Public Document Pack

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

Belfast City Council

MEETING OF THESTRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the on Friday, 17th June, 2022 at 9.30 am, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. **Routine Matters**

   (a) Apologies

   (b) Minutes

   (c) Declarations of Interest

2. **Restricted Items**

   (a) Year-End Finance Report 2021-22

   (b) Non-Recurrent Re-allocations (Pages 1 - 10)

   (c) Kerbside Recycling Economic appraisal and next steps (Pages 11 - 24)

   (d) City Hall: Proposed recovery plan - update on progress (Pages 25 - 30)

   (e) Dual Language Street Signs Policy Public Consultation and EQIA (Pages 31 - 178)

   (Restriction removed 15/7/2022)

(f) Cyber Update (Pages 179 - 186)

(g) Employees on Temporary Contracts (Pages 187 - 190)

(h) Update on the New Regional Planning IT System (Pages 191 - 206)

(i) Asset Management (Pages 207 - 214)

(j) Levelling Up Fund Round 2 - BCC application update and requests for support and endorsement, Shared Island Funding and Community Ownership Funding updates

(k) Review of Bonfires in 2021 - presentation

3. **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

(a) City Region Growth Deal – update (Pages 215 - 248)

(b) Employability Update (Pages 249 - 252)

(c) Delivering the Smart Belfast urban innovation framework (Pages 253 - 262)

(d) Council Improvement Plan for 2022-23 (Pages 263 - 298)

4. **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

(a) Area Working Update (Pages 299 - 332)

5. **Finance, Procurement and Performance**

(a) Procurement Policy (Pages 333 - 368)

(b) Contracts Update (Pages 369 - 376)

(c) Audit Risk Panel Annual Report including Annual Governance Statement (Pages 377 - 436)

6. **Equality and Good Relations**

(a) Minutes of the Meeting of the Shared City Partnership

(b) Diversity Action Plans (Pages 437 - 458)

(c) Request made by Councillor McMullan at Council Meeting on 1 June 2021 – Sign Language (Pages 459 - 474)

7. **Operational Issues**

(a) Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum (Pages 475 - 478)

(b) Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality (Pages 479 - 482)

(c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Active Belfast Board Limited (Pages 483 - 486)

(d) Minutes of Meeting of the City Hall/City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group (Pages 487 - 488)

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STRATEGIC POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Dual Language Street Signs Policy Public Consultation and EQIA
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**	X	**No**	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future		X		
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update the SP&R Committee on the results of the public consultation to the proposed changes to the council's Dual Language Street Signs Policy and the conclusions reached in the accompanying EQIA. A report on the consultation is attached as Appendix 1 and the EQIA final decision report is attached as Appendix 2.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	It is recommended that Members: (i) note the results of the public consultation and EQIA as laid out below.

	(ii) note that officers are currently reviewing the operational process of how the proposed policy would work in practice with a view to establishing an indicative date for the policy to go live, if approved.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	Background The public consultation opened online on the Your Say Belfast platform on 22 November 2021 and closed on 28 February 2022. The survey was available in both the English and Irish languages. There was a total of 4.4k visits to the consultation page and 1,078 written responses (785 in the English language version and 293 in the Irish language version). Officers arranged four online public information sessions, which had a total of 4 attendees. Each political party in the council was offered a briefing session and all attended apart from People Before Profit. Information sessions were held for stakeholder groups, which included Irish language groups and academia, the Ulster Scots Agency and the council's Equality Forum, Migrant Forum and Disability Advisory Panel.
3.2	Consultation Survey The consultation survey focused on five proposed changes to the Dual Language Street Signs policy. For four of the five questions, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the proposed changes, and they could comment if they wished. For the remaining proposed change relating to the operation of the council's residual discretion, respondents were asked to comment. Respondents were also asked to comment on any aspect of the proposed policy that had not been addressed by the preceding questions. The survey also gave respondents the option to comment on the draft Equality Impact Assessment running concurrently with the consultation and on the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment.
3.3	Monitoring data of the online consultation responses Gender: Of the 854 respondents who responded to this question: • Identified as male: 64.4% (550) • Identified as female: 32.1% (274)

- Preferred not to say: 3.5% (30)

Community background: Of the 786 respondents who answered this question:

- Protestant community background: 37.8% (297)
- Catholic community background: 35.1% (276)
- Neither Protestant nor Catholic: 27.1% (213)

National Identity: Of the 793 respondents who answered this question:

- Identified as Irish: 43% (341)
- Identified as British: 33.4% (265)
- Identified as Northern Irish: 19.9% (158)
- Identified as "other": 3.3% (26)
- Identified as English: 0.4 (3)

Postcodes: Responses were received from each postcode in Belfast. The largest number of responses came from North and West Belfast.

3.4 Survey responses

The combined total of responses from the English language version of the survey and the Irish language version were in favour of the four of the five proposed changes to the policy where respondents were asked to express agreement or disagreement, as can be seen below:

Proposed Change	Strongly Agree/Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly Disagree/Disagree
Change to application method (removal of 1/3 petition and specifying that occupier/s of the street, Elected Member for DEA or developer may apply)	59.0%	0.9%	40.1%
Change to threshold for further consideration of the application (2/3 to 15%)	58.7%	0.6%	40.7%
Change to how non-responses are classified (no longer counted as against)	62.0%	3%	35.0%
Change to introduce an equality assessment for each application	56.0%	13.3%	30.7%

<table>
<tr><td></td><td>For the remaining question relating to the operation of the council's residual discretion, respondents were asked if they had any comments, which were categorised and analysed by officers.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3.5</td><td><u>Written comments and sentiment summary</u>
Officers categorised written comments in the English language version of the survey as being positive, negative, mixed or neutral, which allowed a 'sentiment summary' to be produced for each question. The sentiment summary for all questions apart from that on residual discretion was predominantly negative as can be seen in the table below.
<table>
<tr><th>Proposed Change</th><th>Sentiment summary</th></tr>
<tr><td>Change to application method (removal of 1/3 petition and specifying that occupier/s of the street, Elected Member for DEA or developer may apply)</td><td>Negative: 68.8%, Positive 26.7%, Neutral: 3.5%, Mixed: 1%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Change to threshold for further consideration of the application (2/3 to 15%)</td><td>Negative: 68.7%, Positive 25.7%, Neutral: 5%, Mixed: 0.6%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Change to how non-responses are classified (no longer counted as against)</td><td>Negative: 60.4%, Positive 31.4%, Neutral: 7.1%, Mixed: 1.1%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Change to introduce an equality assessment for each application</td><td>Negative: 50.5%, Positive 28.1%, Neutral: 19.6%, Mixed: 1.8%</td></tr>
<tr><td>Explanation of residual discretion</td><td>Negative: 49.6% negative, Positive 12.1%, Neutral 35.3%, Mixed: 3%</td></tr>
</table>

Officers analysed the written comments to determine themes in responses. The findings from this were that those who were broadly opposed to the proposed changes commented negatively on the cost and how the outworking of the proposed policy might be forced on communities by a minority, thereby causing division or tension.

Those in favour of the proposed policy commented positively on how this would enhance the visibility of the Irish language and promote equality and inclusion. Respondents also noted how the proposed policy would be in keeping with best practice under the UN Special Rapporteur guidance.</td></tr>
<tr><td>3.6</td><td><u>Other submissions</u>
Sinn Fein submitted a total of 1,081 identical hard copy responses and An Dream Dearg submitted a total of 274 identical hard copy responses. These coordinated submissions were in favour of the proposed changes to the policy.</td></tr>
</table>

	A written response was submitted by the Committee for the Administration of Justice welcoming the proposed policy but questioning how it interacted with the council's Equality Scheme. Responses were also submitted by Conradh na Gaeilge, An Droichead, Glór na Móna, Ionad Uibh Eachach and Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain. The content of these were largely the same with each being in favour of the proposed changes.
3.7	<u>EQIA findings</u> The Final Decision Report of the EQIA consultants has found that "while the consultation has revealed a lack of consensus with regard to the proposed changes to the policy, and indeed has identified a strong division of opinion, there is nothing inherent in the feedback received to suggest that, at this time, the proposed changes should not now be adopted - but on the understanding that the policy should be subject to rigorous review after a period of two years." With regard to the policy potentially disrupting good relations, the EQIA report states that "sufficient and proportionate checks and balances have been incorporated within the application process to minimise this risk."
3.8	<u>Next steps</u> Subject to Member agreement, a revised policy incorporating the proposed changes will be drafted and presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval. Officers are reviewing the operational processes required to ensure the proposed policy works in practice with a view to establishing an indicative date for the policy to go live, if approved.
3.9	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> As agreed previously, given the potential for increased numbers of applications the council will deal with no more than 5 in any given month. If numbers are excessive, they will be held in a queue and dealt with in the order in which they have been received. This will also be managed in the context of the existing staffing resource and the established annual budget for street signage. A report will be submitted to a future meeting outlining the new procedure emanating from the revised policy, and the options for increasing the number of applications which could be processed on a monthly basis. Assessing each application for any Section 75 implications will have resource implications for Building Control, the Place & Economy Policy team, the Good Relations Unit and also the Equality & Diversity Unit.

	An external consultant has been employed to assist with elements relating to the consultation, EQIA and the revised procedure. It is proposed that these consultants will undertake an initial review of the application and screening process for applications after the first 6 months of implementation.
3.10	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment A final decision EQIA report is attached to this report as Appendix 2. The EQIA consultants will be available to provide ongoing equality advice for a period of up to a year. Each application for a dual language street sign will be assessed at an initial stage for any adverse impact on equality of opportunity or good relations. The revised procedure is being finalised and will be brought as part of the further report outlined in 3.9.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 – Consultation Report Appendix 2 – EQIA Final Decision Report

Consultation Report into the Proposed Changes to the Dual Language Street Signs Policy

April 2022

1. Executive Summary

Belfast City Council agreed on 7th January 2021, to carry out a public consultation accompanied by an Equality Impact Assessment into proposed changes to the Dual Language Street Signs Policy. The proposed changes to the policy include:

- amending the process for starting an application
- lowering the required threshold for support
- clarifying how responses to the street survey are classified
- conducting an equality assessment on each application; and,
- explaining the operation of the council's residual discretion.

This report presents:

- the rationale and background of the council decision,
- the process for developing and launching the consultation
- the consultation response to the policy proposals
- the recurring themes evidenced in the consultation.

The ultimate aim of this is to give elected members as clear a picture as possible of the stakeholder and the public response and issues raised in relation to this policy proposal. This will allow elected members to make an informed decision based on this evidence. This report is accompanied by an independently written Equality Impact Assessment report which will give more specific detail and recommendations in relation to the proposed policy changes.

It should be noted at the outset of this report that this policy proposal generated considerable opinions both for and against and extensive discussion in the media and on social media. The final decision is likely to generate debate both within the council and in the media.

2. Background

Belfast City Council has had a policy permitting the erection of dual language street signs in residential streets since 1998. This is a discretionary power granted to the council pursuant to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 which allows for a local council to erect a dual language name plate in a language other than English. Article 11(4) of the 1995 Order requires councils to have regard to any views on the matter expressed by the occupiers of premises in the street in question. The introduction of this policy in Belfast City Council effectively allowed for dual language signs to be erected in a street where residents could demonstrate the required amount of support for this. While the Local Government Order applies to all languages, there are no dual language signs in Belfast in any language other than Irish. The Irish language street signs are concentrated most densely in west Belfast with the north, east and south of the city having signs but not in comparable numbers.

2.1 The current policy

The current Belfast City Council policy in respect of erecting a bilingual sign is outlined as follows:

- A resident in the street in question must collect the signatures of 1/3 of residents in the street saying they are in favour of the erection of a dual language name plate and present this to the council
- BCC Building Control section carries out a postal survey of the residents of the street on the electoral register
- A threshold of two thirds of residents on the electoral register in the street have to be in favour of the erection of the sign, with non-responses being counted as a “no” vote
- If the required threshold is reached, the results of the survey are then sent to the Council’s People and Communities Committee who approve the application and the dual language name plate is erected by an external contractor.

The current process takes roughly six months from initial petition to the sign being erected. It should be noted that the translation of the street name is carried out by

The Northern Ireland Place Names Project at Queen's University, Belfast. This is carried out by the project in addition to their own work and entails an element of in-depth research to produce an accurate street name. Having this carried out by qualified researchers with expert knowledge in this field lends an element of quality assurance to this process which council officers alone could not provide.

2.2 The proposed change to the Council's Dual Language Street Signage Policy

Belfast City Council, following much debate, agreed in January 2021 to revise the Dual Language Street Signs policy subject to a full public consultation and an Equality Impact Assessment.

Members reached a decision, ratified in January 2021, to adopt a new policy position. This decision was subject to a 'call in' on procedural grounds and on the grounds that the proposed policy might have a detrimental effect on the Protestant or Unionist communities. These assertions were found to be without merit in a legal opinion provided by a practicing barrister. An officer working group then developed the proposed policy, which is outlined below:

- The process can be started by an occupier or occupiers of the street in question, an elected member for that area or a developer building a new development – removing the need for an initial petition;
- Councillors will be presented with a list of applications before these proceed to the survey stage. This allows for elected members to flag any potentially contentious applications early on in the process;
- The council will conduct a survey of the residents in the street in question, with 15% of returned responses in favour being deemed a sufficient threshold for further consideration of the application;
- Non-returned forms are not counted as either a "yes" or a "no", but elected members will be given a breakdown of those for, against and those who did not respond;
- The council will retain a "residual discretion" in relation to each application, this in effect gives elected members the option to depart from the policy. It should be noted that the council always had residual discretion in these matters to depart from this policy.

- Each application will be subjected to an equality and good relations assessment to determine what impact the potential erection of a dual language sign might have in a given area. This can, if required, trigger a formal equality screening and possibly an Equality Impact Assessment;
- The council's current resources enable it to process a maximum of 5 applications a month.

Residual discretion

The proposed changes to the policy include a new section that describes what factors are to be considered when the council exercises residual discretion, namely:

- the views of the occupiers of the street;
- the results of the assessment of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs implications;
- consideration of the local context of the application;
- any other council policies or strategies related to the application; and
- all material considerations relating to the application.

This means that the council can take into account the specific circumstances of each application when determining the outcome and that, according to a report to Belfast City Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in April 2021, "The exercise of the Committee's residual discretion will ensure that second language street signs will not be erected in a manner which could undermine Good Relations at a neighbourhood level."

Council staff sought legal advice concerning the parameters for the residual discretion referred to in the policy. The barrister advised that residual discretion could not be the subject of any rigid parameters and that elected members should consider each application on an individual basis and discuss whether the policy needed to be departed from in any way.

3. Consultation Design Process and methodology

3.1 Officer working group

An officer working group was established in January 2021 to develop a draft policy and to determine procedural issues in relation to the implementation process. This group was chaired by the council's Governance and Compliance Manager and was attended by representatives of the Council's Building Control Unit (the owners of this policy), Governance and Compliance section and the Good Relations Unit, the Equality and Diversity Unit, the council's Irish language officer, Legal Services and the council's Strategy, Policy and Partnerships section. The working group also received advice from a practicing barrister on legal issues potentially relating to the proposed policy and its implementation and from external consultants who specialise in equality issues.

