesday, 7th December

Restricted

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 3 items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the Members of the Press and public from the Committee meeting during discussion on the following 3 items as, due to their nature, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Finance Update

The Committee was reminded that the Strategic Policy and Resources, at its meeting on 31st July, had received an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council's financial position and a strategy to address the forecast deficit and the mitigation measures, which had and would be taken as the situation evolved. It had agreed to continue to provide Members with a monthly update on the financial position and that the same report would be presented to the subsequent standing Committees for noting and to provide further information on ongoing work.

During discussion, Members raised queries in relation to the current arrangements with GLL and the BWUH in terms of finance and staffing and sought clarity on the replacement Job Support Scheme. They were advised that an update in respect of these matters would be given at the November meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Committee noted the October 2020 financial update.

Hire Arrangements Boucher Road Playing Fields and Botanic Gardens

The Committee was reminded that it had previously granted authority to Belsonic to hold a maximum of 10 concerts in Ormeau Park in June of each year for a three-year period from 2019 – 2021. In addition, at its meeting in August 2020, it had also agreed a request from UP Productions for the hire of the Boucher Playing Fields from 22nd May – 2nd June 2021 for the AVA Music Festival.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that the ongoing pandemic continued to make it difficult for organisers to plan and prepare for these type of events, especially given that no one knew when the restrictions would end. On this basis, he detailed that both promoters had made contingency requests.

The Committee considered the two requests. During discussion, at the request of a Member, it was agreed that when emerging from the pandemic it would be useful if the Council would arrange a meeting with the promoters to get a better understanding of the arrangements that promoters put in place when staging large-scale events.

The Committee further agreed:

- the request from UP Productions for the hire of Boucher Playing Fields from the 15th September 2021 until the 30th September 2021 for the AVA Music Festival; and
- the request from Belsonic for the hire of Ormeau Park for the month of September 2021 for the Belsonic Music Festival; and
- that officers be granted permission to liaise with the promoters of the events to agree alternative appropriate dates for both events should public health restrictions require further postponement and/or contingency measures to be put in place.

Grant funding from the Office of Product Safety and Standards

The Director of City Services advised the Committee of a grant programme that was available from the Office of Product Safety and Standards (OPSS). She advised that this grant had been designed to support district councils in Northern Ireland to assist them in undertaking effective market surveillance and with the implementation of the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The grants was up to £55k per Council and was available up to March 2021 and she explained that it had been provided to establish a flexible resource within each Council with the capacity and capability to:

- undertake risk-based market surveillance interventions on goods before they were released for free circulation and, subsequently, throughout the supply chain;
- manage and act on intelligence to drive a risk-based approach;
- provide advice and support to local businesses to meet their obligations under product safety legislation for importing and exporting goods;
- collaborate with district councils and other organisations to coordinate market surveillance activity across NI to ensure compliance with EU regulatory requirements; and
- monitor and report on interventions.

The Committee noted that Belfast City Council was already a Market Surveillance Authority with responsibility for regulating product safety.

The Committee agreed that City and Neighbourhood Services would avail of the additional funding from the Office of Product Safety and Standards on a cost recovery basis until March 2021, to assist it with directing the appropriate resources within the department to ensure that the Council met its obligations as detailed above.

Matters referred back from the Council/Motions

Motion - Action on Avoidable Winter Deaths

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 2nd November, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Groves and seconded by Councillor McAteer, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“With the winter approaching, Belfast citizens will be increasingly susceptible to Avoidable Winter Deaths – particularly our citizens aged over 65 with underlying health conditions and vulnerable elderly people aged 85+.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, elderly and vulnerable citizens are already at high risk, it is therefore imperative that we redouble our efforts to prevent avoidable winter deaths from happening during the winter 20/21.

The increase in winter deaths is widely understood to be caused by the flu and spells of very cold weather - yet these deaths are avoidable. A combination of high energy prices, fuel poverty, ill health, low income and poor housing can make winter a dangerous time for many older people.

This Council has worked with statutory, community and voluntary partners to deliver the Belfast Warm and Well Project to tackle Avoidable Winter Deaths earlier this year. We call on Council to act decisively to implement a multi-sectoral targeted Avoidable Winter Deaths programme for the winter of 20/21.”

Councillor McAteer addressed the Committee and outlined the context of the motion.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services referred to the ongoing work throughout 2019/20 in respect of the delivery of the Belfast Warm and Well Project. He detailed that this had been co-ordinated by Council officers with the assistance of the Belfast Health Development Unit and the Health and Social Care Board and provided an assurance that the Council would continue to work with the other statutory agencies to continue to deliver this work into 2020/21. They would also aim to continue to promote other key messages in regard to cold homes and the importance of the flu vaccination.

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed that officers would continue to work with the Council's statutory, community and voluntary partners to implement a multi-sectoral targeted Avoidable Winter Deaths Programme for the winter of 2020/21 with the aim of delivering the Belfast Warm and Well Project.

Motion - Mental Health - Awareness and Support Campaign

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 2nd November, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Pankhurst and seconded by Councillor Kyle, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“This Council agrees that Belfast is facing a mental health crisis that has been exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This Council agrees to launch an awareness and support campaign in the city centre, at strategic points throughout the city and on social media that targets those with poor mental health. The campaign will focus on posters offering support service details and general questions that have a positive psychological effect for those who read them.

Furthermore, this Council agrees to convene an urgent meeting between the Council, the Executive Office, the Department for Health and statutory agencies to discuss the formation of a community emergency response system that will allow local support services to respond to those in need of urgent and direct help.

Finally, this Council acknowledges and pays tribute to all those charities and services who offer invaluable help to our citizens that undoubtedly save lives on a daily and weekly basis.”

Both the proposer of the motion Councillor Pankhurst and seconder of the motion Councillor Kyle addressed the Committee and outlined the context of the motion, highlighting the need for the Council to work strategically with other statutory and voluntary partners to publicise the help that existed and to ensure that adequate support services were in place to respond to those in need of help.

Several Members commended and paid tribute to those charities, organisations and individuals who volunteered their help and support, often on a daily basis, and recognised the valuable role that they played in society and in helping to save lives.

In response to the motion, the Director of Neighbourhood Services provided the Members with an assurance that the Council was committed to the promotion of mental health awareness and support. He referred to mental health support which was available and publicised via the Council's social media channels and he also drew reference to the Directory of Services Document which was available via the Public Health Agency – a Mental Health Directory of Services aimed at signposting people in need of support to the support services in Belfast, available here: http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-01/Belfast_area_card_2020.pdf

The Director also highlighted the other support mechanisms that were available, including Lifeline (0808 808 8000) the regional 24/7 helpline. He advised that a pilot of

the Multi Agency Triage Team trust, Ambulance Service and Police was ongoing in the Belfast and the South Eastern Trust areas.

A further Member suggested involving the Belfast Youth Forum (BYF). She advised that, at its recent joint meeting with the People and Communities Committee on 20th October, 2020, the Youth Forum had presented its “Elephant in the Room Campaign”, a report which explored young people’s awareness of mental health in Northern Ireland.

A number of Members commended the Youth Forum in regard to the progress made with the Elephant in the Room Group (EITR) campaign and noted that they were keen to continue to work with the BYF to learn from them.

The Director advised that the EITR Group had advised that it intended to invite the current Mental Health Champion to the Executive, Professor Siobhan O’Neill, to meet the group. Professor O’Neill had been present at the presentation to Executive Working Group on Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Suicide Prevention in July and was keen to discuss the EITR report further with the Youth Forum.