This group drafted the text of the proposed policy reflecting the decision reached by elected members including the reduced threshold and the removal of the need for an initial petition to be collected. The working group also discussed, at length, possible procedural issues in relation to the implementation of the proposed policy and the potential resource implications surrounding this.

Advice from a practicing barrister and external consultants focused on the potential good relations impacts of this policy and how this might be mitigated. Legal advice stated that an equality assessment should be carried out in relation to each application. This assessment would gather local demographic information and statistics to support the decision-making process and to give the People and Communities Committee as much information as possible in relation to each application. It should be noted that this exercise is not a full Section 75 Equality Screening.

The proposed policy was subject to a Section 75 Screening and this was screened in for a full Equality Impact Assessment to be carried out by an external consultant. The Equality Impact Assessment accompanies this report.

3.2 Methodology

The public consultation into this proposed policy change was launched on the 22nd November 2021 and concluded on 28 February 2022. The survey was available in both English and Irish Languages. A hard copy format of the survey, in both languages was also made available upon request.

3.3 Public information sessions

Council officers, in conjunction with an external events company, arranged for 4 online public information sessions to present the policy to the public and allow them to give feedback. Online events were organised due to the ongoing spread of COVID at the time and to avoid situations where large groups of people were brought together.

These public information sessions were chaired by the council's Governance and Compliance manager and a presentation was given detailing the proposed changes to the policy and asking for feedback through the online consultation. The public sessions were poorly attended with 4 people attending across the four sessions, despite a total of 15 people registering for these events in advance. The public information sessions were highlighted on the council's website and on social media with participants being encouraged to register their desire to attend in advance.

Engagement sessions with stakeholders and political parties in relation to the development of this policy

Council officers and the external consultant appointed to work on this consultation carried out a number of engagement sessions with relevant stakeholders from the Irish language and Ulster-Scots sectors, as well as the political parties in Belfast City Council. These engagement sessions elicited a range of opinions both for and against the proposed changes to this policy.

Democratic Unionist Party

DUP councillors voiced the opinion that there was no need to change the policy as the current policy worked. There was a discussion of their fear that the proposed changes could have a negative impact on good relations, especially in mixed areas and that this could have the effect of "branding" areas. The DUP said they were, as a

party, uncomfortable with the proposed change which would allow a single elected member to request that a sign be erected in a street or that a developer be allowed to begin the process. Members also challenged the grounding of this policy in guidance from the UN Special Rapporteur. The opinion was expressed that the 5%-20% threshold for the use of a language, other than the primary language, in signage, referred to scenarios where the 5-20% of the population have no knowledge of the primary language. DUP members expressed the opinion that that wasn't relevant in this case as people who speak Irish also speak English.

There was also a discussion of residual discretion and how this could be used to prevent or approve the erection of a sign depending on circumstances and discussion around these issues in committee. It was noted at this point that each application will come before committee and will ultimately be subject to a political vote.

Ulster Unionist Party

Ulster Unionist Party members said that they were opposed, as a party, to elected members being able to begin the process to have a sign erected. They felt that this would cause particular difficulties in DEAs where representatives of multiple parties are present. The UUP also voiced concern that were signs erected in areas where there was opposition to this that this would result in vandalism and damage to community relations locally.

SDLP

SDLP members asked whether there would be a cap on the number of applications that the council would deal with per month.

Alliance Party

Alliance Party members queried how this policy would work in relation to the electoral register how the policy would be applied in relation to non-residential occupiers of premises.

Sinn Féin

Sinn Féin members were in support of the policy but queried why it had taken so long for the consultation to take place and asked when the policy would be in effect.

Progressive Unionist Party

The Progressive Unionist Party raised concern that the proposed policy allowed for a single elected member to begin the process. They also stated that the proposed policy could be difficult if an attempt was made to apply it to what they described as “long streets”, these are streets with numerous homes wither there may be some level of demographic variation between either end of the street. PUP member also queried the use of the word “reasonable” in relation to the policy and what this meant and how its interpretation could impact on the application of the policy.

Council officers also held a meeting with the Green Party who had no questions in relation to the policy. People Before Profit were offered a session to discuss this policy but did not attend.

Irish language community

Council officers met with representatives from a range of Irish language groups including Conradh na Gaeilge, An tÁisionad, An Droichead, Raidió Fáilte, Foras na Gaeilge, Forbairt Feirste, Glór na nGael, East Belfast Mission, Cultúrlann McAdaim – Ó Fiaich and the Northern Ireland Place Names Project at Queen’s University.

Attendees were in favour of the proposed change, however did query a number of procedural issues in relation to the implementation of the policy. There was a strong opinion that the initial assessment of each application could be used to stop the application process before local residents were given the opportunity to voice their opinion. Attendees also suggested that opinions opposed to the erection of a sign which were clearly sectarian in nature should be disregarded from any assessment.

Attendees asked for a definition of good relation and equality of opportunity as they related to this policy and noted that the draft EQIA issued in relation to this proposed policy change stated that the erection of a sign in Irish did not constitute an affront to equality of opportunity.

The session closed with attendees noting that the policy should be highlighted in a positive manner through a communications exercise and that the Council should make staff and budget available to handle the increased numbers of applications.

Ulster-Scots Community

Officers met with representatives from the Ulster Scots Agency and the Ulster Scots Community Network. The representatives noted that in general, local councils do not do much to promote the use of Ulster Scots and its visibility. They did not feel there would be a large demand for signs in Ulster Scots as those interested in the language were more interested in the history and heritage of the language as opposed to seeing it in signs.

The opinion was expressed that a threshold of 15% was low and that this had the potential to politicise this issue and harm good relations.

3.4 Collation of statistics from surveys

As stated above, council officers felt it appropriate in this scenario to produce the survey in both English and Irish formats. The questions asked in each version are the same and the response to the surveys will be shown as follows:

- Statistics from the English version;
- Statistics from the Irish version;
- Combined statistics from both;

The reason for this breakdown is to give as comprehensive a picture as possible to the reader of the responses on this issue. It should be noted, however, that no guarantee can be given that individual respondents have not filled in the survey multiple times.

Respondents were presented with an outline of one of the proposed changes to the policy and asked to state if the strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed. Respondents were also given the opportunity to leave a comment under each question and these comments have added to the qualitative analysis in this report. Raw numbers and percentages in relation to each question will be given in tabular format with a discussion with some of the commentary and written answers following on from this.

3.5 Analysis and tagging

In addition to the statistical analysis of the responses to the survey, officers conducted a tagging of the written commentary left by some of the respondents to the survey. Comments were tagged as either being in favour of or opposed to any of

the proposed technical changes to the policy. The tags developed were based on the key themes in the responses. Each response was also assigned a “sentiment summary”, that is tagged as being positive, negative, mixed or neutral. This then generates a graphic of positive and negative sentiment in relation to that proposed change. This is open to some small margin of error due to the potential for a response to be miscategorized.

There were repeated references throughout the responses to the potential cost of implementing a revised scheme, the potential for the revised scheme to cause division in certain areas and the assertion that the proposed 15% threshold is too low and equates to minority rule. In favour of the policy change there were references to the promotion of minority languages, Irish in particular, the assertion that the original policy is too stringent and places too much of a burden on residents and on brining the policy into line with recommendations around international best practice on minority languages. The themes in the responses will be explored in greater depth later in this report.

3.6 Written submissions

A number of written submissions were made during the period of the consultation and Equality Impact Assessment. Written responses were submitted by the Committee for the Administration of Justice welcoming the proposed policy but questioning how it interacted with the council’s Equality Scheme. Responses were also submitted by Conradh na Gaeilge, An Droichead, Glór na Móna, Ionadh Uibh Eachach and Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain. The content of these were largely the same and will be discussed in depth below. A translated example of one of these is included in Appendix 4.

4. Breakdown of responses

4.1 Responses to the online survey

There were 1078 responses to the online survey, broken down into 785 responses to the English language version and 293 responses to the Irish language version. Throughout the analysis it was clear that there was considerable strength of feeling for and against the proposed change to this policy.

It should be noted that there was no method of stopping individual respondents from filling in both the English and Irish language versions of the survey or filling in one or each multiple times. A number of responses in both the English and Irish versions of the survey were tagged by analysing officers as “pro-forma response”, that is, the same or highly similar responses to questions were received multiple times in the survey suggesting a potential co-ordinated response to the survey.

The Equality Commission’s Guide to the Statutory Duties makes it clear that consultation should focus on the actual impact of the existing policy and the likely impact of proposed and alternative policies. The Equality Commission has also made it clear that an EQIA should not be considered as a referendum or plebiscite whereby the views of consultees from a majority are counted as votes to decide the outcome.[1]

The online survey results are included below which incorporates the responses to the survey in the English and Irish languages. A further breakdown of these figures is presented in Appendix 4.

4.1.1 Responses to the survey (hard copy submissions)

Two sets of hard copy versions of the survey were received in support of the proposed changes to the policy. Irish language advocacy and campaign group An Dream Dearg delivered a 274 copies of the survey (Appendix 2) and Sinn Féin delivered 1081 copies of the survey, again, strongly in favour of the proposed changes.

It should be noted that the hard copy submissions presented by Dream Dearg (274) are identical copies of the same response.

In addition, the hard copy submissions presented by Sinn Fein (1081) are identical copies of the same response and are strongly in favour of the proposed changes to the policy.

These figures are considered separately from the completed online survey in the analysis below.

4.2 Breakdown by community background, age, gender, geographical location and relationship to Belfast

4.2.1 Gender

The majority of respondents to the English language version of the survey (62.7% or 496 respondents) self-reported as being male, with 29.3% (216) of the responses coming from women. The remaining responses came from people who preferred not to declare their gender for the purposes of this survey (3.3% or 24 respondents) and people who describe themselves as something other than male or female (0.3% or 2 respondents).

The responses to the Irish language version of the survey did not follow the same pattern with 45.8% (54) or the respondents being male, 49.2% (58) being female and 5.1% (6) respondents preferring not to say.

It should be noted that there is a discrepancy here between the number of people who filled in the survey and those who opted to fill in the questions to generate this type of metadata in the Irish language version. 175 of the respondents to the Irish language version of the survey opted not to answer this question making it harder to give an overall figure and percentage across both versions of the surveys for this.

Across the two versions of the survey 854 respondents opted to respond to this question with 65.4% (550) respondents describing themselves as male; 32.1% (274) describing themselves as female and 3.5% (30) preferring not to say. It can be seen, therefore, that the majority of respondents across both versions were male.

4.2.2 Community background of respondents

Respondents were asked to indicate what community background they came from regardless of whether or not they actively practiced a religion. They were asked to indicate a Catholic or Protestant community background as it is felt that these

correspond to the two major community groups within Belfast and Northern Ireland as a whole. Respondents were also given the option to say that they belonged to neither the Catholic nor Protestant communities.

The majority of respondents to the English language version of the survey (41.2% or 294 respondents) stated that they came from a Protestant community background with 33% (235 respondents) coming from a Catholic community background. The remaining 25.8% of respondents (185) declared that they came from neither a Catholic nor a Protestant community background reflecting the increasing trend for people to not strongly identify with either religious group.

This pattern was not repeated in the Irish language version of the survey where 4.2% (3) respondents described themselves as being from a Protestant background, 56.9% (41) of respondents coming from a Catholic community background and 38.9% (28) respondents coming from neither a Catholic nor Protestant background. Again any analysis of these figure should bear in mind that the number of respondents to this question in the Irish language version of the survey does not tally with the overall number of responses to the survey. These figures, therefore, represent those who responded to this question not all of those who responded to the survey.

When the available statistics across both versions of the survey are accumulated there is little variation here with 37.8% (297) of all respondents describing themselves as coming from a Protestant community background, 35.1% (276) coming from a Catholic community background and 27.1% (213) respondents describing themselves as being from neither community.

4.2.3 National Identity

The survey asked for respondents to describe their national identity, giving them the options of British, Irish, Northern Irish, Other, English Scottish and Welsh.

The breakdown of responses to the national identity question in the English language version of the survey was as follows:

- British 36.8% (265).
- Irish 39.1% (282).
- Northern Irish 21.1% (152).

- Other 2.6% (19) and
- English 0.4% (3).

In the Irish language version of the survey

- Irish 81.9% (59)
- Northern Irish 8.3% (6)
- Other 9.7% (7).

No respondents to the Irish language version of the survey described themselves as British.

The question about national identity was not answered by the majority of respondents to the Irish language version of the survey with only 72 respondents filling this question in. Aggregate figures and percentages below, therefore, represent those who answered this question and not all of those who responded to the survey. Across both versions:

- 33.4% (265) of respondents described themselves as British;
- 43% (341) of respondents described themselves as Irish;
- 19.9% (158) described themselves as Northern Irish with
- 3.3% (26 respondents) describing themselves as “other” and
- 0.4 (3) respondents describing themselves as English.

4.2.4 Age

The breakdown of ages of respondents across the two versions of the surveys is as follows. These

results have been presented in tabular format for ease of reference.

Table 1: Age of respondents to English language version

Age range	Percentage	Number
Under 18	0.4%	3
18-24	9.8%	73
25-39	28.6%	213
40-54	31.4%	234
55-64	18.5%	138

65+	11.4%	85

Table 2: Age of respondents to Irish language version

Age range	Percentage	Number
Under 18	32.3%	54
18-24	13.8%	23
25-39	32.9%	55
40-54	9%	15
55-64	6%	10
65+	6%	10

It should be noted based on the figures above that a significant number of respondents who filled in the Irish language version of the survey did not respond to the question about their age. The initial inference that can be drawn from the above statistics, however, is that the was a trend for respondents from the Irish language version of the survey to be younger than those who filled in the English language version. There is also a much higher occurrence of respondents under the age of 18 filling in the Irish language version.

Table 3: Age of respondents across both versions

Age range	Percentage	Number
Under 18	6.2%	57
18-24	10.5%	96
25-39	29.4%	268
40-54	27.3%	249
55-64	16.2%	148
65+	10.4%	95

The statistics above show that while respondents were spread across the age range there was a higher likelihood of responses coming from those in the 25 to 54 years of age range.

4.2.5 Postcode

Respondents were asked to indicate what area of Belfast they lived in by postcode. A map of Belfast that shows areas by postcode is attached as Appendix 5. The data in the English language version of the survey shows a spread across the city but with a higher proportion of the postcodes representing the west of the city. Postcodes in the BT4, BT5 and BT6 areas representing east Belfast also featured heavily amongst the respondents to the English language version.