The Director concluded by advising that the Belfast Protect Life Implementation Group (BPLG), a multi-agency partnership in Belfast that was responsible for suicide prevention, which was facilitated by the PHA, had recently updated its membership. He assured the Committee that the Council would, as requested in the motion, continue to engage with it to discuss the formation of a community emergency response system.

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed that the Council would continue to promote mental health awareness throughout the city and via social media. It further agreed that the Council would engage with the BPLG to discuss the formation of a community emergency response system that would enable local support services to respond to those in need of urgent and direct help.

Motion - Support for Young People and Students

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 2nd November, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Nicholl and seconded by Councillor Mulholland, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“This Council notes the adverse effect COVID-19 has had on our city’s young people and students. Accordingly, we call upon the Council to facilitate an ad hoc meeting with key stakeholders to amplify the wide range issues and ensure a joined up approach is taken.”

Councillor Mulholland addressed the Committee and outlined the context of the motion. She commenced by highlighting the alarming trend of anxiety and depression amongst young adults during the Covid-19 pandemic and she paid tribute to the many support organisations, charities and services that were trying to support young people through the pandemic and she reiterated the need to try and ensure that a joined up approach was taken.

Several Members noted the lack of stability and routine for many young people who were suffering with a lack of connection and support from their friends and mentors due to online learning.

A further Member referred to the financial difficulties that many students were facing through losing employment and not having been afforded any reduction in rental, despite the fact that most of their lectures had been moved online and often accommodation was no longer required. For those students who remained in student accommodation, there was the added worry in regard to the sharing of facilities such as bathrooms and kitchens during the pandemic.

The Members acknowledged that it was important to understand the wide range of issues that young people had been experiencing during the pandemic and to establish ways of supporting them.

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed to facilitate an ad hoc meeting with key stakeholders to enable the Council to highlight and discuss the issues affecting young people and students resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure a joined up approach was taken.

Motion - Belfast City Council - Cycling Champion

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 2nd November, the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor McReynolds and seconded by Councillor McAllister, had, in accordance with Standing Order 13(f), been referred to the Committee for consideration:

“This Council agrees to introduce a Belfast City Council - Cycling Champion within the Council to support active travel and bicycle use; and, agrees to write to the Minister for Infrastructure calling on the publication of the Belfast Bicycle Network.”

Councillor McReynolds addressed the Committee and outlined the context of the motion.

The Committee:

- adopted the motion and agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting detailing how the Council planned to progress the introduction of a Cycling Champion who would support active travel and bicycle use; and
- agreed that the Council would write to the Infrastructure Minister calling for the publication of the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Update on Interaction with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council - Re: Cutts HRC

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To provide an update report to the People and Communities in relation to the decision taken at the meeting held on 8th September 2020, namely:

'The Committee agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting which would detail potential options, including costs, for Belfast City Council (BCC) to enter into a Service Level Agreement with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) in respect of the disposal of waste by residents of the Colin area of Belfast at the Cutts Recycling Centre within the LCCC District.'

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee are asked to

- **Note the update report**

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1 As a direct result of the initial outbreak of Covid-19 in March 2020, all but essential services across Northern Ireland's 11 Councils, including Belfast City Council (BCC) were suspended. This included the closure of Household Recycling Centres and Civic Amenity Sites. Once clarification and assurance was received from Central Government as to whether journeys to disposal sites were allowed under the 'Essential Travel' Guidelines, BCC reopened their sites with revised operating arrangements, designed with consultation with all internal stakeholders including Trade Unions to agree safe working practices and Covid-19 risk assessments.**
- 3.2 Similar to other Councils, BCCs arrangements included measures to control access to these sites to maintain control and adhere to social distancing measures which in turn gave protection to staff and members of the public alike. Again, like other councils, these measures included restricting access to Household Recycling Centres to individual council residents.**
- 3.3 Initially 100% identity checks were carried out by additional front of house staff, but as demand on the Belfast HRCs has settled, and control measures such as the booking system for Commercial type vans and trailers has been introduced, a more pragmatic approach has been adopted.**
- 3.4 Each of the 11 local councils have taken similar but individual approaches to the re-opening and operation of their respective Household Recycling Centres and Civic Amenity sites. Each Council will have undertaken their own specific risk assessments as to how they will safely operate their individual sites. Differing approaches,**

arrangements and site specific Safe Systems of Work are to be expected between councils. These have been discussed during Council Waste Forum and TAGNI meetings between officers to benchmark and learn best practice from others during the current unprecedented difficult operating environment under which the collection of waste is carried out.

- 3.5 In respect to the operating procedures within Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC), the requirement to prove residence within their boundary in order to gain access to their HRCs, including the site at the Cutts, Dunmurry, has been maintained. This has led to Belfast City Council area residents who have tried to gain access the site in LCCC area being turned away.

Main Update

- 3.6 Following the decision from the P&C Committee in September, the City Services Manager (Resources and Fleet) was able to contact his equivalent officer in LCCC. He in turn noted the BCC request to explore options and advised that he would discuss the matter internally and revert as soon as possible.

- 3.7 Subsequent to this, the City Services Manager (Resources and Fleet) received an email on 1st October outlining the LCCC position. The main points are outlined as follows:

- The matter was discussed by the LCCC Chief Officer Team on 1st October and it was agreed that they could not be supportive of the proposal at this time.
- LCCC have made a council decision to dedicate the use of its sites to their own residents
- In their view, to open these sites to residents from another council would create many complications and could not be considered in isolation i.e. that sites adjacent to other councils would have to be made available to them too, which in turn would mean those other councils having to consider access to their sites where restrictions to residents only are in place.
- LCCC advised 'With the current societal and economic pressures being experienced by us all in these unprecedented times we need to manage our services and costs to best effect and to the benefit of our own residents, therefore to consider changing an adopted process which we are satisfied services our Council needs is unlikely to achieve LCCC political support which is necessary to advance your proposal.'

3.8 In conclusion, it was stated that on this basis LCCC could not progress the matter any further.

3.9 LCCC, in support of their position, included a copy of correspondence sent to BCC in July 2014 from NIEA and copied to the then Lisburn City Council, when discussions were being held specifically around the Cutts site and the possibility of shared use and shared responsibility for the waste post-RPA. NIEA was not supportive of the proposed arrangement at that time, and LCCC have stated that a number of their concerns expressed in the letter still remain valid.

3.10 This letter details the complications around entering into an arrangement around one site in respect for:

- Licensing and regulation of the site
- Statutory recording, tracking and management of waste under a joint arrangement.

3.11 In conclusion, the letter stated:

‘To conclude, it is NIEA’s view that the current situation where the operator of a CA sites is solely responsible for the waste is straightforward and clear. CA sites already exist near council borders that will be receiving waste from residents from different council areas and this has been accepted by all parties. The proposed approach would introduce a great deal of complexity into the system and increase the potential for errors for no obvious environmental benefit.’

Financial and Resource Implications

3.12 Any potential change in service provision would have financial implications which would require assessment for both councils.

Equality and Good Relations implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.13 An assessment is not required at this time given the update only nature of the report.”

The Committee noted the report.

Council Response to Department of Health 'Consultation on cross-departmental Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan'

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised the Members that an invitation had been received from the Director of Family and Children’s Policy seeking the Council to participate in the Department of Health’s consultation on the ‘Cross-departmental

Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan.' He advised that the full consultation report was available for download [here](#) and drew the Members' attention to the Council's draft response to the consultation document:

Appendix 3

**Belfast City Council - Response To The Covid-19
Vulnerable Children And Young People's Plan**

1. Introduction

- 1.1** The Department of Health has led on the development of a Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan, which has been produced on a cross-departmental basis with DfC, DE, DOJ and DfE.
- 1.2** The plan has been developed in response to the challenges and risks facing children, young people and their families due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is intended to reflect a series of activities that will be, or have been, undertaken across the Executive to meet the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families during this time and in the recovery period after.
- 1.3** The Executive agreed to the publication of the Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's plan on 6 August 2020, subject to a targeted consultation to ensure the Plan:
- reflects the activities that are being undertaken to support children and vulnerable families during Covid-19;
 - reflects how services have adapted and enhanced provision to continue to support children and families during Covid-19; and
 - Includes new actions, which have been undertaken specifically to address some of lockdown's risks and challenges.
- 1.4** The Plan will help support the next steps in rebuilding services to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people.
- 1.5** Belfast City Council (BCC) welcomes the core principle of the document. We find however that the document will benefit from additional detail.
- 1.6** Alignment with current policies and frameworks (Eg. Outcomes groups) need to be detailed. Correspondence between established indicators aimed at measuring the improvement of children and young people and the newly proposed actions needs to be explored to assess the real impact of the proposed interventions.

- 1.7 In order to prevent the reactive nature and volatility of some interventions due to current unprecedented circumstances and the constant changes in the limitations for service delivery, a more thorough plan is needed. The plan would benefit from an assessment of which intervention can be delivered according to the different levels of restrictions in place. This will ensure that different interventions are in pace to mitigate the named risks regardless of the different levels/tiers of restrictions.
- 1.8 The response outlined below follows the structure set out in the consultation paper. We have provided answers where BCC has a stated position and where it is considered appropriate for us to respond.
2. **Definition of Vulnerable children and young people.**
 - 2.1 We welcome the definition of children and young people used in the consultation document. We welcome in particular the specific acknowledgment to “invisible” children, that is, those not known to services and invisible to local authorities. The number of these children have increased dramatically as a consequence to COVID pandemic encountering a wide range of difficulties from physical health , mental illness to going hungry or cold; at the verge of getting homeless or out of school; being at risk of neglect or living with parents with health problems.
 - 2.2 BCC welcomes the aims of the plan.
 - 2.3 Monitoring, reporting and engagement need to take a holistic approach. We found it challenging to discern between actions already in place, and plans of actions which will take place in the future. Clear and simple reporting mechanisms need to be put in place as a matter of urgency in order to respond efficiently to the needs of children and young people.
3. **Promoting safety and wellbeing in the home environment**
 - 3.1 We welcome the actions proposed. BCC welcomes in particular the recognition of the relevance of the usage of outdoor spaces. In addition to the opening of parks and other outdoor facilities, BCC is working on a programme of interventions aimed at encouraging service users, including children and young people, to exercise and use outdoor spaces. BCC recognises the impact that the usage of outdoor spaces has on mental health and wellbeing.

- 3.2 A clear reporting mechanism for the learning from the different COVID emergency support lines needs to be put in place to make best use of the learning incurred during the lifetime of the service. This mechanism should be informed by already agreed indicators. (Outcomes for children and young people).**
- 3.3 There are a number of initiatives across the region that, while not targeting children and young people directly, have proven to be a huge influencing factor in improving quality of life across the region during the pandemic. An example of this is the Belfast Community Response Hub.**
- 3.4 The Belfast Community Response Hub was established within 9 days (distribution hub, customer helpline and remote contact centre). This provided an opportunity to support vulnerable families and children. Some of our outputs are:**
- 9,770 calls handled by the Contact Centre**
 - 6,908 enquiries were in relation to food parcels**
 - 5,115 calls handled by local community run helplines**
 - 930 welfare referrals were managed by the Area Teams N/S/E/W (this included providing advice and signposting for prescription pick up, emotional support and emergency food). The majority of referrals were for charity or community support (43%), non-emergency support (20%), collection of prescriptions (11%) and emergency service support (10%).**
 - 30 staff provided with ‘Big Word’ training to improve communication with people who didn’t have English as their first language**
 - 107,407 food parcels and hot food delivered over 16 weeks - 50,533 food parcels from Community Response Hub and 56,874 food parcels and hot food from Community Organisations**
 - 9,320 deliveries or prescription pick-ups were made on behalf of residents**
 - Over £1.6 million in grants allocated to 134 Community Groups to fund their support of the project.**
 - 4,577 calls were made by the Contact Centre to residents to prepare them for the closure of the scheme and to signpost them on to community support where needed.**

- 3.5 With an increase of usage of internet by children and young people, there is a bigger potential for online harm to take place. Specific guidance on how to deliver online services safely for professionals would be welcome.
- 3.6 Multiagency support is key. Fluid communications between the different organisations involved needs to be formally established particularly in the co-design of activities.
- 3.7 While there are several interventions that would address the majority of children in a vulnerable position, there are a number of key issues that might need further consideration such as the lack of wrap around support mechanisms for families, isolation and specific issues such as poverty, food poverty and fuel poverty.
- 3.8 The consultation asked if we are aware of any other effective interventions to support the improvement of mental health in children and young people: we would recommend the attached 'Universal approaches to improving children and young people's mental health and wellbeing: Short descriptions of interventions identified from the synthesis of systematic reviews' by Public Health England (2019)
- 3.9 A simple reporting mechanism needs to be put in place from the beginning of the intervention to assess progress and needed corrections. An accountability mechanism with specific outcomes and targets is required by each one of the partners.
4. **Promoting safety and wellbeing in the wider community**
- 4.1 Overall, we agree that the right actions have been put in place. There is no clarification as to which of these are currently being delivered and which ones are being planned, making it difficult to assess the demand and need for these services.
5. **Strengthen system capacity to respond to current risks**
- 5.1 In addition to the availability of adequate information in a timely manner to inform decision making, there are a series of services such as parent and toddler groups, activity based children groups , afterschool's and play groups that prove to be invaluable in promoting the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Timely advice, guidance and planning of these activities will provide an additional resource during this time. Up to date advice and coordination between different partners to agree minimum standards for the delivery of services are paramount.

6. **Rebuild Services**

6.1 In addition to the executive recovery plan, Council is in the process of finalising its own recovery plan that will guide us in how we move Belfast forward towards COVID recovery and beyond. The framework covers both economic and community recovery, the latter in the broadest sense – families, local businesses, and community sector – all those stakeholders that are connected to a local place.

6.2 In BCC we will approach recovery collectively and in an integrated way that is very much in the spirit of the principles agreed by chief officers and elected members. These are:

- Support local area problem solving
- Create opportunities for new ways of working
- Support cultural change in support of area working
- Create synergies to pool the great knowledge and experience that you all have
- Align to the vision of community provision

Several Members of the Committee welcomed the draft Council response that had been prepared by Council officers and made a number of comments and addendums that they requested be incorporated into the draft document in advance of it being submitted. It was agreed that officers would liaise with the various Members to ensure that their comments were accurately reflected in the consultation.

The Committee agreed that the consultation response to the 'Cross-departmental Covid-19 Vulnerable Children and Young People's Plan', be submitted to the Department of Health by the 13th November deadline, with the proviso that the response would reflect the additional comments of the Members and be subject to Council approval at the 1st December Council meeting.

Boxing Strategy - Quarter 2 Report

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that the Council had previously agreed to provide £200,000 in funding to the Irish Athletic Boxing Association Ulster Branch (IABA) in the current financial year for delivery of an agreed action plan which supported the Belfast Boxing Strategy and he then provided an update on the progress in relation to the agreement up to the end of September 2020.