Table 4: Postcode breakdown for English language version

BT1	2.4% (13)	**BT2**	0.9% (5)
BT3	2.2% (12)	**BT4**	7.1% (39)
BT5	6.9% (38)	**BT6**	8.7% (48)
BT7	6.7% (37)	**BT8**	2.7% (15)
BT9	4.7% (29)	**BT10**	4.4% (24)
BT11	10.4% (57)	**BT12**	8.9% (49)
BT13	8% (44)	**BT14**	11.3% (62)
BT15	6.7% (37)	**BT16**	1.1% (6)
BT17	6.7% (37)		

Table 4: Postcode breakdown for Irish language version

BT1	4.4% (11)	**BT2**	4.8% (12)
BT3	4% (10)	**BT4**	0.4% (1)
BT5	1.2% (3)	**BT6**	0.8% (2)
BT7	4% (10)	**BT8**	2% (5)
BT9	1.2% (3)	**BT10**	1.2% (3)
BT11	24.1% (60)	**BT12**	23.7% (59)
BT13	3.6% (9)	**BT14**	20% (8)
BT15	2.4% (6)	**BT16**	0
BT17	14.1% (35)		

While previous questions requesting metadata had not been consistently answered in the Irish language version of the survey, it can be seen that a higher proportion of

respondents were prepared to indicate what part of the city they lived in. Again it can be noted immediately through both the numerical and statistical data that the largest group of respondents to this survey come from west Belfast. It should also be noted here that the Irish language version of the survey did not elicit the same number of responses from residents in the east Belfast postcodes.

Table 4: Combined postcode breakdown across both versions

BT1	3.1% (24)	**BT2**	2.2% (17)
BT3	2.8% (22)	**BT4**	5.1% (40)
BT5	4.8% (38)	**BT6**	6.1% (48)
BT7	6% (47)	**BT8**	2.5% (20)
BT9	3.7% (29)	**BT10**	3.4% (27)
BT11	14.9% (117)	**BT12**	13.7% (108)
BT13	6.7% (53)	**BT14**	8.9% (70)
BT15	5.5% (43)	**BT16**	0.8% (6)
BT17	9.8% (77)		

The combined statistics from the above table bear out the trend from the segregated breakdowns in relation to postcodes, demonstrating that the largest group of respondents to the survey came from the west Belfast area. Beyond this initial trend, however, the respondent sample covers the entire city with respondents coming from each postcode.

4.2.6 Residency in and link to Belfast City Council area

Respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they were residents or ratepayers in the Belfast City Council area and what specific link they had to Belfast. In the English language version of the survey 82.6% (615) of respondents indicated that they were residents or ratepayers, with the remaining 17.4% (130) saying they were not. Respondents to the Irish language version of the survey were overwhelmingly (94%/268) resident in the Belfast City Council area.

Respondents who were not residents in Belfast were then asked to indicate their primary interest in Belfast as an area. Respondents to the English language version of the survey were broken down as: NI resident – 68% (87); visitor to Belfast – 3.1%

(4); worker – 10.9% (14); student – 7.8% (10) and other 10.2% (13). When those who selected “other” were asked to specify their link to the city the most common response was that they were a former resident.

There were far fewer responses to this question in the Irish language version with only 14 respondents opting to answer this question. Of this number 14.3% (2) described themselves as NI residents, 21.4% (3) were visitors, 50% (7) were workers in the city, 14.3% (2) were students and no respondent selected “other”.

Across the two versions of the survey, therefore, the majority of respondents – 85.7% - were ratepayers or residents in the Belfast City Council area. Of those who indicated that they were not residents or ratepayers in Belfast 62.7% (89) were resident in Northern Ireland, 4.9% (7) were visitors to Belfast, 14.8% (21) were workers, 8.5% were students with the remainder of respondents selecting other.

4.2.7 Summary and comment on respondent sample

The survey yielded a total of 1078 responses. The majority of respondents were residents in the Belfast City Council area. Males (65.4%) accounted for the majority of responses to the survey. 35.1% of respondents described themselves as Roman Catholic, 37.5% as coming from a Protestant community background, with the remaining 27.1% describing themselves as coming from neither background.

In terms of national identity, the single biggest group, 43% described themselves as Irish, 33.4% as British and 19.9% as Northern Irish. The majority of respondents (56.7%) fell in the 25-54 age range. The single biggest groups of respondents came from the west and east of the city.

Metadata in relation to gender, age, community background, national identity or respondent relationship to Belfast was not provided for any of the hard copy responses that were submitted and the statistical data above reflects the responses to the online survey only.

Hard copy submissions

Sinn Fein submission (1081 copies)

Policy changes are referred to are as follows:

A. 100% agree with the removal of initial petition and allowing one resident to begin application process

B. 100% agree with proposed lowering of threshold from 67% to 15% Respondents are asked to explain their answer and all responses have a pre-prepared written response saying the previous threshold was undemocratic and not in keeping with international best practice.

C. 100% in favour of the proposal to no longer categorise non-responses as not being in favour of the erection of a street sign

   Respondents are asked to explain their answer and there is a preprepared written response stating that no other council has this provision in their policy and that this creates an undue barrier.

D. 100% agree proposal to screen each application under the proposed policy – Respondents are asked to explain their answer and are there is a prewritten response saying there was a similar question in the consultation regarding bilingual signage in leisure centres.

The following sections are numbered:

All respondents presented a preprepared statement stating that the adoption of the proposed policy would make Belfast one of the leaders in the protection of minority rights.

There are references to international treaties and a paragraph in Irish stating that bilingualism enriches day to day life and that the visibility of languages is important in their promotion.

Submission by An Dream Dearg (274 identical copies) included:

- 100% in favour of the proposed policy stating that only the following persons may apply: an occupier or occupiers of the street, an Elected Member representing the District Electoral Area where the street is located or a developer.
- 100% in favour of the proposed policy requiring 15% of the occupiers of the street to be in favour of the application for a dual language street sign. If that

threshold is reached, a report will be brought to committee to consider the application.

- 100%in favour of the proposed policy removes the presumption that you are not in favour of the application if you do not return a survey. Only those indicating that they are not in favour of the application will be deemed to be so.
- 100% not in favour of the new policy requiring an assessment of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs implications.
- 100% not in favour of the council retaining a discretion to depart from the policy. The respondents all agreed that they wanted the opportunity to give their view.

Submission from Irish language groups

As discussed above in this report the Council received submissions in Irish from Conradh na Gaeilge, Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain, Ionad Uibh Eachach, Glór na Móna and An Droichead. These each followed a similar pattern, with an introduction specific to the group explaining their background and the services they provide. There is an explanation of the proposed changes to the policy, a discussion of Section 75, issues surrounding language and good relations issues, and domestic and international agreements and their references to language. The submission then lays out the questions in the survey explaining that the groups strongly agree with the changes to the policy but are opposed to the proposal to screen each application individually. There is also commentary on the draft EQIA which discussed good relations and language issues. The submissions conclude with a range of examples of best practice from other councils and as well as guidance from Wales and Scotland. A translated example of this submission, in this instance the Conradh na Gaeilge submission, is included at Appendix 4.

5. Consultation questions

Respondents were asked to give their opinion on four of the five proposed technical changes to the policy by indicating whether they Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Neither Agreed nor Disagreed, Disagreed and Strongly Disagreed with each of the proposed

changes. Respondents were also asked to provide comments on the fifth proposed technical change and were asked also to comment on any aspect of the proposed policy that had not been addressed by the preceding questions. Respondents were also given the opportunity to make their opinions known on the Equality Impact Assessment running concurrently to this consultation and on the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

As well as indicating how strongly in favour or opposed to four of the proposed changes, respondents were given the opportunity to provide a comment or opinion on each of the proposed changes. It should be noted, however, that the comments underneath each proposed change did not always correspond to that change. Respondents would often leave a generic comment in response to the policy proposal as a whole rather than commenting on the technical point being highlighted in that question. It should also be noted that respondents were less likely to leave a comment the further they went into the survey. There are fewer comments, therefore, against the proposed changes that are outlined later in the survey.

Each question in relation to a proposed change described the current policy position and the proposed change. The rationale for presenting each proposed change and asking for feedback on each of these was to maximise the volume of feedback on the individual changes and to allow respondents to see each proposed change in comparison to the current policy position.

6. Discussion of responses to each proposed change

The following section gives a breakdown of the numerical and percentage responses in favour of and against each of the proposed changes. These are broken down across both versions of the survey and an aggregate percentage and numerical value are then given. This will be followed by a discussion of the qualitative comments raised about the proposed change.

Officers were able to assign a “sentiment value” to each comment left under a proposed change in the English language survey, that is, to mark it as being positive, mixed, neutral or negative. It should be noted at this juncture that the majority of responses to the surveys and the combined total were in favour of the changes to the policy. The majority of written responses to each change, however, were negative comments opposed to the change.

6.1 Proposed change to application method

The proposed change removes the requirement for a petition of support of one third of the occupiers of the street to accompany an application and provides that only an occupier/s of the street in question, Elected Member representing that District Electoral Area or a developer may apply.

Table 7: Responses in relation to the proposed removal of the initial petition and allowing a single occupier, elected member, occupier or developer to begin the application process

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English language version	286 (36.7%)	55 (7.1%)	9 (1.2%)	25 (3.2%)	405 (51.9%)
Irish language version	284 (97.3%)	7 (2.4%)	1 (0.3%)	0	0
TOTAL	570 (53.2%)	62(5.8%)	10(0.9%)	25(2.3%)	405(37.8%)

It can be seen that the majority of respondents to the English language version of the survey, 55.1%, were opposed to these proposed changes. The overwhelming majority of respondents to the Irish language version, 97.3% were strongly in favour of the change. The combined total showed that 59% of responses across the survey were in favour of the change with 41.1% on the whole being opposed.

6.1.1 Commentary and key themes in relation to the proposed change

There were 509 comments in relation to this change in the English language version of the online survey (68.8% of these were categorised as being negative, with 26.7% of the comments being marked as positive). Officers reviewed each comment and developed ‘tags’ to determine themes. Those not in favour of the proposed change highlighted the costs associated with the policy and often commented that the erection of second language street signs is a ‘waste of money’ or that the money would be better spent elsewhere, for example the NHS or education. Respondents also commented that the proposed change for applying for a second language sign would not be democratic since it would allow for ‘minority rule’ and that there is ‘no need’ for second language street signs because a minority of the population can read Irish but everyone can understand English.

Another issue which was mentioned repeatedly in commentary opposed to this change was that this policy or the erection of Irish language signs has the potential to alienate one section of the community and cause ‘division’ and ‘tension’ in communities and could enflame community relations. Concern was expressed that second language street signs would be akin to ‘marking territory’ and that the Irish language would be ‘weaponised’. Respondents noted that because the topic is ‘contentious’, there should be ‘community support’ for such signs before they are erected. There was concern expressed that this change in policy could lead to second language street signs being ‘imposed’ or ‘forced’ on streets where they are not wanted. Respondents commented that the proposed change to the application process ‘reduces the bar’ and could mean that divisive applications may be made.

The majority of comments relating to Members and developers being able to apply for a sign were negative and concerns were expressed that an application should not come from someone who does not live on the street in question or the area and that

with regard to Members making applications, the process would ‘politicised’. Respondents noted that this process should be ‘resident driven’.

A repeated theme that became apparent from these comments was the perception that this issue is being actively promoted by Sinn Féin for political ends and that this policy can potentially be used to have Irish language signs erected in areas where the majority would not want this. There are repeated references in the comments to Sinn Féin, republicans and the potential for elected Members to use this against the Protestant or Unionist community.

A number of comments were tagged as ‘PUL community’ and the strength of feeling in these comments was notable. Respondents commented that ‘we are British not Irish’ and that the proposed policy changes are ‘not inclusive of the Unionist population’. Respondents noted that the proposed signage is ‘divisive’, will lead to ‘marking of territory’ and will ‘alienate Unionists for a language that is barely used’.

Several respondents commented negatively on the proposed policy change of having one person apply without an accompanying petition. Comments included that this could cause ‘friction’, that the signs need more of a ‘mandate from residents’ and that this ‘reduces the bar’ which could lead to ‘confrontation’.

As stated above 26.7% of responses were marked as being positive, that is in favour of the change. These comments tended to focus on the promotion of Irish and minority languages and how the proposed policy change was in keeping with international best practice. Frequent references were made throughout the commentary that Irish is a minority language and an indigenous language to all of Ireland and therefore should be promoted. The written comments highlighted the importance of preserving the Irish language and increasing its visibility. Respondents also commented on how the Irish language is the ‘native tongue’ of society and that it is an important part of cultural heritage and tradition. Respondents also noted that the proposed change in method of application for a second language street sign would remove ‘barriers’ and ‘obstacles’ for applicants and that the requirement of the initial petition was ‘prohibitive’, ‘unnecessary’ and posed a ‘barrier’ for applications. Those in support also noted that Irish speakers should be afforded ‘equal rights’ and how inclusion in a shared society is important.

A range of comments also referenced the international agreements and guidance in relation to the promotion of Irish and that making the language more visible creates a shared space which is welcoming to all. Respondents also referenced the current policy and a number of comments around this noted that it placed an undue burden on residents and that the 66% threshold was an undue barrier to the promotion of minority languages. A number of comments also opined that the promotion of Irish or any minority language cannot be considered offensive or an infringement on the rights of others.

The Irish language version of the survey elicited overwhelmingly positive responses in relation to this proposed change although a sentiment summary analysis was not possible on the Your Say Belfast platform for this version of the survey. Respondents here again described the current policy as unnecessarily prohibitive against the promotion of minority languages and that the new proposed policy was more suited to their promotion. There were references to international standards and best practice and to the idea that the promotion of minority languages is in line with the promotion of human rights and equality.

6.2 Proposed change to the threshold for further consideration of an application

The proposed policy includes a reduced threshold for an application for a dual language street sign to be considered by committee. The proposed change would mean that 15% of returned responses being in favour of the proposed erection of the dual language sign would be sufficient for this to be sent to committee for consideration.

Table 8: Responses to the proposed change to the policy to lower the threshold for an application to be considered to 15%

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
English language version	300 (38.5%)	45 (5.8%)	6 (0.8%)	18 (2.3%)	410 (52.6%)
Irish language version	287 (98.3%)	5 (1.7%)	0	0	0
TOTAL	587(58.2%)	5(0.5%)	6(0.6%)	0	410(40.7.%)

6.2.1 Commentary and key themes in relation to this proposed change

Overall, there was a majority in favour of the proposed change across the survey. The commentary beneath each version of the survey however, did show considerable strength of feeling both for and against the proposed change. Again it should be noted that the majority of written comments in relation to this report were opposed to the change, with 68.7% of the responses in the English language version being tagged as negative in the sentiment summary function.

Within the negative commentary there was a strong emphasis on the perception that this proposed change allows the minority to make a decision for the majority of a street. A range of respondents felt that having this lower threshold allowed for “minority rule” and that this had the potential to damage community relations and could become a factor in intimidation. Respondents commented frequently that the reduced threshold of 15% was ‘too low’ and would ‘overrule’ or ‘dictate to’ the 85% ‘majority’ of occupiers who were not supportive of a second language street sign. This in turn would ‘impose’ or ‘force’ second language street signs and would be ‘inflammatory’, cause ‘societal problems’, ‘tension’ and ‘division’, lead to ‘resentment’ and ‘damage community relations’. Comments were made that this would make the Irish language a ‘political weapon’. Respondents also noted that a minority should

not be allowed to ‘drive change’ and that 15% is not ‘democratic’ and does not represent a ‘consensus’, especially given the ‘contentious’ nature of the issue. Respondents offered suggestions of alternative thresholds, which included keeping the status quo of 67% and having a simple majority of over 50%. The cost of second language street signs was commented on in a negative manner with respondents stating that they are a ‘waste of money’ and that ‘ratepayer’ money should be spent ‘more wisely’ on ‘NHS’ ‘serious deprivation and social issues’.