He explained that, in line with the Council's objectives, the Belfast Boxing Strategy Steering Group had met quarterly. The Steering Group was chaired by the Director of

Neighbourhood Services and attended by Council officers, IABA officers and officials and Co. Antrim officials.

The Committee was reminded that the Council had previously agreed a total of 37 Indicators with the IABA to monitor delivery of the programmes. The Director reported that the IABA had been compliant with all the reporting matters.

The Committee noted the progress to date and that the achievement of targets had been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 restrictions. It further noted that IABA were hopeful that full implementation of the majority, if not all, of the agreed KPIs could be achieved by year end (subject to the current regulations being lifted/relaxed).

Stadia Community Benefits Initiative Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To advise Committee of progress with the Stadia Community Benefits Initiative (SCBI) and update on the action plan.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the content of the report.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 The Council has been progressing with the Leisure Transformation Programme to renew and further develop its leisure offering across the City. This programme has been influenced by the partnership opportunities presented by the NI Executive Stadia Programme.

3.2 The Council, Department for Communities (DfC) and the Irish Football Association (IFA) had previously recognised the opportunities presented by the Stadia Programme and had committed to work together to maximise these benefits via the establishment of a Stadium Community Benefits Initiative as part of the Belfast Community Benefits Initiative (‘the Project’) to implement and deliver agreed objectives including promoting equality, tackling poverty, and tackling social exclusion within the Belfast area.

3.3 In March 2016 the Council, DfC and IFA signed an agreement which sets out their respective commitments to the project. As other major stadia are developed in Belfast it is anticipated that other sports governing bodies shall become parties to the agreement. At its April 2018 meeting, People and Communities committee agreed that

Council would work with the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) within the Stadia Community Benefits Initiative and recognised their significant planned investment in gaelic games in the city to support their Gaelfast strategy. GAA activities became fully incorporated into the action plan at the start of financial year 2019-2020, with Gaelfast staff imbedded into the governance structure at Communications Board, Delivery Board, Policy and Performance Board. There will be further opportunities for the extension of programme delivery over the next number of years, particularly following recent NI Executive approval for redevelopment of Casement Park.

- 3.4 The agreement is for a period of ten years with financial commitment from Council and IFA in place to the end of March 2026. Delivery is managed through monthly meetings of the Delivery Board, which reports quarterly to the Policy and Performance Board. Financial and performance reports can be presented to Council and other partners' Boards as necessary with formal reviews of the agreement planned for years 5 and 10.
- 3.5 The Policy & Performance Group is responsible for agreeing the Benefits Realisation Plan and associated annual targets. Work was undertaken to ensure the end benefits/outcomes are aligned to partners' strategies. To measure the progress of this the Council and the IFA have developed a range of indicators/intermediate benefits which are monitored through programme delivery:
- a. Number of coaching sessions provided
 - b. Number of coaches engaged in delivering coaching
 - c. Number of sessions improving club governance
 - d. Number of volunteering opportunities
 - e. Participation opportunities for under 16s
 - f. Female participation rates
 - g. Number of people completing skills development programme
 - h. Number of people members of at least one sports club
 - i. Number of sessions for under-represented groups
 - j. Number of sessions for school and youth groups
 - k. Community group usage of stadia
 - l. Number of clubs attaining club-mark
 - m. Educational opportunities
 - n. Number of programmes targeting ASB
 - o. Improved collaborative working
 - p. Number of disabled participants
 - q. Number of older people participating

- 3.6 Following the completion of a baseline assessment in early 2017, annual work-plans were then developed for years 1, 2 and 3.
- 3.7 It was agreed that year 3 (2019-2020) would be a transition year, with GAA actively joining the partnership and the first year that GAA was incorporated into programme delivery. The action plan for 2019-2020 included a mixture of sports specific programmes (e.g. National Governing Body specific coach education) and some joint collaborative initiatives delivered by both sporting codes. The IFA and GAA were able to access additional resources to enable them to deliver the joint partnership programmes, for example they collaborated to deliver club development workshops in the areas of social media, strength and conditioning and sports psychology. These club development workshops were attended by both gaelic games and football clubs. In addition, a series of tours of the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park took place, with youth football/soccer teams pairing up with youth GAA teams.
- 3.8 To improve collaborative working and to increase the community benefits in 2020-2021, a joint planning workshop was held in the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park in Nov 2019. This workshop helped to identify specific themes, which both IFA and GAA agreed to be the focus within the new action plan for the forth-coming year. The SCBI Policy and Performance group approved a joint action plan for 2020-2021, at the February 2020 meeting. This included plans for a joint SCBI conference, which was due to be held in June 2020. Other planned joint initiatives included youth summer camp, disability summer camp and community outreach with the BME communities.
- 3.9 These initiatives unfortunately had to be postponed due to NI executive Covid-19 restrictions. The majority of IFA staff involved in the delivery of the SCBI programmes were placed on furlough/part-time furlough until September 2020 and all of the Gaelfast staff currently remain on furlough. Both IFA and Gaelfast staff are likely to return to full time working in November 2020 and each organisation is fully committed to developing a revised action plan to maximise programme delivery in Q3 & Q4 and to develop new and creative ways of working/delivering whilst ensuring compliance with any Executive restrictions.
- 3.10 Programme delivery to date in Year 4 (financial year 2020/2021) has been limited. Given that some IFA staff returned from furlough on a part-time basis in August/September 2020, this enabled some programmes to commence as summarised below:

- Five club coaches have been able to complete their IFA level 1 via support of Stadium Community Benefits funds.
- Two IFA Educational Programmes have commenced in September 2020, with two schools and 30 young people currently completing a series of qualifications including: grassroots introduction, futsal intro, referee certificate and show racism the red card.
- IFA officers are currently working with online developers to try and move some coach education online. It is hoped that grassroots, OCN and part of the NCC (level 1) will be accessible online from November 2020. These courses will then enable aspects of the SCBI educational programme to be delivered online, regardless of further Covid-19 restrictions.
- SCBI has supported Street Soccer over the summer months. SCBI funding facilitated Golf soccer sessions. This commenced as soon as Covid-19 restrictions lifted in June 2020. This provided much needed socially distanced activity for this group of adults who have experienced homelessness.
- IFA Walking Football and Shooting Stars programmes were due to commence in Belfast in November 2020. However this has now been put on hold due to the most recent Covid-19 restrictions coming into play.
- IFA clubmark accreditation system is now online. In 2020, four Belfast clubs have successfully completed the new IFA clubmark accreditation. A further 23 Belfast clubs have registered on the online clubmark platform. These registered clubs are currently being supported by IFA and Belfast City Council Sports Development staff.
- The IFA club development officer and volunteer development officer have developed a series of online workshops, which have been accessible to Belfast clubs; including online workshops/videos on: Mental Health, Covid-19 Protocols, Covid Officer training.
- The IFA volunteer development officer worked alongside Volunteer Now to assign IFA volunteer roles during lockdown to help in local foodbanks.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.10 In accordance with the Council's obligations under its DfC Funding Agreement for the Olympia Regeneration Project, the Council has committed a sum of £100,000 per annum for a minimum of ten years, so that a minimum of £1,000,000 is contributed in total to the Project. Reduced programme delivery leads to reduced expenditure and discussion will take place as to whether this budget can be carried forward into future work plans.

Equality and Good Relations implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.11 There are no additional impacts related to this report."

The Committee noted the report.