In the positive comments there were frequent references to support for ‘minority rights’ and the Irish language in particular and how the lowering of this threshold makes it easier for residents to have the language of their choice displayed in a street sign. Respondents commented that commented that ‘visibility’ of the Irish language is important. Those respondents who commented favourably on the proposed change in threshold stated that that the current threshold of two-thirds is ‘too high’ and ‘undemocratic’ and that the proposed threshold is more ‘reasonable’, ‘realistic’ and ‘suitable for a minority language’. Reference was also made to the lack of promotion of the Irish language within Northern Ireland and how this policy would go some way to redressing this. The theme of UN and international guidance around minority language issues also feature in the positive responses to this question with numerous respondents saying that the proposed change was in keeping with ‘best practice guidance’. Several responses alluded to the growth of Irish medium education in Belfast and how there are now areas of the city where there are higher proportions of Irish speakers. Respondents also commented that the reduced threshold would respect the rights and views of ‘linguistic minorities’, ‘new communities’ and other ethnic groups and is more ‘minority compliant’.

This question also elicited a number of what would be described as “pro-forma responses” or variations on pro-forma responses. These frequently referred to the UN Special Rapporteur guidelines on this issue and suggested that a lower threshold, potentially 5%, would be more acceptable and indeed make this process easier for residents.

6.3 Proposed change to clarify how responses to the survey are classified

The current policy in relation to the erection of dual language street signs contains a provision in which the number of non-responses to the survey of occupiers on a street are deemed as being not in favour of the proposed sign. The proposed policy will not count these as being either in favour of or against the erection of a street sign. The number of non-responses will be listed along with the votes in favour and against the erection of a sign and this information will be passed to committee.

Table 9: Responses to the proposal to not count non-responses to the street survey as being opposed to the erection of a dual language sign

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
English language version	321 (41.5%)	48 (6.2%)	31 (4%)	38 (4.9%)	335 (43.3%)
Irish language version	290 (99.3%)	1 (0.3%)	1 (0.3%)	0	0
TOTAL	611 (57.4)	49(4.6%)	32(3%)	38(3.6%)	335(31.4%)

Again it can be seen that overall across the survey that the majority of respondents are in favour of this proposed change. Opinion was divided almost equally in the English language version, with 47.7% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the change, and 48.2% being opposed. Responses to the Irish language version of the survey being overwhelmingly in favour of this.

6.3.1 Commentary and key themes in relation to this proposed change

Again a similar trend is borne out in relation to this proposed change as is seen with the other changes with 60.4% of written responses being marked as negative and opposed to the change with 31.4% of responses being positive. It can be seen again therefore, that despite the majority of responses to the survey being in favour of the proposed change there is still considerable strength of feeling in opposition to it.

Many of the comments opposed to this change focused on the perception that this change allows for “minority rule”, and that a clear majority of respondents should be required to effect any change. Comments frequently focused on the potentially deleterious effect this would have on good relations. There was also a common misconception in relation to this proposed change with a range of comments indicating that the respondent felt that a non-response would now be counted as being in favour of the erection of a sign, which was considered to be ‘absurd’, ‘unjust’ and ‘unfair’. Those not in favour noted that the onus should be on the people wanting the street sign to respond to the survey and that the current policy should remain. Respondents expressed concern that those who disagreed could be ‘identified’ or ‘feel pressure’ to respond, which creates the potential for ‘hate crime’ ‘retaliation’ or that this will ‘stir up trouble’. Comments were made to the effect that the current policy or ‘status quo’ should remain. A handful of comments presupposed that the street survey would be online and expressed concern about accessing it, stating that not everyone has the ‘technology’ or is ‘computer literate’ to be able to respond. The majority of comments tagged as ‘opposed’ did not respond directly to this technical point but rather commented on other aspects of the policy or negatively generally.

The responses in favour of the proposed change again centred around a number of key themes and concepts. The most frequent of these was that the previous policy assumed that a non-response was not in favour and that this was not good practice and not reflective of practice in any other referendum or plebiscite. Again there was another pro-forma response stating that no other council has a provision like this in their policy for erecting dual language street or road signs. Those in favour noted that it makes sense not to ‘presume’ an answer from a non-response, that ‘no opinion can be derived’ and that an ‘explicit confirmation’ should be given. Respondents also commented that it’s ‘fair’ and ‘logical’ that occupiers must ‘actively engage’ to express an opinion. Further comments stated that only responses that are returned should be considered. Comments in relation to this in the Irish language version of the survey were overwhelmingly in favour of the proposed change with comments being of a similar nature.

6.4 Proposal to assess each application for equality, good relations and rural needs implications

The proposed policy will require an assessment of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality good relations or rural needs implications. This assessment will be based on local information and data and that if deemed necessary, a fuller equality screening or possibly an Equality Impact Assessment may be carried out on an application.

Table 10: Responses to the proposal to assess each application for equality, good relations and rural needs implications

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
English language version	262 (33.9%)	147 (19%)	135 (17.5%)	30 (3.9%)	198 (25.6%)
Irish language version	181 (62.2%)	5 (1.7%)	6 (2.1%)	5 (1.7%)	94 (32.3%)
TOTAL	443(41.7%)	152(14.3%)	141(13.3%)	35(3.3%)	292(27.4%)

6.4.1 Commentary and key themes in relation to the proposed change

It can be seen that the majority of respondents to each version of the survey are in favour of this change with a combined total of 56% of respondents being in favour. An assessment of the commentary in relation to this did, however, show that there was some opposition to this change.

50.9% of the comments left a response to this were tagged as being “negative” in the sentiment analysis. Frequently these comments do not refer to the specific change being examined in this question but are comments on the proposal to change this policy as a whole. There were references to the perception that this policy would allow for “minority rule” and that it would result in the Council “forcing” the Irish

language into areas where it was not wanted. Comments specifically in relation to this proposed change offered the opinion that a further assessment was a ‘waste of ratepayers’ money’ and that any assessment could be ‘easily manipulated’ and ‘gameable’ by one section of the community, leading to division. Concern was expressed about ‘potential malicious misapplication’ in terms of how ‘anyone can identify as whatever on a form to change results’. Respondents also commented that the process sounds ‘unnecessarily bureaucratic’ and that that it would be ‘expensive’.

A number of comments did, however, give the opinion that any equality exercise could potentially be used to stop any application for a dual language street sign. An example of this type of comment is below:

- Each resident, regardless of their street, should have the right to indicate their preference via the Council's street survey. This clause means that council can potentially override this right, and make assumptions which could lead to the dismissal of an application. I strongly recommend that this clause is removed, and if that's not possible, that it is removed from the beginning of the process, until there is a clear picture of residents views from the street survey.

It was also suggested in some comments that as the overall policy change was subject to a Section 75 equality screening and an Equality Impact Assessment that any further screening of individual applications would be ‘excessive’. There was also some commentary around the fact that seeing a minority language in a sign cannot create an inequality of opportunity and therefore there is no need for an assessment for each application. Of the 44 written comments in Irish the majority (39) of these were opposed to this proposed change on the grounds that respondents felt it unnecessary and excessive to carry out an assessment on each application.

Commentary in favour of this change suggested that the assessment would help build a clear picture of local demographics and opinion which would aid the decision-making process. Some respondents felt that this would add to the transparency of the process and help to potentially avoid division and damage to good relations. Those in favour of this proposed change commented positively on ‘further scrutiny’ and ‘detailed equality screening’ and highlighted how this was important due to the potential for ‘quite serious outcomes’ and ‘community disagreements’. Respondents

commented on the importance of the ‘entire process’ being open to more ‘scrutiny and assessment’ and on the importance of ‘fair’ and ‘balanced’ decisions. The theme of ‘community support’, ‘maintaining good relations’ and the council’s consideration of ‘local knowledge’ and ‘local opinions’ were also included in the comments in favour of this proposed change.

6.6 Comments on the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment

Comments in relation to the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment which accompanied this consultation were tagged as being 40.1% negative in the sentiment summary analysis. 56.7% of the comments were tagged as “neutral” given that many of the respondents simply answered “no” to this question. Much of the negative commentary related to the proposed policy change as a whole, not to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment with comments regarding the perception of “minority rule” and cost featuring here as well as statements in outright opposition to the proposed policy change. There were three positive comments to this question, with respondents noting that the RNIA seemed “more than competent” and one stating that the proposed policy change “should be implemented”.

6.7 Proposed change to explain the operation of the council’s residual discretion

Respondents were asked to give their opinions on the potential exercise of the Council’s residual discretion in relation to this policy. Belfast City Council has always had residual discretion in relation to this policy which allows for the relevant committee, with proper advice, to take a decision which may depart from the parameters of the policy. The proposed policy sets out the factor which may be considered in any instance where the Council opts to use its residual discretion. These include but are not limited to:

- The views of the occupiers of the street
- The results of the assessment of each application to identify equality, good relations and rural needs implications
- Local context of the application
- Any other relevant council policies
- All material considerations relating to the application

Respondents were asked to give their opinions on these factors. 49.6% of the commentary in relation to this was negative, with 12.1% being tagged as positive and 35.3% being neutral. Many of the negative comments around this again focused on the policy as a whole, not this technical change with reference being made to cost, and the perception that this policy could lead to division. There were, however,

a number of comments in relation to how residual discretion may be applied. Some respondents felt that the residual discretion clause gave the council the power to ‘depart from’ the policy and ‘override’ the street survey on this issue and go against the wishes of residents. Further comments noted that this residual discretion should not override their ‘international obligations’ regarding language rights or the protection of minorities and concern was expressed that council discretion could go against the wishes of the residents by ‘imposing its own decisions’.

One issue that occurred repeatedly in relation to this potential change, especially in the comments on the Irish language version, was that arguments or opinions which could potentially be deemed to be sectarian should not be considered in relation to the application of residual discretion. Respondents also commented that the council is under a ‘legal obligation’ to seek the views of residents when an application is made, that residual discretion should only be used at the end of the application process and that potential applications for street signs should not be stopped before residents have had the opportunity to voice their opinion ‘as is clearly laid out in law’.

Positive comments in relation to the exercise of residual discretion welcomed the clarification as to what potential factors would be considered in relation to the residual discretion and that this added another level of accountability to the process and gave another method for residents to have their say on any application. Those in favour commented that this ‘sounds sensible’ with ‘everything taken into consideration’ and it is good that ‘further clarification’ and ‘clarity’ has been provided as to when the council can depart from the policy. Respondents in favour of this proposed change also highlighted the importance of ‘transparency’ of the council’s decision making process’ and noted that the council should ‘fully explain’ and provide ‘written disclosure’ of its decisions and rationale. Further comments noted that this would bring the council ‘into line with other progressive councils’ and see the council ‘become a leader’ in the protection of minority language rights.

Some respondents sought clarity on the factors that may be taken into consideration in the council’s residual discretion and questioned if the ‘ambiguity could be exploited’. Another theme apparent in the comments was the importance placed on the views of the occupiers of the streets in question and how these should be ‘paramount’, ‘take preference’ and be ‘given significant weighting’.

6.8 Other comments on the proposed policy

Respondents were given the opportunity to make any other comments they wished on the proposed policy. Similar themes in opposition to the policy change came to the fore in this section.

Respondents in favour of the proposed change said they felt that the new policy would bring Belfast City Council into line with international guidelines on these issues and that any policy change would promote the Irish language in a positive manner. Those who commented positively and were tagged as 'in favour' welcomed the proposed policy and highlighted the 'identity of growing Irish speaking community', the 'burgeoning and blossoming Irish Language community', the importance of 'greater visibility' for the language and how it should be 'reflected in the signage' of the city. Reference was also made to how the Irish language is 'truly independent of creed, class and identity, while creating a vital link to our shared past' and how 'inclusion and mutual respect can create conditions for an enduring peace in NI'. Twenty-one respondents provided a pro forma response which noted that this policy would see Belfast become a 'leader in the protection of minority language rights' and would 'meet its obligations under - European Charter for Regional and Minority languages (Treaty no. 148) - Framework Convention for National Minorities (Treaty no. 157)'. Three respondents submitted a comment to the effect that the EQIA documents 'clearly state that bilingual signage is a neutral action which is in line with political agreements and international covenants and charters'.

Those who commented negatively on the proposed policy noted that it is 'divisive', has the 'potential to ghettoise Belfast', will 'seriously harm good relations across this city' and has the scope to 'stir up tensions'. Respondents again referred to cost, noted that council resources are 'stretched to the limit' and that in these 'austere times' the money would be better spent elsewhere.

Appendix 1: Themes Emerging from Online Consultation Comments

Respondents tended to either agree or disagree with the consultation questions and there were very few neutral comments. Therefore, officers tagged most of the comments as being either ‘in favour’ or ‘opposed’ to the proposed policy changes.

These comments were further analysed by officers, who identified themes.

Those not in favour of proposed changes

The themes emerging from those not in favour included: cost, division, the need for majority support, ‘no need’ for dual language street signs and comments related to Elected Member or developer input.

The following is an example of comments by theme of those who were not in favour of the proposed changes. These have been copied directly from the consultation:

Cost

- Absolutely NO need for a language other than that which is the language of the country and understood by everyone. Complete waste of taxpayers money which should be used for the NHS which benefits everyone.
- Glad to hear Belfast City Council has surplus money for street signs. Please direct it to healthcare, policing, schools. When these areas are well funded then let us look at street signs.
- Removing the requirement for a petition will only increase the number of applications, causing increased costs for the council
- Constantly hearing about no money for health/education etc. The last thing we need is money wasted on dual language signs. Fed up with Irish language being weaponised by Sinn Fein.
- No Irish street signs as the majority in NI do not speak of understand the language. Therefore to put signs up would be a major waste of public funds.
- More important things to be spending rate money on
- Shouldn’t have dual language signs complete waste of money
- waste of ratepayers money at a time when people are struggling to heat their homes

- An absolute waste of public money, everyone in Northern Ireland can read English, no need to change street signs into irish as only a selected few will be able to read them
- Waste of money with so much going on least of Belfast worries better bus service more housing etc

Division

- There must be clear evidence that at least one third of the street agree before it is proposed potentially causing conflict amongst neighbours.
- Dual language street signs are politically divisive. Residents may be afraid to object to the erection of such for fear of being targeted by the more outspoken who esteem themselves to be politically correct and inclusive.
- It will cause tension and hostility in the protestant community
- This policy is incredibly divisive that will pit mixed residents in mixed residential areas against one another.
- This will lead to marking of territory and will alienate Unionists for a language that is barely used. This is purely sectarian.
- Unessecary and will only continue to divide communities and create tensions where such tensions don't exist
- This will lead to marking out a territory which will cause more conflict within the area. Most people don't want this to happen and is only being pushed in to cause more division.
- This signage you are proposing is too divisive. In an already divided city. An does not take into consideration what people from the PUL Community want.
- Any application should have the support of a sizeable portion of the community to avoid unnecessary community tension.
- This proposed policy is a recipe for conflict and division
- This idea is open to abuse. Unless the majority of a street are in favour, ie beyond current policy, there is a danger here that those outside an area can exert influence to drive a change that a silent majority may then feel I'll at ease to oppose. It is open to 'activist' manipulation and bullying coercion. It will also marking of territory akin to painting kerbs.
- There is no need to waste rate payers money on duel signage we are educated in the English language all Government and business is conducted

in English duel signage will benefit no one, No one is discriminated against this just serves to reinforce division in this land If one day there is a poll which favours an all Ireland then that would be the time to change street signage as a rate payer and citizen of Belfast i do not give my consent to change the status quo.