Sports Development Strategy

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To seek approval to extend the terms of reference for development of a Belfast City Council Sports Development Strategy and revised timeline for development and completion.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee are asked to agree;
1. The proposed extended terms of reference
 2. The revised timeline for development of the strategy

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

- 3.1 It was agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 5th January 2018 that a Belfast City Council Sports Development Strategy and associated funding strategy would be developed. This strategy was to provide a framework for future decision making on providing funding to National Governing Bodies of Sport delivering programmes in Belfast in support of existing funding streams and work programmes which enhance sporting opportunities for Belfast's sporting organisations and individuals.

3.2 People and Communities Committee of 5th June 2018 agreed a proposed Terms of Reference and proposed timeline. Since that date the Departmental Change Programme has prompted consideration of wider opportunities to clarify and align the links between sports development and Council's strategic funding and programming decisions in the areas of asset development, health improvement and community development.

3.3 Department for Communities (DfC) are currently developing a Physical Activity and Sport Strategy for Northern Ireland 2020 - 2030. Pre-consultation has been carried out by DfC on this strategy and Council has provided responses to the approach. It would appear that alignment to the DfC approach may support maximising the Belfast Agenda outcomes for Belfast which have a focus on delivery until 2035.

3.4 Proposed Extended Terms of Reference

Based on what was agreed at committee on 5th June 2018 it is proposed that the Terms of Reference are extended to include the following;

- In line with the Belfast Agenda the outcomes are extended to 2035
- Physical activity programming is considered as part of the pathway into organised sport
- Considered and aligned with our Leisure Transformation Programme, including the development of Phase 3.
- Identification of alternative sources of financing/partner opportunities.
- Facility/asset utilisation and management is maximised through collaborative partnership approaches
- Facility/asset planning and development is considered taking account of local, citywide and regional need.
- Sport's contribution to improvement of whole health is considered in the context of partnership working through the work of the Belfast Community Planning Partnership and associated Boards – particularly the Living Here Board
- Sport's contribution to community development is considered in the context of City & Neighbourhood's Departmental approach to area working and neighbourhood regeneration
- The strategy 'working title' to be 'Belfast Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy.'

3.5 Proposed Draft Timeline

Subject to committee's approval of the draft terms of reference the following is a proposed timeline for the development of the strategy.

Establish Board and structures for developing strategy	December 2020
Clarify and allocate resources for developing strategy	January 2021
Research and benchmarking of best practice	February 2021
Draft strategic and policy context completed	February 2021
Audit of current programming, asset provision & management arrangements.	February 2021
Draft aim and objectives completed	March 2021
Pre consultation and co-design with key stakeholders including sporting clubs, community partners, GLL, DfC, Sport NI and key governing bodies to determine what is already available and key needs of the sector	April and May 2021
Draft strategy document	June 2021
Draft equality screening and rural needs analysis	June 2021
Agreement of draft by DMT/CMT	July 2021
Consideration of draft strategy by SP&R	August 2021
Council ratification	September 2021
12 week public consultation	October to December 2021
Analyse consultation findings and amend strategy as required	January 2022
Finalise equality screening	January 2022
Present draft strategy and action plans to P&C Committee	February 2022
Council ratification	March 2022

3.6 Financial Implications

Cost associated with the development of the new strategy and engagement of external partner will be met within existing departmental resources. Members are advised that no capital finance is in place to support the sports development strategy at this stage,

which will need to be considered as the strategy is developed and needs become clearer.

3.7 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

The draft strategy will be equality screened in line with the Council's agreed process."

The Committee agreed the proposed extended terms of reference and the revised timeline for development of the strategy.

Operational Issues

Proposal for naming new streets

The Committee agreed to make a recommendation in respect of the applications for the naming of new streets in the City, namely, Areema Grove, off Areema Grove, BT17 and Kilwee Lane, off Upper Dunmurry Lane, BT17.

Proposed improvements to Parks and Open Spaces

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 Members will recall that in December 2019 this committee received an update report on a number of requests from Elected representatives for a range of improvements to our Parks and Open Spaces. This included a notice of motion relating to the provision of artificial lighting in Parks and a request to review the hours our Parks are open to the public.**

1.2 In March 2020 members will also recall that this committee agreed to pilot the opening of 3 parks in the city for 24 hours from the start of July to the start of September. It was agreed that this was a pilot scheme would be subject to ongoing review and evaluation. It was also agreed that information sessions would take place where users and residents would be informed of the pilot and these will be used to record and listen to any concerns raised. It was agreed that members would receive feedback on this prior to the commencement of the pilot and both the PSNI and the Council legal Services department would also be consulted.

1.3 The 3 sites chosen for the pilot were Ormeau Park, Falls Park and Woodvale Park.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and;

- Note the substantial financial implications of installing lighting in all parks and note that there is no capital financing associated with this. Given this it is recommended that a feasibility study is undertaken into the lighting requirements for different parks (e.g. City Park, Neighbourhood park). Members are also asked to note that lighting has been installed at a number of parks over the past few years as part of a number of recent capital projects and it is further recommended that the learning from these projects is factored into the above feasibility.
- Agree that officers recommence work on the Opening Hours Pilots previously agreed and bring a report detailing the outcome of the consultation and engagement to the March 2021 meeting of the People & Communities Committee.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Our green and blue infrastructure including our Parks affects the quality of life for everyone in our city. It helps to define a sense of place and the character of our communities; provides important spaces for recreation with associated health and wellbeing benefits and strengthens the resilience of our natural environment to change. Protecting these assets and enhancing the benefits that they provide is therefore integral to the future of Belfast.

- 3.2 From the start of the Pandemic parks and greenspaces have played a major part in relation to meeting both physical and mental health needs, during times when access to the outdoors has been limited. Research has shown on numerous occasions that parks and green spaces provide multiple benefits to the health and wellbeing of residents and are a vital component of creating sustainable and healthy communities.
- 3.3 This is a transformational time for our city, with the Belfast Agenda setting out shared commitments across public services to an ambitious vision to create a better quality of life for us all.
- 3.4 In order for our Parks and Open Spaces to work effectively they will need to be well designed, regularly maintained and appropriately funded. This needs to be recognized and used to help attract sustainable funding to ensure the benefits from any future improvements are fully realized.
- 3.5 The Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan (GBIP) sets the strategic spatial framework, vision and five strategic principles for the future delivery, management and enhancement of the whole green and blue infrastructure network; helping to meet the outcomes envisaged in the Belfast Agenda's vision. It is supported by a number of other strategies which focus on specific sub-sets of green and blue infrastructure, such as the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS).
- 3.6 Belfast Open Spaces Strategy (BOSS) provides a road map on how the public want to use our Parks and Open spaces over the next 10 - 15 years. An update Report on BOSS was brought to SP&R in March and under delegated authority the following recommendation was agreed. 'The Committee is asked to note the update on the draft BOSS consultation process and agree the proposed changes and actions set out at Appendix 1 and the production of the final Strategy document.' Officers will shortly be making the required amendments to the strategy document and this will be published.
- 3.7 Over the next 12 months, Officers from across City and Neighbourhood Services will work with colleagues across the Council to begin to develop action plans under each of the seven Strategic Principles and these will be brought to members for approval. Within the context of our transformational places approach future action planning will also seek to maximise public assets and funding by

engaging and working with partners, such as DfI and DfC to identify other strategic opportunities like the Belfast Urban Greenway and the Bolder Vision for Belfast to identify funding opportunities and work up proposals.