- An extremely divisive idea in already heightened sectarian times. Certain parts of a belfast already have the dual signage, we don't need it everywhere. The needs of the many who speak and use English, should out way the needs of the few who use Irish & already have it in their area.

Majority Support

- Should be a clear majority in the street or location in favor, otherwise this will prove divisive in an already divided city
- All occupants at least 90% in the street must agree before changes can be made to street signs with English as the Universal language there is really no need to add any other language... waste of money at this time NHS,EDUCATION ETC more important issues
- Proposed dual signage has to also show support within an area where they are to be erected. Imposing a language in an area without local support would be using the language as a cultural weapon rather than promoting the lanuage as a shared language
- A majority of residents should be in favour otherwise it should not be forced onto them.
- The current policy allows for a demonstrable level of support for change. The proposed policy is open to abuse by those keen to cause societal trouble or make political gain from their position
- To have a Irish street sign there must be a majority of residents voting for it otherwise it will be in my view anti democratic to have only %15 of people who are able to over rule %85 that is blatant discrimination.
- 15% is not a representative percentage in any democratic society. Any council who forced a minority decision sgainst 85% of street residents would end up in civil action and cause community tensions.
- I have no problem with a street sign being proposed, but only if the majority of residents in that Street were to apply for it.

No Need

- Absolutely NO need for a language other than that which is the language of the country and understood by everyone. Complete waste of taxpayers money which should be used for the NHS which benefits everyone.
- There is no need for this waste of money. The vast majority of people do not speak or read Irish.
- There is no need. The Irish speaking numbers are so tiny! Just a waste of money!
- We don't need dual language signs the majority of people speak English and only a very small minority speak Gaelic. How you apply does not need to be changed to make it unfair for those who do not agree with dual language signs.
- An absolute waste of public money, everyone in Northern Ireland can read English, no need to change street signs into irish as only a selected few will be able to read them

Elected Member and Developer Input

- Better to leave it up to the people that live there, it is their Street.
- Elected representatives should be excluded from ability to nominate streets, as SFIRA are absolutely biased in this matter and are using Irish language as a weapon of division in our city"
- Should be resident driven
- Not in favour of elected member proposing change.
- An elected representative or a developer may not hold the same views/may be in disagreement with the residents living in an area and therefore I believe the current policy is the fairest.
- Nobody but the occupiers HOME OWNERS should have the right to apply for dual language not someone who may live 20 miles away current policy to stay
- Disagree with removing the requirement for 1/3 of residents of the street to support the application. Would also say that only those living on the street should be allowed to propose. NOT a politician... this shouldn't be a political process, it should be resident driven.

- It should be residents of the street who apply, not an elected member of the DEA who may not live in the street.
- Elected officials should not have a vote unless an occupier of the street
- The street should agree before making the application. It is not up to an Elected Rep to make an application before consulting the residents.
- To gain dual signage it should have a considerable amount of support from people in that street as previously was the case and not be able to be applied for from people who do not live in that specific area.
- For additional signage, plus the costs, upkeep and maintenance of the same should have the majority of the residents of the street in favour before being considered. The proposed policy could allow someone from outside the area with zero support on the street in question propose changes that everyone on that street is opposed to.
- My elected representative does not have the same political views as the residents off my street for one. I'm sure that is the case over other areas in Belfast
- It is not right to remove the need for a petition of support from residents of the street. I also feel that applicants should be residents, not politicians or developers who, more than likely, do not live in the area.
- So an elected rep or a tiny minority can dictate a bilingual policy. The passing dogs can mark the lamp posts. I applaud you for a policy designed to sow seeds of discord. It will undoubtedly succeed
- Dual language street signs are a contentious issue, therefore it is essential that the majority of occupiers of the street actively support the proposal for change. I believe that requiring one third of occupiers to support the application is the right proportion to get the conversation started in the street. It demonstrates that a significant proportion of the occupiers want change which will be more meaningful and engaging for the rest of the occupiers than a proposal from an individual. The proposal for change should originate from a substantial proportion of the occupiers (one third is a good proportion), not anyone else, elected or otherwise.

- This means others from outside the area can submit changes for residents who don't want a sign with a language most of the population don't understand. This creates tension and is a waste of money.
- An elected representative or a developer may not hold the same views/may be in disagreement with the residents living in an area and therefore I believe the current policy is the fairest.
- It is not right to remove the need for a petition of support from residents of the street. I also feel that applicants should be residents, not politicians or developers who, more than likely, do not live in the area.
- The proposed policy takes away the consent of those living on the street. A developer can impose his ideas regardless of the views of the occupants.

Those in favour of proposed changes

The themes emerging from those in favour of the proposed changes included: references to culture, heritage and tradition; equality and inclusion; removal of barriers; visibility of the Irish language and references to best practice under the UN Special Rapporteur guidelines and other applicable frameworks and law.

The following is an example of comments by theme of those who were in favour of the proposed changes. These have been copied directly from the consultation:

Culture, heritage and tradition,

- I believe it is important to retain Irish language in Ireland to support culture and tradition.
- I feel the Irish language is an important part of everyone's history and culture. In 2021 it is time that this was recognised. Therefore, it should be easier for residents in the city to have their culture and heritage acknowledged where they live.
- We live in a society where almost 11% of the population speak the native tongue street signage should reflect this.
- Irish is the native language of the country and is part of our culture. It should be made easy for our streets to have the Irish street signs added.

- As part of the island of Ireland we should be embracing our cultural heritage and help make the Irish language more accessible and part of every day life in the north of Ireland
- The protection and promotion of the Irish language is of National importance to our heritage. Very positive policy movement. I would love to see all signs in dual language as policy (thought recognise this is an iterative process).

Equality and inclusion

- Dual signage is important for equality.
- I live in a bilingual community and I believe that the Irish language and speakers should be afforded equal rights
- We want a city of equals, therefore the Irish language must have parity of esteem
- A shared space should be inclusive of all, therefore if a person living in the area speaks a different language it should be celebrated and accepted
- The Irish language has to be seen and its something to be proud of. The language belongs to us all and enriches us all.
- An inclusive society. My child goes to an Irish school and speaks the Irish language. All children should be able to see an all inclusive island that allows all languages to be spoken, promoted and respected. That be ulster scots, gaelige, english, chinese and so forth

Removal of barriers

- The current policy poses a substantial barrier for most streets, preventing the views of residents being heard. The new policy allows for a simpler and more straightforward process that is more responsive to the desires of residents.
- This removes the obstacle for the resident who wants a bilingual street sign.
- The current requirements are unfair and disadvantage minorities
- I support the proposal to make it an easier process for the application to go ahead, removing barriers.
- I feel the requirement for a petition showing the support of not less than one third of the occupiers of the street in question was prohibitive and unnecessary, therefore, I strongly agree and support the new proposal.

- It makes the process less complicated and in the case of someone who lives in a house with 5 more Gaeilgeoirí, is much more minority compliant. This initial step placed a barrier before the process even begun.
- I feel it is important that this process is facilitative rather than prohibitive to enable progress on dual language signage.

Visibility of the Irish language

- I strongly agree as I believe this is a way to preserve the Irish language Strongly agree that visual language identity should be more easily achieved in line the rapidly growing Irish speaking community in the city of Belfast.
- Improved visibility of the Irish language is very important
- Visibility in line with international standards should be made as easy as possible

Best practice / UN guidelines

- I believe that the previous method through which bilingual signage could be applied for wasn't based upon best-practice nor was it in keeping with International and European Agreements in relation to minority languages. Therefore, I would like to see the method changed to that which is being proposed.
- I strongly support this change because it removes the onerous requirement of having to survey everyone on a street. It also makes it easier to have dual signage adopted and to meet minority language requirements.
- The EQIA documents which are published alongside this consultation clearly state that bilingual signage is a neutral action, an action which is in line with political agreements and with international covenants and charters, which have been ratified by the British Government and recommended by the Department for Communities

- Belfast is the second biggest city on the Island of Ireland and has fast growing Irish speaking community. Irish language legislation was agreed in New Decade New Approach Agreement and BCC

Appendix 2: Submission from An Dream Dearg

Belfast Citv Council's street signage policv Public consultation

Name:

Date of Birth:

Postcode:

Currently, if you wish to erect a bilingual street sign in your street, you must go door-to-door and gather names from 33% of residents in the street to start the process. The new policy recommends that this clause is removed, and the process can be initiated by you, an individual resident. This is much more straight forward.

I agree with the proposed change

Under current council policy, the Council will conduct a street survey to collect the views of residents regarding the erection of a bilingual street sign. This survey must gain support from 67% of residents in the street. The updated policy recommends a more minority-compliant threshold of support of 15% of residents.

I agree with the proposed change

In Belfast City Council's current street signage policy, if a resident doesn't respond to the street survey, the council regards them as being opposed to the application, The new policy recommends removing this and will base the outcome of the application solely on the responses which they receive.

I agree with the proposed change

In the proposed new policy, the Council will scrutinise each individual application that they receive. They can only accept 6 applications per month, and this would increase the time and money to be spent on each application.

I disagree with the proposed change

The council can use their discretion to end an application before it even reaches the stage of the street survey for a number of reasons. This shouldn't be used until residents have an opportunity to indicate their views, and no weight should be given to arguments which are rooted in blatant sectarianism

I want residents to have a chance to give their views

Signature Date:

Go raibh mile maith agat!

AN DREAM
DEARG

Polasaí sráidainmneacha Chomhairle Chathair Bhéal Feirste Comhairliúchán poiblí

Ainm: _____

Dáta Breithe:

_____

Cód Poist:

_____

Faoi láthair, más maith leat comhartha sráide dátheangach i do shráid, is gá duit dul doras go doras ar an tsráid agus ainmneacha a bhailiá 33% den tstáid chun tús a Chur leis an iarratas. Moltar sa pholasaí úr an clásal seo amach agus thig leatsa scríobh chuig an Chomhairle agus tús a chur leis an phróiseas tú féin. Tá seo i bhfad níos fusa dúinn!

Aontaím leis an athrú molta

Ag an bhomaite, déanfaidh an Chomhairle suirbhé sráide chun fáil amach cé atá i bhfabhar an chomartha. Is gá don tsuirbhé tacaíocht a fháil 67% de chónaitheoirí sa tsráid. Moltar sa pholasaí úr tairseach tacaíochta níos forásaí de 15% ó na cónaitheoirí.

Aontaím leis an athrú molta

Sa pholasaí reatha, muna dtugann duine freagra ar an tsuirbhé, glacann an Chomhairle leis go bhfuil siad in éadan an iarratais! Moltar sa pholasaí úr an gné seo a bhaint agus bunófar an cinneadh ar na freagraí a bhailítear amháin.

Aontaím leis an athrú molta

Sa pholasaí úr, déanfaidh an Chomhairle grinnscrúdú ar gach aon iarratas a fhaigheann siad. Ni féidir leo glacadh ach le 6 hiarratas sa mhí agus chuirfeadh seo go mór leis an mhéid ama/airgid atá i gceist le gach iarratas,

Easaontaím leis an athrú molta

Is féidir leis an Chomhairle deireadh a chur leis an iarratas fiú sula mbaineann sé an suirbhé sráide amach ar chúiseanna éagsúla. Níor mhaith go ndéanann siad seo sula mbíonn an deis ag cónaitheoirí a mbarúlacha a chur in iúl, agus níor mhaith go dtugtar aon mheachán d'argóintí a bhfuil bunús seicteach leo.

Ba mhaith liom go mbíonn an deis ag cónaitheoiri a mbarúlacha a chur in iúl

Signature :Date:

_____ _____

Go raibh mile maith agat!

Appendix 3: Sinn Féin submission example

Proposed Dual Language Street Signs Policy

Belfast City Council is currently undertaking a review of the Dual Language Street Signs Policy. We are seeking your views and feedback by participating in the survey below. You do not have to sign in or register on our Your Say Belfast platform to take part, however if you are a registered user, you must sign out of Your Say Belfast account so that your response is anonymous. Please be aware, that if you are signed into Your Say Belfast, your email and site registration details can be linked to this survey.

Proposed changes to the policy

A. Proposed change to the method for applying for a dual language street sign

Current policy:

The current policy requires an application to be submitted with a petition showing the support of not less than one third of the occupiers of the street in question.

Proposed policy:

The proposed policy states that only the following persons may apply: an occupier or occupiers of the street, an Elected Member representing the District Electoral Area where the street is located or a developer.

The proposed policy removes the requirement that an application must be submitted with a petition showing the support of not less than one third of the occupiers of the street in question.

1 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? I Strongly agree
2 Please explain your answer, or if you would like to propose an alternative approach, please tell us here: Please add your comment here...

"I believe that the previous method through which bilingual signage could be applied for wasn't based upon bestpractice nor was it in keeping with International and European Agreements in relation to minority languages. Therefore, I would like to see the method changed to that which is being proposed."

B. Proposed change to the threshold for further consideration of the application

Current policy:

The current policy requires two thirds (67%) of the occupiers of the street to be in favour of the application for a dual language street sign. If that threshold is reached, a report is brought to committee to recommend approval of the application.

Proposed policy:

The proposed policy requires 15% of the occupiers of the street to be jn favour of the application for a dual language street sign. If that threshold is reached, a report will be brought to committee to consider the application.

The threshold of 15% was adopted by the council after consideration of a number of factors, including UN Special Rapporteur guidelines, which recommend an approach that allows bilingual or trilingual signs where between 5 - 20 % of the local population speak the regional or minority language: OHCHR I Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities

It is important to note that the council has always had and will continue to have residual discretion to erect or not erect a dual language street sign based on various factors including the results of the survey of the street.

Please see the FAQs section for an explanation of residual discretion and background as to why this change in threshold is being proposed.

3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? I Strongly agree

4 Please explain your answer, or if you would like to propose an alternative approach, please tell us here: Please add your comment here...

"The previous threshold was in itself undemocratic. In 2017, United Nations Special Rapporteur on minority issues published Language Rights of Linguistic Minorities: A Practical Guide for Implementation (2017). In relation to the threshold of multilingual signage, the UN proposed a threshold of between 5-20% as a best practice estimate for the inclusion of minority languages, The proposed policy clearly sets out a 15% threshold and therefore is in keeping with the UN's recommendations. The Framework Convention for National Minorities also commits Britain to endeavour "to display traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications intended for the public also in the minority language" in areas where there are speakers of minority languages and when taking into account the specific conditions of the language (Article11(3)). I believe that the 67% threshold is too high and therefore in breach of this article."

C. Proposed change to clarify how responses to the survey are classified

Current policy:

In the current policy, if you do not respond to the survey, you are deemed not to be in favour of the application.

In practice, the committee receives a breakdown of all responses (and non-responses) to the survey for consideration.

Proposed policy:

The proposed policy removes the presumption that you are not in favour of the application if you do not return a survey, Only those indicating that they are not in favour of the application will be deemed to be so.