Provision of Artificial Lighting to our Parks

- 3.8 In the December 2019 report members were informed that we currently have approximately 300 km of road and pathways in our Parks and Open Spaces and pilot work was required to identify potential sites and work up proposals. This pilot would also need to consider the outcomes benefits and risks/issues etc. including any impact on crime and ASB, any impact on landscape character and wildlife habitats and ultimately costings in relation to purchasing and installing the equipment and any associated revenue and maintenance trail. Due to Covid this work has not been undertaken to date.
- 3.9 Members are asked to note the substantial financial implications of installing lighting in all 300km of road/pathways in our parks. Members will also be aware of the current limitations of the capital financing budget and that there is no capital financing associated with this proposal. Given this it is recommended that a feasibility report is undertaken into the lighting requirements for the different types of parks within the Council's park portfolio as it will not be a 'one size fits all' model in terms of need (e.g. City Park, Neighbourhood park) . Officers from C&NS will work with the Physical Programmes Department on working this up. This will then allow officers to develop up fully costed proposals. This will then be reported back to Committee once undertaken Members are also asked to note that lighting has been installed at a number of parks over the past few years as part of a number of recent capital projects (see Appendix 1) and it is further recommended that the learning from these projects is factored into the above feasibility. Officers will also collate information on those parks and spaces that have lighting in order to promote their possible use in the winter months.
- 3.10 Members are further asked to note that any proposals for lighting will be required to be recommended to the SP&R Committee to be added to the Capital Programme as a Stage 1 – Emerging Project and will therefore need to be considered in the context of the organisational financial position.

Amending the Opening and Closing Hours of Parks

- 3.11 Due to Covid the 24 hour pilot for Ormeau, Woodvale and Falls Park did not take place. Officers were unable to carry out any consultation with local groups, seek the views of legal services and the PSNI and put together any animation programmes for the sites in question.
- 3.12 Members will also be aware that due to Covid 19 restrictions we were unable to close our Parks during the initial lock down period. At the start this presented few problems however as we began to emerge from lock down our Parks experienced increased Anti-Social Behaviour, vandalism and damage. A number of assaults also took place. Following complaints from the public and elected representatives we began locking our parks again. There is the added concern that should Parks remain open over the winter months the absence of lighting increases the possibility of accidents, additional crime and ASB.
- 3.13 Prior to amending the opening hours of our Parks further consideration of the risks is therefore required. The opening times for our Parks can be accessed via the following link <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/parks/a-z>. The council has currently no capacity within the existing Open Space & Street Scene service to staff Parks outside of these hours.
- 3.14 If members are content officers can re-start the pilot proposal and begin consultation with local groups, legal services and the PSNI. Officers could also start to look at animation proposals for these spaces. Officers will report on the outcome of this work to the March 2021 committee.

Financial & Resource Implications

Artificial Lighting In parks

- 3.15 Members will be aware of the current limitations of the capital financing budget and that there is no capital financing associated with this proposal, therefore any proposals for lighting will be required to be recommended to the SP&R Committee to be added to the Capital Programme as a Stage 1 – Emerging Project and will therefore need to be considered in the context of the organisational financial position.

Amending the Opening & Closing Times of Parks

- 3.16 The council has currently no capacity within the existing Open Space & Street Scene budgets to amend the opening and closing times of parks outside of the current working times.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.17 There are no known Equality, Good Relations or Rural needs implications.”

Following a query from a Member, the Director of Neighbourhood Services confirmed that disabled access to parks would be considered under the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy.

The Committee also discussed the feasibility of lighting up parks that already had floodlighting installed but the Director advised that this would not be possible as when these facilities were in use separate staff were brought in to facilitate the booking of the pitch, this all came at an additional cost to the Council.

A further Member referred to the levels of anti-social behaviour in some of the parks and welcomed the exploration of animation programmes as he felt that early intervention and prevention was essential.

It was noted that the Council was working on a pilot programme to ascertain if animation helped with positive usage of facilities and that the Council would continue to link with other statutory partners, including the PCSP's to develop an agreed vision and supporting strategy.

The Committee adopted the recommendations and, at the request of a Member, agreed that quarterly reports be submitted to Committee detailing incidents of vandalism that had taken place in Council Parks over the period.

Membership of the Northern Ireland Resources Network

The Director of City Services advised the Committee that a pilot network was being formed, the Northern Ireland Resource Network (NIRN). She explained that its aim was to facilitate knowledge sharing and to promote joint working between stakeholders interested in increasing the levels of repair and reuse locally. Membership of the network would assist the Council in terms of learning, best practice and it would possibly assist with linking up potential project partners to develop the repair and reuse sector. This aligned with the Council's work under the Resourceful Belfast theme of growing the circular economy.

The Committee approved the Council's membership of the Northern Ireland Resource Network for the duration of the free membership period (until March 2022) and further agreed ongoing membership of the network (initially set at £250.00 per annum and subject to reasonable increases over time), subject to review, and an assurance that the membership continued to remain worthwhile to the Service.

Second wave planning - support for vulnerable citizens

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to update Members on the planning, partner engagement and support mechanisms in place to support vulnerable people in a way that is complementary to existing community and voluntary sector delivery.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- note this approach is based on extensive partner engagement (including debrief with strategic community partners) and will be discussed with our community partners for any further feedback
- endorse the Frequently Asked Questions at Appendix 2

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1 Members will be aware of the extensive work by community and voluntary sector partners, Council and other statutory partners as part of the initial COVID-19 wave.

- 3.2 Members will also be aware though that during that initial wave, there was a strong sense:

- There was potential duplication (particularly in relation to food)
- Council (on request from DfC) had stepped in to a space in relation to food delivery and running a helpline which it had not traditionally operated in
- That alignment between services a statutory and community/voluntary level could be improved upon
- That because of all of the above, we were collectively not always getting to those who most needed the support.

- 3.3 A debrief with the strategic community partners Council worked with during the initial wave of COVID-19, was held on 13 October 2020 and our strategic community partners supported this position. In particular, they felt that Council should add value by connecting, facilitating and advocating, rather than stepping in to a space we did not traditionally operate in and duplicate existing provision. The summary of their feedback is attached at Appendix 1.

Second Wave Planning

- 3.4** Taking all of this in to account, Officers have worked with partners to work through the processes that would support a more holistic approach to supporting vulnerable people, with the Council enhancing and adding value if there were gaps and when it was needed, rather than duplicating existing services.
- 3.5** Partners involved in that planning were:
- Advice NI (Funded by DfC to run the Regional Helpline)
 - Volunteer Now (supporting the volunteer eco system across the city should it be needed)
 - Fareshare (Strategic food supply chain partners regionally and funded by DfC to enhance this, provides food supply to community/voluntary organisations working with vulnerable people, rather than individuals)
 - Red Cross (Welfare, Hardship and Food support regionally as well as logistics support in the form of volunteers/vehicles if needed. On contract to BCC)
 - Trussell Trust (Citywide Network supporting majority of existing foodbanks in Belfast, also with strategic food supply chain partners)
 - Belfast Trust (supporting clinically vulnerable individuals, also with a contract with Red Cross in similar areas as Council)
- 3.6** The outcome of that engagement has supported the feedback from strategic community partners. Additionally, individual planning by these organisations has identified the following (please note this is the position as things stand today and whilst surge planning has taken place, the position is not guaranteed and will needed reviewed weekly).
- Food supply in to Belfast to support food banks and community/voluntary organisations providing food to vulnerable people is not an issue at present and not expected to be for the next 6 months. The supply chain is strong and food banks are reporting to us there are high levels of stock at present
 - There is an extensive bank of individuals who volunteered in the first wave who can be called upon to support community/voluntary partners if needed and systems are in place to enhance that if needed

- Financial hardship support is in place from within the existing system (including the DfC COVID-19 discretionary payment for anyone on a low income who has to self-isolate or is ill due to COVID-19 and other benefits). However, there is also fall back financial hardship support provided by Red Cross (on contract to both Belfast Trust and Belfast City Council which will include utilities/fuel) should existing systems not alleviate the immediate pressure for the individual/family.
- The expertise in accessing support to alleviate financial hardship (access to benefits and debt alleviation) lies with local advice providers who are already funded to deliver this work. They continue to provide support as needed and are not identifying unmanageable pressures at present, however, we keep in regular touch with them to ensure early identification of pressures on the system that may need further support.
- There are a number of key inter-dependencies which will determine how significant the expected surge in relation to financial hardship including any job support schemes brought forward by the UK Government/NI Executive and the Universal Credit application waiting times (currently 4-6 weeks). Contacts in DfC have been identified to keep us informed on the Universal Credit waiting times so we can adjust plans with all partners.
- Social and Emotional Support systems are already in place regionally should they be needed, with referral pathways to local service providers if needed and this is also in place for prescriptions.
- Advice NI has undertaken the necessary preparations to ensure their operations can be scaled appropriately in response to demand.
- A formal request has been made to DfC to ensure local authority level reporting can be provided through their contract with Advice NI (rather than regional as is the current position) to ensure early warning of issues/pressures in Belfast and to ensure individual/family queries to the helpline are being appropriately managed.

3.7 The frequently asked questions at Appendix 2 outlines how the regional services interact with citywide and local services to ensure individual/family need is met in the most effective and timely manner possible:

- Access to Food and Food Poverty (due to affordability)
- Prescriptions
- Financial hardship in areas other than food (e.g. utilities)
- Social and Emotional Support

- 3.8 Please note the frequently asked questions are based on the official Department for Communities position on supporting vulnerable people. They will also be continually reviewed and updated as appropriate both by the Department for Communities and Belfast City Council.

Financial implications

- 3.9 None identified at this stage. There remains significant value in the existing Council contract with Red Cross, which is expected will cover any emergency needs within Belfast that the existing system and services cannot alleviate.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

- 3.9 None identified at this stage.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations and commended the many Council staff who continued to work hard maintaining vital council services and supporting our citizens and communities during the pandemic.

Update on One Million Trees Programme

(Ms. G. Long, Commissioner for Resilience, attended in connection with this item)

The Committee considered the following report:

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

- 1.1 To provide this Committee with an update on progress to date in relation to the Belfast One Million Trees Programme, include a launch date in late November.

2.0 **Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to
- note the report and provide comment.

3.0 **Main report**

- 3.1 In March 2019, Belfast City Council referred to Committee a motion by Cllr Heading (appendix 1) with an ambition to plant one million trees in Belfast. In June, the People and Communities Committee received a proposal from the Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group seeking Council support in coordinating an initiative, which would see one million trees planted over a 15-year period. The committee agreed to

be lead partnership facilitator for the project, working with key stakeholders with a report to be brought back to a future Committee regarding next steps.

- 3.2 Separately, following citywide engagement on possible opportunities to build climate resilience across Belfast, the draft Resilience Strategy includes a recommendation to plant one million trees and for growth in afforestation and urban tree cover, over time.
- 3.3 Following the committee's decision that BCC acts as a convenor, a steering group for the programme was established, with meetings chaired by the Commissioner for Resilience. Coordination is undertaken by officers from the Resilience Team, and officers from City and Neighbourhood Services Department. The coordinating officers have also convened internal discussions with colleagues in the Planning Service, City Regeneration, the Strategic Hub and Physical Programmes to raise awareness of the proposal.
- 3.4 To date, officer involvement has focused on steering group coordination, acting as a broker between all stakeholders. We have made good progress, and have arrived at a point where sufficient partnerships and funding opportunities are available for a public launch.
- 3.5 There are multiple objectives associated with a tree-planting programme at scale. It will contribute to several Belfast Agenda priorities on sustainability, liveability and inclusive growth. The Mini Stern, undertaken to inform a roadmap to decarbonise the city, concluded that Belfast will use up its carbon budget in nine years. Tree planting at scale provides a cheap and safe approach to carbon capture and storage within a city, and to boost biodiversity. Furthermore, designed in the right way, using the right land, tree planting at scale can support sustainable urban drainage, reduce flooding through rainwater capture and protect the city from the impacts of climate change, as rainfall increases. Afforestation in cities is increasingly accepted as an economic driver – boosting property values and contributing to place-making and tourism. Several cities in Europe are citing tree planting as core to their economic recovery post-Covid 19, and we understand
- 3.6 DAERA is considering afforestation as a core pillar of a future approach to 'green growth' in the region. While more trees in Belfast will improve air quality overall, we are not proposing that this programme will be a major contributor to better air quality, due to the number of trees which would need to be planted in particular

locations, to have a material impact on air quality. The programme helps to deliver the Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan, the Open Spaces Strategy, the Resilience Strategy, and the Belfast Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plan as it progresses.

- 3.7 Since establishing the steering group, Minister Poots has announced a significant tree-planting programme for Northern Ireland, with an intention to fund the planting of £18m trees in a decade. This would amount to a major increase in forest cover across Northern Ireland, and would meet the recommendations of the Committee on Climate Change, when it prioritised tree planting as a way to reduce Northern Ireland's CO₂ emissions. BCC officers have met the Deputy Permanent Secretary at DAERA and the Chief Executive of the Forest Service to ensure alignment between both programmes and mutual support and has encouraged DAERA to adapt funding streams to support urban tree planting. Two BCC officers will sit on the recently established DAERA Forests for the Future Forum, which brings together delivery partners for the project.
- 3.8 It should be noted that the One Million Trees programme proposed for Belfast will overwhelmingly consist of tree-planting at scale on strategic sites (e.g. woodland), and is not a 'street tree' planting initiative. However, we are keen to work with DAERA to support greater city liveability by making communities, arterial routes and the city centre more attractive, and healthier places for people, encouraging mobility and the positive use of public space. The Steering Group is seeking creative ways to green the city such as green roofs, wildflower meadows, rewilding derelict areas and will approach this on a site-by-site basis.
- 3.9 Furthermore, a forthcoming review by City and Neighbourhood Services of our existing assets, and future maintenance obligations needs to be complete before BCC could commit additional resources to tree planting and maintenance in our own parks and other assets.

Progress to date:

Site Selection

- 3.10 BCC officers have convened a number of meetings with project partners to achieve agreement on a programme of tree planting at scale for the city.
- 3.11 The Steering Group has engaged in a series of positive discussions, agreeing a phased approach to the programme, and that planting would be recorded and collated by partners as of January 2020 onwards.

3.12 The Steering Group agreed that site selection should be guided by a set of principles including the following:

- Air quality management areas
- Flood risk areas (pluvial and fluvial)
- Nature conservation sites/wildlife corridors/watercourses
- Areas lacking green assets (e.g.: city centre/inner urban) – consider pocket parks with trees (maybe in large planters) in prominent city centre and local/district areas
- Opportunities for more street trees
- Vacant/derelict sites, including ‘rewilding’ opportunities
- Repurposing of part of areas of extensive cut grass open space (e.g. BCC parks, NIHE amenity grassed areas, roadside verges, etc)
- the countryside/hills around the city (including upland water management measures)
- sites that buffer and connect to existing woodland

3.13 Planting one million trees in Belfast over 15 years requires approximately 30 hectares of land per year - equivalent to approximately 30 football pitches. The cost has been estimated by the Belfast Metropolitan Residents Group as £100,000 per year for planting (£3,000 per hectare, 2000 trees per hectare).