The committee will continue to receive a breakdown of all responses (and non-responses) to the survey for consideration.

5 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? I Strongly agree

6 Please explain your answer, or if you would like to propose an alternative approach, please tell us here: Please add your comment here...

"Existing policies within councils across the north make no mention of the current Belfast policy in relation to the acceptance of a non-response as a vote against the erection of bilingual signage. Newry, Mounre and Down and Mid-Ulster councils employ some of the most progressive policies on bilingual signage in this region and their polices make no reference to this clause. I believe this is an undue barrier that has been placed before the erection of bilingual signage and would be in favour of its removal in the proposed policy".

D. Proposed change to assess each application for equality, good relations and rural needs implications

Current policy:

The current policy process does not require scrutiny of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs implications.

Proposed policy:

The new policy process will require an assessment of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs implications. This assessment will rely on the information submitted on the application form, local data and local knowledge as well as the survey results. This may lead to a more detailed assessment if necessary (a screening or an Equality Impact Assessment), Please see the FAQs for further explanation of this process.

7 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? I Strongly agree

8 Do you have any comments about this change in policy to assess each application? Please add your comment here...

"I am in favour of the proposed change. The previous consultation on bilingual signage in Leisure Centres featured a similar question. "

E. Proposed change to explain the operation of the council's residual discretion

Current policy:

The council has always retained a discretion to depart from the policy.

Proposed policy:

The proposed policy provides further clarification on the factors that may be considered when the council exercises that discretion:

- the views of the occupiers of the street;

- the resuIts of the assessment of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs implications;
- consideration of the local context of the application; - any other relevant council policies or strategies related to the application; and - all material considerations relating to the application.

9 If you have any comments on the factors that may be taken into account, please tell us here: Please add your comment here... I have nothing to Add

10 If you would like to comment on any aspect of the proposed policy that has not been addressed by the preceding questions, please respond here: Please add your comment here...

"This new policy would see Belfast City Council become a leader in the protection of minority language rights and an example to other councils which have weak or developing bilingual signage policies. This new proposed policy would also see Belfast City Council meet its obligations under - European Charter for Regional and Minority languages (Treaty no. 148)

- Framework Convention for National Minorities (Treaty no. 157)

Belfast has a burgeoning and blossoming Irish Language community and this policy, which will heighten and increase Irish Language visibility, will ensure that our council is one of the driving factors in that.

Cuireann an détheangachas go mor le hachan gné den tsaoil. Dar leis an Chairt Eorpach do mhionteangacha, is ionann féicealacht na teanga agus i a chur chun cinn. B'amhlaidh ann le comharthaiocht dhátheangach i mBéal Feirste."

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) and Rural Needs Impact Assessment

11 Do you have any comments on the draft EQIA? Please add your comment here... I have nothing to Add

12 Do you have any comments on the draft Rural Needs Impact Assessment? Please add your comment here... NO

13 Are you aware of any other equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs issues that should be taken into account in relation to the proposed changes to the policy? No

Name DEA:

Appendix 4: Example of submission submitted by Irish language groups

Belfast City Council Street Names Consultation

Draft Submission – Conradh na Gaeilge

This submission relates to the current Belfast City Council consultation on the proposed changes to the street names policy. Belfast City Council is asked to accept this document in its entirety as an official submission.

Conradh na Gaeilge

Conradh na Gaeilge is the democratic forum of the Irish language community and the

an organisation for the language throughout Ireland and around the world. The main aim of the organisation is to re-establish Irish as a normal language of Ireland.

Since its establishment on 31 July 1893 the members of Conradh na Gaeilge have been actively promoting the Irish in all aspects of life in the country, from legal and educational matters to the development of media and Irish language communications and services.

Conradh na Gaeilge has been selected by Foras na Gaeilge, the all-island body representing both Governments North and South to promote the Irish language, as one of the six lead organisations they have funded to develop the Irish language on the island of Ireland. Primarily, Conradh na Gaeilge has been selected to address language protection, representation and awareness raising for the Irish language.

Conradh na Gaeilge has 180 branches and many individual members, and all members of Conradh na Gaeilge work tirelessly to promote the use of Irish in its own areas. Further information on the work of Conradh na Gaeilge is available at www.cnag.ie

Conradh na Gaeilge welcomes the update of Belfast City Council 's street names policy which is currently out for consultation. As has been set out in international standards and guidelines, a particular emphasis is placed on the importance of visibility, especially in the case of minority languages. It has been identified that the visibility of the language has a positive impact not only on the language community itself, but on the community as a whole; Comprehensive signage policies help to normalise the language and inform the language community that they are welcome to use their language. In addition, international research shows that tolerance increases, and that acceptance is furthered due to the frequency with which these minority languages are seen. Particular emphasis is also placed on the traditional use of the original version of placenames; It is estimated that 95 +% of placenames in the north come from the Irish language and this should be celebrated and promoted through a comprehensive and rights-based signage policy.

Despite all this, Belfast City Council 's current policy is extremely limited; in a compliance framework put together by Conradh na Gaeilge and CAJ in 2019, which is based on the duties of the Councils concerning the Irish language, the Council's street names policy came under criticism. It was recognised that there were areas within this policy which are counter to international recommendations and directives and place additional obstacles in the way of those residents who wish to erect a bilingual street sign. We therefore demand:

- That the 33% of residents to be collected in order to begin the process be removed. Demand for the bilingual street sign is assessed through the street survey, so this step is redundant and places additional, unnecessary responsibilities on the resident who has requested the signage.

- The preliminary assessment should removed when applying for a bilingual street sign. All residents should have the democratic right to comment on the bilingual street sign and this step has the potential to infringe on that right by terminating the process before the street survey is completed. In addition, it is possible at this stage that weight be given to arguments. Councils should recognise this and put a stop to such arguments. Language belongs to everyone, regardless of location, demographic, or history of the area and this step is contrary to that.

- The support threshold should be reduced from 66% to 15%. While we welcome the reduction, we believe that the Council could be even more progressive; if COMEX, Council of Europe experts recommend between 5-

20%, the Council should work towards the most progressive part of that scale (5%).

- Only responses collected by the deadline stated in the street survey are considered. A resident's failure to respond to the street survey should not be considered as an objection. This was an excessive, unreasonable and unfounded aspect of the old policy.

- Not all applications received by the Council under the policy are scrutinised. EQIA will be carried out on the policy itself, so it is not necessary to do so with every application made under the policy. This is excessive and would add significantly to the amount of time and expense involved in each application, which is already restricted by the Council. This step has the potential to significantly delay all applications.

Context

Equality and Section 75

Given that the majority of Irish language users are, according to statistics, young people or those of Catholic or nationalist background, it is likely that any provision for the Irish language will have a clear and positive impact in terms of equality of opportunity on these groups. This policy may have a positive impact on equality of opportunity for Protestants, unionists, the elderly and ethnic minorities as these are groups that are unlikely to have had other opportunities to engage with the Irish language. (Census 2011). Provision for the Irish language in politically neutral environments, such as streets throughout the city, will increase this understanding.

An 'adverse effect' on equality of opportunity is something that is immediately or ultimately has an impact on a group or groups of people. To date, a policy that facilitates Irish language signage, which is in line with the recommendations of the ECRML, has never been shown to have an adverse effect on equality of opportunity.

Disputes surrounding the Irish language are often rooted in sectarianism, and this goes against Section 75 and other equality legislation. However, this is rarely mentioned in the equality assessments of Irish language policies.

Good Relations

There have been many references to Belfast City Council's obligations concerning good relations within this policy. It is worth noting that the Equality Commission has updated its definition of 'good relations', which now states:

"Promoting good relations between different groups in society is about fostering mutual respect, understanding and integration."

The Irish language faces many obstacles as well as discrimination and intolerance. As a leading public institution, Belfast City Council should, in line with its own language policy, embark on a program that addresses discrimination and intolerance, which encompasses the provision of bilingual signage which, in turn, enhances visibility and normalisation. of Irish.

While we recognise that the issue of the Irish language has been mentioned in a number of political controversies over the use and promotion of the language, this new definition ensures that 'good relations' should not be used as a veto to anything involving political controversy. The origins of the opposition should be clear, and local authorities, including Belfast City Council, should not support a challenge based simply on sectarianism. This would be contrary to the provision of good relations and equality.

The oversight body for The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has stated that it is concerned about the way in which good relations have been misread in a way that restricts the protection of the Irish language. In 2011, their Third Opinion on the United Kingdom stated:

> *"The Advisory Committee was disconcerted to hear that some representatives of the authorities consider that promoting the use of the Irish language is discriminating against persons belonging to the majority population. Such statements are not in line with the principles of the Framework Convention… "*

The Committee reiterates that the exercise of the rights of minorities protected under the Framework Convention is not "discrimination against others."

The Committee also stated that,

> *"It is regrettable that measures to promote the visibility and use of this language have*
>
> *often been opposed with the justification that they constitute a discrimination against other groups of the population." (para 21).*

The contracting body dealt directly with the use of the 'good relations' obligation to avoid positive action towards the Irish language. He specifically mentioned bilingual signs, in view of the specific cultural heritage obligations under the Framework Convention to promote placenames in their original language. In 2011, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for National Minorities stated:

"Advisory Committee has been informed that, in some instances, the need for keeping good relations has been used as justification for not implementing provisions in favour of persons belonging to minorities, such as the erection of bilingual signs...

Additionally, it finds it problematic that the official policy is to limit the erection

of such signs to certain areas where the issue would not raise controversies. The Advisory Committee is concerned that this approach is not in line with the spirit of the Framework Convention... the aim of which is to value the use of minority

languages … with a view to promoting more tolerance and intercultural dialogue in society."

International Standards and Signage

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (the Charter) is an international convention aimed at protecting and promoting regional and minority languages as an endangered aspect of Europe's cultural heritage. For this reason, in addition to a non-discriminatory article on the use of these languages, there is provision for measures that actively support them.

The United Kingdom (UK) ratified the Charter in March 2001 and recognised obligations to protect and promote the Irish language, which has Part III status. Thirty-six articles on the Charter have been selected by the UK Government to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that the Irish language is used in education and the media and to allow its use in judicial and administrative contexts, in economic and social life and in cultural activities.

The ECRML calls for the promotion of the Irish language through greater visibility in public places. Research has shown that increased visibility helps to normalise minority language, which in turn increases tolerance and understanding of that language. The use of bilingual signage provides a simple and natural way of facilitating access to the Irish language in a way that highlights a shared culture and history. Bilingual signage should, therefore, be available at a local level in areas where there is a clear demand; instead, applications are hampered by unreasonable steps contained within the actual process, as reflected in Belfast City Council's old policy.

Reports made by contracting bodies show that the obligations to promote and protect the development of the Irish language are not being met in accordance with international obligations - many of which have been referred to by Belfast City Council in the equality screening report of the consultation. Obligations in relation to the protection of the Irish language are enshrined in a number of different treaties made since the 1990s. These include: The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Recommendations made within confirm support for an Irish Language Act and state in particular that any protection legislation for the Irish language must include bilingual signage.

Good Friday Agreement (1998)

The Good Friday Agreement made the first ambitious commitments to the Irish language, including a promise to

● take resolute action to promote the language;

● facilitate and encourage the use of the language in speech and writing in public and private life where there is an appropriate demand;

● seek to remove, where possible, obstacles that would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language;

● make provision for liaising with the Irish language community, representing their views to public authorities and investigating complaints;

● encourage parties to secure agreement that this commitment will be sustained by a new Assembly in a way that takes account of the desires and sensitivities of the community.

According to the Council of Europe, it is a legal framework and a measure that represents a 'resolute action' for the Irish language, which is not yet in place. Without a clear law or framework that demonstrates how the Irish language should be dealt with, whether in service delivery or through signage, the promotion of the Irish language depends on political understanding, rather than legal definition. Increased visibility through bilingual street signage is an opportunity to express the Irish language in a non - political way.

The Good Friday Agreement also promised to seek to address obstacles that would harm, or constrict the development of the Irish language. Since then, instead of tackling obstacles, further barriers to the development and normalisation of the language, have been placed at local level especially regarding street signage. The original version of the placenames can encourage people to discover the linguistic origins of their area. Bilingual signage at local level should be available on demand; instead, policies for bilingual street signs rely on an unreasonable and excessive support threshold; the resident takes on additional responsibility and those who do not participate in the process are inaccurately classified.

St Andrews Agreement (2006)

In the 2006 St Andrews Agreement the commitments given in the Good Friday Agreement were built upon under Strand Three ‘Rights, Protections and Equality of Opportunity’. Under Annex B of the 2006 St Andrews Agreement, the British Government undertook to "introduce an Irish Language Act reflecting the experience of Wales and Ireland." Despite this commitment, an Irish Language Act has never

been passed, although there have been three consultation processes to date since 2006, in which the majority of respondents clearly supported statutory provision for the Irish language. In 2015, over 13,000 responses were received and 97.4% were in favour of an Irish Language Act.

Northern Ireland Act (1998)

A second commitment was made in which the Northern Ireland Executive was placed under a statutory obligation to "adopt a strategy setting out how it intends to enhance and protect the development of the Irish language." On March 10, 2016, despite that and other commitments made in the 2011 Program for Government by the Executive, the Executive voted in favour of rejecting the recommendation submitted by the Minister in the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure to adopt a strategy for the Irish language. On March 3, 2017, in a judicial review taken by Conradh na Gaeilge against the Executive, the High Court ruled that the Executive had failed to fulfil its statutory duty to implement a strategy for the Irish language.

Draft Strategy for the Enhancement and Protection of the Development of the Irish Language (DCAL) (2015)

The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) and the DCAL Minister published a draft 20-year Strategy to Enhance and Protect the Development of the Irish Language (2015-2035). This draft strategy recognises the importance of bilingual signage, and sets out the role that local Councils would play in honouring commitments under the ECRML, including a duty to,

● “facilitate the preservation and appropriate signage of Irish placenames and the naming of new housing developments in Irish” (p. 53)

Belfast City Council Language Strategy (2018)

In 2018, Belfast City Council launched a Language Strategy (2018-2023) which aimed to respect and celebrate linguistic diversity within Belfast. Five languages are specifically mentioned under this policy, including Irish. The Strategy states that the needs of the Irish language community need to be met, and that the recommendation is to do this through;

● Normalising the visibility and use of the language in general.

It is clear that the Council's current policy on street names is contrary to the above aim.

New Decade New Approach (January 2020)

The New Decade New Approach Agreement in January 2020 was the first agreement to officially recognise the Irish language in the north. As part of that agreement, a commitment was made for more provision for the Irish language. It was stated that this will be done through;

"Legislation to create a Commissioner to recognise, support, protect and enhance the development of the Irish language in Northern Ireland and to provide official recognition of the status of the Irish Language in Northern Ireland…"

It was stated within that Agreement that an Irish Language Commissioner would be appointed, and that he/she would have responsibility for drafting language standards, and distributing these standards to public authorities, according to their level of contact with the public. This is a practice in place in Wales, and experience shows that local councils are in the highest category (which means a high level of contact with the public).

Of course, street signage falls within the remit of local Councils; in the spirit of the New Era New Approach agreement, local councils should see progressive progress on street name policies. As such, Belfast City Council has the opportunity to be proactive, rather than reactive and at the forefront of its new street names policy.