On this basis, the Steering Group agreed to work according to four phases:

Stage 1 – Site identification (May 2020 – June 2020);

Stage 2 – Site assessment (July 2020 – September 2020);

Stage 3 – Planting (November 2020 – March 2021);

Stage 4 – ongoing site identification, assessment and planting

3.14 A site assessment team was established which is coordinated by the Resilience Unit with support from CNS, and includes the Woodland Trust, Belfast Hills Partnership, Conservation Volunteers and QUB.

3.15 The above process is a rolling programme, which delivers a pipeline of projects for consideration. Where a site is not suitable for woodland creation the team consider alternative options that will enhance green and blue infrastructure, biodiversity and liaise with landowners accordingly. Work is ongoing to develop design principles and a framework for sites that are not suitable for woodland creation but which could support our targets in relation to carbon

reduction, enhanced biodiversity, flood alleviation, urban cooling, and improved health among others. Sites could also be utilised as tree nurseries to support the objectives of the project and a request has been made to BCC regarding this from the Conservation Volunteers which is currently under consideration.

- 3.16 Discussions are ongoing with other landowners at present regarding potential sites and it is proposed that we undertake a scan of BCC land for suitable sites for inclusion. Initial discussions have taken place with Peace IV team, CNS Parks, City Centre Regen Team, and Planning, placing this initiative firmly in the context of the Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan and Belfast Open Spaces Strategy, whilst delivering on the aims of the Belfast Resilience Strategy and the Belfast Climate Plan, which sit within the Belfast Agenda.
- 3.17 A number of workstreams are in development through the Programme including communications and marketing, mapping and research, community, public and business engagement.

Regional alignment

- 3.18 Belfast City Council has nominated two representatives to the DAERA Forests for the Future Forum, who will represent both BCC and the Belfast One Million Trees Programme. The first meeting of the Forum will take place on 9th December 2020. DAERA are presenting the Belfast One Million Trees Programme as a good news story and example of good partnership working. DAERA have also created a GIS platform where DAERA funded woodland creation can be inputted.

Public, business and community participation (volunteerism, corporate role, communities of place and interest)

- 3.19 It is anticipated that Belfast One Million Trees will launch in December 2020 beginning a new phase of public engagement. To date community engagement has been undertaken through Belfast Community Planning Partnership's Voluntary, Community and Small Enterprise Panel, and through Belfast Climate Commission's Community Climate Action Working Group. In addition engagement has taken place on a site by site basis. We hope to provide an opportunity for members of the public to register interest in the project, potentially holding a tree giveaway event/s.
- 3.20 Business engagement has taken place through Business in the Community Environmental Leadership Team, with options for business involvement including staff volunteering, planting on site, corporate sponsorship, and carbon offsetting.

Education and skills

- 3.21 The project presents an opportunity to coordinate capacity building and educational activity under the Belfast One Million Trees banner, for example volunteer tree planting, site inspections, an audit of education and skills programmes, further development of tree wardens and champions, and opportunities to support job creation through horticultural and arboreal training, with placements on partner estates.
- 3.22 ECO – Schools have been engaged with following discussions with Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful about the potential to link Belfast One Million Trees Programme to the ECO schools in Belfast, adding to the four schools already submitted by EA for assessment.

Communication

- 3.23 Communications officers from Belfast City Council and the Woodland Trust have met on a number of occasions to discuss messaging, promotion and the launch of the Programme, with the launch potentially linked to National Tree Week at the end of November, start of December 2020.

Research and learning

- 3.24 We view research and learning as key to underpinning the development of the Belfast One Million Trees Programme as it will support our understanding of where tree planting should take place, and the impacts across a range of targets that can be achieved. We have identified carbon sequestration, improved air quality, flood alleviation, urban cooling, beautification, physical and mental health and wellbeing, and protection and enhancement of biodiversity as high level impacts. More work must be done to quantify and measure these.
- 3.25 Initial discussions were held with the city of Melbourne, then later with the Environment Bank, National Park City, Professor Frank Kelly of Imperial College, Professor Laurence Jones of UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology Environment Centre Wales, Neil Galway of QUB School of Natural and Built Environment who supported us by providing a Masters Student Perla Mansour, whose report will help inform next steps for the project.

- 3.26 Latterly we have linked to Ruth Hunter of the School of Public Health in QUB, and to Paul Caplat of the School of Biological Sciences. There are many other city tree planting schemes and there will be a rolling programme of engagement with them, particularly those in the UK and ROI who share our climate and socio-economic conditions. The I-Tree ECO project has brought us into contact with Forest Research and Treeconomics, two organisations who work together to undertake research on trees and woodland, supporting tree strategies and city/town tree planting at scale. The I-Tree ECO project will deliver a report to us which sets out the canopy cover, species mix, and will quantify a number of the targets that we have identified, also providing a cost benefit to existing and new tree cover in the city.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.27 At this stage, it is not anticipated that Council is required to commit additional financial resources. A small budget of 40k has been allocated within the Resilience Unit to support part funding of a woodland creation post, a data/research workstream, and design activity.
- 3.28 It is proposed that BCC undertake a site scan utilising Million Trees site identification and assessment process that partners are undertaking. Options for site use include additional tree planting, nursery provision (as mentioned above), enhanced maintenance and upkeep of existing woodland, as well as other potential site uses such as the development of green infrastructure, biodiversity and other uses as determined through the assessment process. One of the key principles we are promoting is integration of the initiative within existing and future programmes and projects.
- 3.29 In the first year of the Emergency Tree Fund, Belfast has been nominated as one of 11 eligible towns and cities. Our 'expression of interest' is for up to £300,000 over a 3 year period and if successful will support tree planting, coordination of education and volunteering programmes, community engagement programmes, tree nursery development, woodland protection, tree planting on small urban sites, and commissioning of tree plans and environmental impact assessments.
- 3.30 It is anticipated that landowners who submit sites for consideration will retain ownership of the site and responsibility for costs attributed to planting and maintenance. Resources are available to support woodland creation namely:

- DAERA provide grant aid for woodland expansion on sites 5 hectares and above (opens in June 2020) This grant does not provide a set amount for establishment costs and is a competitive scheme where projects bid for the funding required against eligible costs i.e ground preparation, plant supply, labour for planting, maintenance etc. Projects tend to be somewhere in the range of £3,500 to £5,000 per hectare depending on the amount of new fencing and how much ground preparation is needed. This will be open to Council.
- DAERA are working at present to create a new small woodland grant scheme for sites of 0.2 hectares to 3 hectares (opening in January 2021) The new small scale grant scheme will be a fixed payment of about £3,000 per hectare to plant trees at 2.5m spacing. 80% of the £3,000 payment will be made after planting and the remaining 20% in year 5. This will be open to Council.
- DFI are currently developing funding streams that support green and blue infrastructure – BCC submission on greenways includes reference to the One Million Trees Programme.
- The Woodland Trust provide tree packs for schools and community groups which provide up to 1000 trees.
- In addition The Woodland Trust provide an option for landowners to transfer sites 3 hectares and above, or groups of smaller sites to the Woodland Trust for a 20 year period during which WT would undertake grant aid applications and maintenance.
- There is the potential to lever private finance and sponsorship through businesses for tree planting initiatives, conversations that have been delayed due to the pandemic and impact on businesses.
- The Woodland Carbon Code is a verification scheme whereby carbon capture can be authenticated to support the sale of carbon to investors. DAERA are currently working with us to explore options to expand this in Northern Ireland.

3.31 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality, good relations or rural needs issues.”

Several Members spoke in support of the initiative and the Chairperson, on behalf on the Committee, thanked the Commissioner for Resilience for her efforts in co-ordinating the progression of the proposal.

Noted.

Chairperson