Committee of Experts 5th Monitoring Report (July, 2020)

In July 2020, as part of the Committee of Experts' 5th monitoring report on the implementation by the UK Government of the European Charter for the Irish Language, 20 recommendations were published to meet all the obligations in relation to the Irish language in the Charter. One of the recommendations was to:

k. Facilitate the adoption and use, by local and regional authorities as well as public service providers, of place-names in Irish.

Recommendations

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? Strongly agree	**Question 2: Explain your answer** Residents who wish to have their street surveyed for Irish language signs should not be deterred. There was never any basis for the condition in the old policy regarding ⅓ of residents required to begin the process. I strongly agree with the proposed change.
Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? Strongly agree	**Question 4: Explain your answer** The UN has recommended that the recommended threshold be between 5-20% and I believe the threshold should be selected at the bottom of the scale (i.e. 5%). I do not understand the reasoning behind choosing 15% among 5-20% scale. If the UN has recommended between 5-20%, it is

	worth pursuing the most progressive part of the scale.
Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? Strongly agree	**Question 6: Explain your answer** The old policy was asinine and had no reasonable basis. Like local elections, only votes cast should be taken into account.
Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed change? Strongly disagree	**Question 8: Explain your answer** The policy is generally equality screened. This policy is expected to have positive implications for good relations and no other equality implications. To this end, all applications covered by this policy should not be subject to equality screening if a decision has already been made on the equality implications of the policy itself. Also, it would be excessive and unreasonable to subject each application to a separate equality screening. I strongly recommend that not all applications be scrutinised, especially by officials at the initial stage of the process before the application reaches the survey stage. I do not believe there is any basis for any decision taken to block an application to go as far as a local survey. I believe that it would be a breach of the legislation (1995) to deny residents the democratic right by cancelling applications due to ‘equality’ or other screening prior to this stage of the process. All applications should be considered in the first instance based on a breakdown of responses. It is not clear to me that local authorities have any other practice or example in which such requests could be overturned through an unclear ‘equality’ process or other indicators. To that end, this is merely a further impediment to the unfounded process, which could lead to the

	cancellation of legitimate applications at the discretion of an official. This recommendation is not in line with best practice for equality for minorities.
Question 9- Any other comments? The residual discretion of the council is left to the council or a committee of the Council at the final stage of the process only. Residual discretion of the council should not be allowed before residents have an opportunity to comment on the application as clearly set out in law. The council has a legal duty to seek the views of residents when all applications are received. The residual discretion of the council should not infringe on their international obligations regarding language rights or the protection of minorities. Any opposition to that application/language rooted in sectarianism or discrimination should be immediately ruled out.	**Question 10 – Any other comments?** The EQIA documents published with this consultation specifically state that bilingual signage is a neutral act in relation to the Irish language, an action which is in line with political agreements and international instruments and instruments ratified by the UK Government and recommended by the Department. Communal. Additional evidence from the UN, CAJ and Conradh na Gaeilge shows that increasing the visibility of local minority languages contributes significantly to the normalisation of that minority language and thereby increases tolerance, empathy and understanding of diversity and languages in general. It is strongly recommended that all international obligations regarding language rights and minority protection be fully implemented as they fall within the scope of this advice.
Question 11: Do you have any comments on the draft EIA? The main purpose of the Section 75 statutory equality duty is to better promote the ‘adverse impact’ on equality and equality alone, as evidenced by nine different characteristics. Political opposition or disputes against a particular policy should not be misunderstood as ‘adverse effects.’ Similarly, it would be contrary to the very reason for this duty in itself for arguments rooted in prejudice or intolerance (including sectarian bias) against minority languages to influence policy due to the Section 75 process. As well as this, there is no guidance on how the Council would approach such evidence. To that end, I do not think that a policy that promotes and facilitates bilingual signage under Section 75 would have any adverse effect and yet, if it did, restricting linguistic diversity would not solve the problem; the Council should take further action to combat intolerance and promote understanding.	

However, at present, the 'good relations' section of the EQIA refers to previous consultations, referring to the 'concerns' from those 'who do not support languages other than English,' and talks about putting local protections in place to deal with these concerns. The need for ‘community support’, and the reference of bilingual signs without ‘significant opposition’ would provide a veto which would be contrary to the purpose of the obligations under Section 75 itself and minority rights in general. It would also risk contributing to institutionalisation bias in policy-making. I would call for these sections of the draft EQIA and the policy itself to be reconsidered and removed from these providers to ensure that the policy and outcomes of the EQIA are consistent with the types of action that would make the good relations duties authoritative. Indeed, the Council's own equality scheme defines good relations as seeking to promote respect and 'accept diversity of all kinds' - in contrast, the purpose of the good relations measure mentioned in the draft EQIA is to embed a veto against linguistic diversity for those 'who do not support languages other than English.'

The Council's decision to scrutinise all decisions taken to erect a bilingual street sign would be a significant change for the Council from the normal implementation of the equality scheme. If this is a new approach from the Council, its implementation would have operational implications, for example, in all, or any, other building control applications. I ask why this approach has been applied to something that is primarily concerned with the Irish language, and if the Council has a similar process in place elsewhere, in which all applications are scrutinised?

I welcome the inclusion, in the draft EQIA, of material that refers to international standards, as they relate to minority rights, the ECRML and the FCNM. The references to the Charter could be changed to obligations under Section 7 and the specific reference to the promotion and use of Irish placenames in Section 10 (2) (g), as they relate directly to street signage. I would also urge the Council to outline and incorporate these responsibilities into the circumstances that the Council will consider in reaching a decision.

Question 12: Do you have any comments on the draft Rural Needs Assessment?

N / A

Question 13: Are you aware of any other issues relating to equality of opportunity, good relations or rural need that should be considered in relation to the proposed policy changes?

It is known

Question 14: Explain your answer

Reference is made to the duty of good relations in relation to this policy. It is important to note that the Equality Commission has updated its definition of good relations. They now suggest that "the promotion of good relations in society is about fostering mutual respect, understanding and integration, while tackling discrimination and intolerance." The Irish language faces many obstacles and yet, Irish speakers suffer from discrimination and intolerance. As a key public institution, Belfast City Council should adopt this policy which addresses some of this discrimination and intolerance, and which takes progressive steps towards the visibility and normalisation of the Irish language through bilingual signage. As referenced in the EQIA, the use of minority languages in signage has a positive impact on community relations and mutual respect.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 2

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.

Céard É An Scéal? 2020

46% in the north believe that bilingual signage should be erected to raise awareness of our shared heritage (only 30% opposed it) according to an independent survey conducted by Kantar in 2020.

Best practice in other councils' street name policies

Mid-Ulster

https://www.midulstercouncil.org/resident/building-control/street-naming/street-naming-and-dual-language-signage-policy

- *A valid petition or letter, signed by occupiers of the street must be made to Council to enable this matter to be considered.*
- *The Environment Committee will receive notification of submitted requests by way of valid petition as referenced at 1, above. A petition will be deemed to be valid where it is completed by a minimum of one householder on that street.*

Approval will be sought from the Environment Committee to undertake the survey.

- *Upon agreement, the Council will canvass, by post, all occupiers listed on the Electoral Register and the Pointer addressing system of that street; seeking their views on the request to erect a dual-language street nameplate. Each letter will contain survey forms for the number of occupiers registered on the Electoral Register for that property at that time.*
- *The occupiers will be advised of the date by which completed surveys must be returned. Incomplete or illegible survey returns will not be counted. Completed surveys must be returned in the self- addressed envelopes provided for that purpose. Only replies received by the specified date shall be considered.*
- *For purposes of assessment where 51 % (rounded to nearest whole number) of the occupiers that respond indicate that they are in favour of the erection of a dual language street nameplate, then this shall be presented to the Environment Committee for decision recommending that the dual language street nameplate be approved and erected. The Environment Committee having considered the request and the result of the survey may agree to permit or not permit the erection of the dual language nameplate.*

An tIúr, Múrn agus an Dún

https://www.newrymournedown.org/postal-numbering-and-street-nameplates

- *In line with the Council's Bilingualism Policy, the Council will promote the inclusion of the Irish language in street nameplates while having regard of any views on the matter expressed by occupiers of the street.*
- *A resident of any street may request in writing a dual language nameplate for that street. Any request must be submitted to the Council's Licensing Section.*
- *An elected member can submit a request for a dual language nameplate on behalf of residents in their electoral area. Elected members shall provide the name and address of the resident(s) who they are submitting the request on behalf of.*

https://www.newrymournedown.org/media/uploads/development_naming_postal_numbering_and_erection_of_nameplates_policy_and_procedures.pdf

6.4.4 *Where a dual-language street nameplate is to be erected, only the traditional*

and correct forms of the place-name shall be used.

6.4.5 *Where a simple majority of responding residents have indicated that*

they are in favour of the erection of a dual -language street nameplate, then the

proposal will be presented to the Director of the Regulatory and Technical

Services Department for consideration recommending that the dual-language

street nameplate is erected. The Director having considered the request may

agree to permit or not permit the erection of the nameplate.

***6.4.6** The local townland name shall be placed at the bottom of all new nameplates.*

Single language townland names shall be provided on single language

nameplates and dual-language townland names shall be placed on all new dual

language nameplates.

Derry and Strabane

The same approach to Belfast City Council's proposed policy changes has indeed been agreed by Councillors in Derry and Strabane City Council. In January last year, Derry and Strabane City Council Councillors voted to lower the support threshold for bilingual street signs from 66% of residents to 15%.

It is a significant step for Belfast City Council to look at the policy of Derry City Council and Strabane, as setting out a clear example of good practice, but there is still a significant difference between Derry City Council's policy and what is proposed. under Belfast City Council;

- while Derry and Strabane Council have a residual discretion, we do not see it as proposed under that Council's policy that this discretion be allowed to be exercised at the beginning of the process (ie before residents have the opportunity to comment indicated in the street survey) as proposed under Belfast City Council's new policy.
- The current policy of Derry and Strabane City Council also states that there is no limit to the number of applications that the Council can accept, which is specified in Belfast City Council's policy.

Therefore, while it is positive that Belfast City Council is looking to those councils that are adhering to best practice, all aspects of this good practice should be identified and this example followed with all aspects. of the policy.

Fear Manach agus na hÓmaí (Fermanagh and Omagh)

https://www.fermanaghomagh.com/app/uploads/2021/07/210709RevisedStreetNamingAndNumberingPolicy.pdf

> ***2.3*** *An application for the erection of a street sign in a language other than English may be made by an 'Applicant' which for purposes of this policy means:*
>
> *(a) an Occupier or Occupiers of the street for which the application is made, or*
>
> *(b) an Elected Member of Fermanagh and Omagh District Council who represents the District Electoral Area in which the street is located.*
>
> ***2.4*** *When an application is received, the Council will canvass by post all Occupiers of that street and seek their views on the request to erect a street sign in a second specified language. Replies must be returned by the date specified in the correspondence. Only those replies received from the occupiers by that date will be considered.*
>
> ***2.6*** *Where fifteen percent or more of the Occupiers of that street have indicated*
>
> *that they are in favour of the erection of a second language street sign, then such a sign may be erected, subject to the residual discretion and protections/mitigations as specified in 2.8.*

Guidance from Wales

Bilingual Cardiff 2017-2022

https://www.cardiff.gov.uk/ENG/Your-Council/Strategies-plans-and-policies/Bilingual-Cardiff/Documents/Bilingual%20Cardiff%20Strategy.pdf

"Increase the visibility of the Welsh language within the city to reflect a 'Bilingual Cardiff' through existing planning mechanisms."

- *Investigate and where appropriate identify planning mechanisms to ensure that planning applications for large developments such as chain stores, supermarkets and retail consider the need to display bilingual signage and notices.*
- *Investigate and where appropriate identify planning mechanisms to ensure that planning applications for new housing developments consider the need to adopt Welsh or bilingual names, displaying bilingual signage and notices.*

Guidance from Scotland

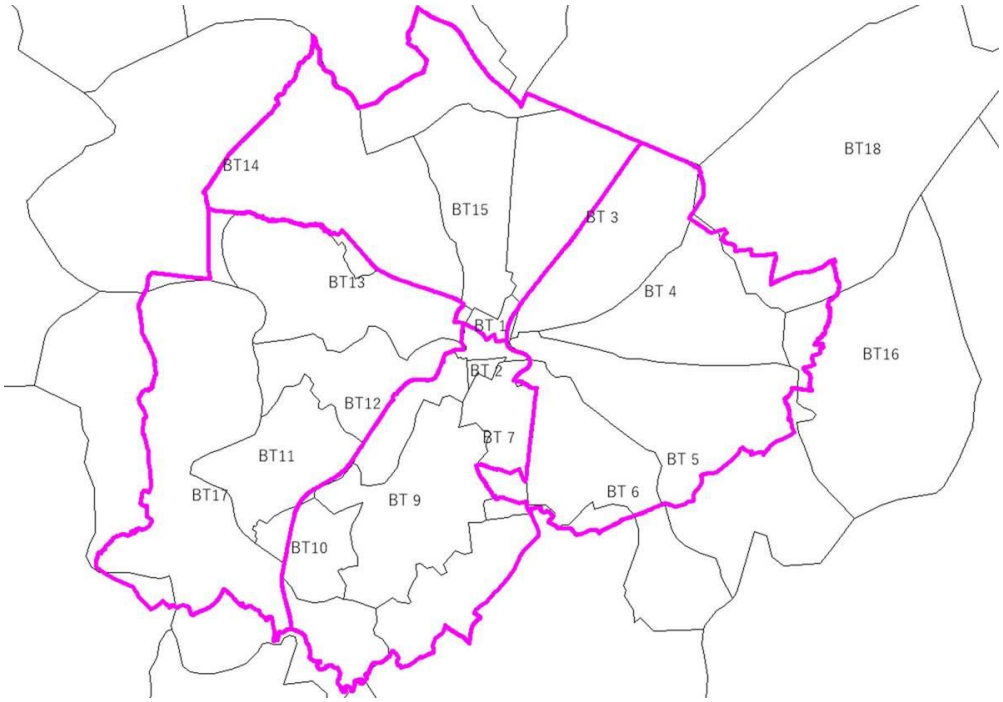
The Scottish Governments Gaelic Language Plan 2016-2021

https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2017/05/scottish-government-gaelic-language-plan-2016-2021/documents/00517453-pdf/00517453-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00517453.pdf

- *We will continue to work to increase the public profile of Gaelic through bilingual*
  signage policies on a new or replacement basis following the principle of equal respect for Gaelic and English.

Appendix 5: Belfast Postcode Map

Postcodes and NSEW proxy



Link to an online interactive map for NI postcodes. [Northern Ireland postcode geographies]

YSB Tags:	Main Classification*	Secondary tagging
BT1	City centre	N&S inner
BT2	S	City centre
BT3	E	
BT4	E	
BT5	E	
BT6	E	
BT7	S	
BT8	S	Mostly Lisburn & Castlereagh
BT9	S	
BT10	S	
BT11	W	
BT12	W	SW (S – Village area and Sandy Row)

BT13	W	
BT14	N	
BT15	N	
BT16	E	Mostly Lisburn & Castlereagh
BT17	W	SW (S - lower Dunmurry area)

*main classification based on where majority of BT sits.

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Revised Dual Language Street Signs Policy

Equality Impact Assessment –
Final Decision Report

April 2022

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1. Introduction

On 7 January 2021 Belfast City Council, in line with its statutory obligations under Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 agreed to carry out a 12-week public consultation as an integral part of its Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) into proposed changes to the Dual Language Street Signs Policy. The proposed changes to the policy include:

- amending the process for starting an application
- lowering the required threshold for support
- clarifying how responses to the street survey are classified
- conducting an equality assessment on each application; and,explaining the operation of the council's residual discretion.

During the consultation period a draft EQIA consultation report was made available on the council's website together with questionnaires designed to facilitate responses from both council staff and the public in general. The council's Equality Scheme consultees were notified of the availability of the draft EQIA report and invited to comment, and four open public meetings were carried out online.

This EQIA Final Decision Report sets out:

- the initial findings from the draft EQIA report;
- the results of the consultation process;
- conclusions;
- recommendations for monitoring any adverse impacts.

The EQIA Final Decision Report has been prepared in order to provide the council with all available information on which to base a decision on the proposed changes.

2. The policy

The current policy

Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 provides for street naming, street numbering and the provision of street signs. It also gives councils the discretionary power to erect dual language street signs or secondary nameplates in a language other than English.

Belfast City Council first adopted a policy for the erection of dual language street signs in 1998. The purpose of the policy was to give clear guidance to applicants on the process and assist Elected Representatives in reaching decisions. It allows that any individual can apply for a dual language street sign to be erected provided the application is accompanied by a petition with support from at least one third of the street's residents. The application may then be approved by council if the proposed signage is agreed by two thirds of the street's residents following a further consultation exercise.

In 2009 the policy was incorporated into a new wider Policy on Naming of Streets and Numbering of Buildings, which had been drafted to provide clearer guidance.

In 2012, after considering options that would change how consultation responses are counted and reduce the threshold from two-thirds to a simple majority, the council reaffirmed the existing policy.

The policy applies to all languages although the majority of applications to date under the existing policy have been for signs to include English and Irish.

Proposed changes

This section summarises the proposed key changes to the council's 1998 Dual Language Street Signs Policy.

Applying for a dual language street sign

The new policy proposes that only an occupier or occupiers of the street in question, an elected Belfast City Council Member representing the District Electoral Area in which the street is located or a developer may apply.

Threshold for further consideration of the application

The new policy proposes that the process may be started by an individual or group of individuals (as above) submitting a request to council. This will then trigger a survey consultation with a minimum of 15 per cent of the occupiers of the street required to support the application.

A report will then be brought to Committee for consideration (instead of being accompanied by a recommendation for approval). The council will have residual discretion.

Any decision relating to the erection of a second nameplate in the city centre (the “business core”) will in addition be subject to a wider public consultation to reflect the community of users.

The policy will cover the corporately designated Gaeltacht Quarter until such time as a policy which may contain specific proposals in respect of a bilingual strategy have been adopted.

Survey responses

The proposed policy removes the stipulation that an occupier is deemed not to be in favour of the application if they do not return a survey. (In practice, the Committee will continue to receive a breakdown of the survey results indicating the number of responses in favour, the number of responses not in favour and the number of responses that were not returned.)

Impacts on equality of opportunity, good relations and rural needs

The new policy process will require further Section 75 scrutiny of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs implications from the outset. The initial Section 75 assessment and rural needs determination will rely on the information

submitted on the application form, local data and local knowledge as well as the survey results.

Residual discretion

The council has always had residual discretion to erect or not erect a dual language street sign taking into consideration all relevant information (in addition to that contained in the application and petition). However, the current policy does not outline the factors that the council will consider when exercising such residual discretion.

The proposed changes to the policy include a new section that describes what factors are to be considered when the council exercises that residual discretion, namely:

- the views of the occupiers of the street;
- the results of the assessment of each application to identify and inform the council of any equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs implications;;
- consideration of the local context of the application;
- any other council policies or strategies related to the application; and
- all material considerations relating to the application.

This means that the council can take into account the specific circumstances of each application when determining the outcome and that, according to a report to Belfast City Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in April 2021, "The exercise of the Committee's residual discretion will ensure that second language street signs will not be erected in a manner which could undermine Good Relations at a neighbourhood level."

Timescales

When the council receives an application, there is a process in place for creating and sending the surveys to the residents of the street in question. The survey will include the proposed translation of the street name into the second language, which is arranged by the council from an appropriate, independent and competent institution. The residents have one month to

respond to the survey. The survey results are then collated by council officers, and a report is prepared for each application that will go to Committee.

The council's current resources enable it to process a maximum of five applications per month.

Decision making

The Committee then has to consider the report along with the survey results and any other relevant information to make a decision. The Committee's decision will be based on a simple majority. The vote is then ratified at the next full council meeting.

As with all decisions, the decision may be subject to reconsideration (also known as call-in) if 15 per cent of council Elected Representatives provide a requisition form to the Chief Executive stating that the decision was either:

1. not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts or issues; or
2. that the decision would disproportionately adversely affect any section of the inhabitants of the district.

If the requisition states wholly or in part that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district, the council is required to obtain the opinion of a practising barrister or solicitor .

If the practising barrister or solicitor is of the opinion that there is merit in reconsidering the decision, the council must vote again and the reconsidered decision will require a qualified majority of at least 80 per cent of Elected Representatives present voting in favour of the original decision.

3. Consideration of available data and research

This section provides an overview of the data and research that was considered in the draft EQIA report.

Research

The Draft EQIA Report included a range of background information on policies and guidance that might have an influence on the Council's policy. These are set out in the appendices to this report and include:

- Appendix 1: Relevant Belfast City Council strategies
- Appendix 2: Policies of other councils in Northern Ireland
- Appendix 3: Other relevant strategies
- Appendix 4: Legal advice on the proposed Dual Language Street Signage Policy
- Appendix 5: Legal precedents
- Appendix 6: Equality Commission NI guidance
- Appendix 6: Guidance given by other agencies

Data

Data on Belfast City Council residents by Section 75 category is set out in Appendix 6. Most of this information is taken from the 2011 Census.

Appendix 7 provides statistical analysis of the use of languages other than English in Belfast. This data is drawn from the Census, School Census and Continuous Household Survey.

Consultation on the council decision to erect bilingual/multilingual signage in four leisure centres

In October 2019, Belfast City Council agreed to commission a public consultation regarding the installation of bilingual/multilingual signage in four new or recently refurbished leisure centres, namely Andersonstown, Lisnasharragh, Olympia and Templemore.

Consultees were asked to consider options for external and internal signage in English only; English and Irish; English and Ulster-Scots; and English, Irish and Ulster-Scots.

The result of this consultation as relevant to the dual language signage policy is summarised at Appendix 8.

4. Assessment of impacts

In accordance with the EQIA process, having gathered information on the policy and those affected by it, the council must then assess whether there is a differential impact related to one or more of the Section 75 grounds, determine the extent of differential impact and whether that impact is adverse.

Differential impact suggests that a particular group has been affected differently by the policy (either favourably or unfavourably), while adverse impact is an indication that the effect is less favourable (i.e. negative) and is potentially unlawful[1].

In order to determine whether the proposed changes to the policy may have any adverse differential impact, it is necessary to consider the people affected by the policy, their needs and experiences and the equality categories to which they belong.

The following section summarises the assessment of impacts as set out in the draft EQIA consultation report based on the evidence available at that time.

Equality of opportunity

At first glance, how this policy change may impact on good relations within the city may appear to be of primary concern. However, the EQIA process is also intended to anticipate barriers to participation or failings in service provision (i.e. the promotion of equality of opportunity).

One of the key indicators of adverse impact, as identified by the Equality Commission, is lower participation rates or uptake by one group.

In theory at least, it could be argued that there may be the potential for dual language street signage to create a psychological barrier to access or use of certain streets, such as long streets or in commercial areas. However, to date there is no hard evidence to substantiate this assertion, and the proposal to

[1] Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Equality Commission for NI, 2004 (pp.22-23)

include residual discretion will continue to allow for the consideration of local context.

Further, there may be the potential for use of bilingual street signage to cause a degree of uncertainty or confusion for those with literacy issues, perhaps linked to a disability or ethnicity. This was raised during the consultation on language use at leisure centres and the potential for multilingual internal and external and internal directional signage.

Good relations

The evidence that is available to date, and prior to this period of consultation, does not indicate that the proposed changes are likely to have an adverse impact on good relations on grounds of religious belief, political opinion or race/ethnic origin in the medium to long term.

At the same time, previous consultations on related matters, and including the introduction of bilingual/multilingual signage in leisure centres, have suggested that there may be the potential for those who do not support languages other than English to see dual language signage as potentially challenging to their sense of identity. These concerns are most notable when decisions are seen to impact on local areas or facilities and against the perceived wishes of those communities.

With this in mind, the safeguards that are in place within the council to ensure that each decision takes on board the views of the local community and are fair, reasonable and proportionate within local circumstances are crucial in the roll-out of the revised policy.

Conclusions

The draft EQIA report reached the following conclusions, based on the evidence gathered at that time and prior to consultation.

The available evidence to date, and prior to the period of consultation, did not indicate that the proposed changes would be likely to have an adverse impact on groups within any Section 75 categories in the medium to long term.

Indeed, with the appropriate safeguards in place and including the residual discretion that the council is able to operate in the case of each final decision on street naming, in the longer term it is likely that the policy may have the capacity to enhance and promote good relations by affording respect and due regard to those who choose to promote languages other than English within their locale.

5. Consideration of measures

The EQIA process requires that, if it is decided that the policy has an adverse impact on one or more of the nine equality categories, then a series of alternatives should be put forward for consideration and an assessment of the possible impact of these alternatives undertaken. The council must consider measures which may mitigate the adverse impact and alternative ways of delivering policy aims which have a less adverse impact on the relevant equality category or which better promote equality of opportunity and good relations.[2]

At the time of preparing the draft EQIA consultation report, and prior to feedback obtained from the public consultation, it was not felt that any further mitigating measures needed to be introduced to the revised policy.

However, the council remains mindful of the need to continue to accommodate sensitivities around this issue and to ensure that all steps are taken to minimise adverse impacts in the future, whether currently seen or unseen.

With this in mind, it is proposed that, in keeping with the commitment included in the council's Equality Scheme (see p.17, para. 4.30), the revised policy should be subject to review after two years, and that this review should take into account and remedy any identified adverse impacts. This review should also draw on data to indicate whether footfall or use of streets may have been impacted by the introduction of dual language signage.

[2] Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Equality Commission for NI, 2004 (pp.30-31)

6. Summary of consultation responses

The Equality Commission's Guide to the Statutory Duties makes it clear that a formal consultation exercise should be included as a critical stage in an EQIA, immediately before decision making. Consultation should focus on the actual impact of the existing policy and the likely impact of proposed and alternative policies. Consultation should be inclusive, afford a fair opportunity to communicate pertinent information and enable consultees to give advice and opinion on the policy so that the public authority may reach a more informed decision[3]. However, the Equality Commission has also made it clear that an EQIA should not be considered as a referendum or plebiscite whereby the views of consultees from a majority are counted as votes to decide the outcome.[4]

The consultation process on this EQIA covered a 14-week period from 22 November 2022 to 28 February 2022. During the consultation period the draft EQIA report was available on the council's website together with a questionnaire designed to facilitate the type of responses referred to above. The council's Equality Scheme consultees were notified of the availability of the report and invited to comment. A press release was issued to various media outlets, and there were four online meetings open to the general public.

Responses were received as follows.

Responses to the online survey

There were 1,078 responses to the online survey (785 responses to the English language version and 293 responses to the Irish language version). (For the purposes of analysis, whether a respondent chose to complete either the English or Irish version is not considered of relevance over and above the

[3] Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, Equality Commission for NI, 2004 (p.36)

demographic variables outlined below, and hence the entire sample (n = 1,078) is set as the standard baseline.)

A summary of key findings is offered below.

It should be noted that there was no method of stopping individual respondents from filling in both the English and Irish language versions of the survey or filling in one or each multiple times. There is evidence that the same or highly similar responses to questions were received multiple times suggesting a degree of coordination of responses to the survey, once more reinforcing the Equality Commission's guidance not to treat consultation as a robust numerical poll of views and opinions.

Demographic breakdown of responses

Gender of respondents

Of the 854 respondents who responded to this question,

65.4 per cent (550) identified themselves as male;

32.1 per cent (274) as female; and

3.5 per cent (30) preferred not to say.

Community background of respondents

Respondents were asked to indicate what community background they came from, regardless of whether or not they actively practiced a religion.

Of the 786 respondents who answered this question,

37.8 per cent (297) identified themselves as coming from a Protestant community background;

35.1 per cent (276) from a Catholic community background; and

27.1 per cent (213) as being from neither community.

National identity of respondents

The survey asked for respondents to describe their national identity, giving them the options of British, Irish, Northern Irish, Other, English, Scottish and Welsh.

Of the 786 respondents who answered this question,

33.4 per cent (265) described themselves as British;

43 per cent (341) described themselves as Irish;

19.9 per cent (158) described themselves as Northern Irish;

3.3 per cent (26) described themselves as “other”; and

0.4 per cent (3) described themselves as English.

Age of respondents

While respondents were spread across all age ranges, there was a higher likelihood of responses coming from those in the 25 to 54 years of age range.

Age range	Percentage	Number
Under 18	6.2%	57
18-24	10.5%	96
25-39	29.4%	268
40-54	27.3%	249
55-64	16.2%	148
65+	10.4%	95

Residency of respondents

85.7 per cent of respondents to this question indicated they were ratepayers or residents in the Belfast City Council area.

Responses to survey questions

Respondents were asked whether they Strongly Agreed, Agreed, Neither Agreed nor Disagreed, Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed with four of the five proposed technical changes to the policy:

i. Proposed change to the method for applying for a dual language street sign
ii. Proposed change to the threshold for further consideration of the application
iii. Proposed change to clarify how responses to the survey are classified
iv. Proposed change to assess each application for equality, good relations and rural needs implications

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide a comment or opinion on each of these four proposed changes.[5]

Respondents were then asked to provide comments on the fifth proposed technical change:

v. Proposed change to explain the operation of the council's residual discretion

Respondents were also given the opportunity to comment on

- any aspect of the proposed policy that had not been addressed by the preceding questions
- the draft EQIA report.

i. Proposed change to application method

59.0 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this proposed change compared to 40.1 per cent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Combined total	570 (53.2%)	62 (5.8%)	10 (0.9%)	25 (2.3%)	405 (37.8%)

Among the negative comments received, there was a perception that this issue is being pushed by Sinn Féin and that this policy can potentially be used to have Irish language signs erected in areas where the majority would not want this. There are repeated references in the comments to the policy being used against the Protestant or Unionist community.

[5] It should be noted that the comments underneath each proposed change did not always correspond to that change. Respondents would often leave a generic comment in response to the policy proposal as a whole rather than commenting on the technical point being highlighted in that question. It should also be noted that respondents were less likely to leave a comment the further they went into the survey. There are fewer comments, therefore, against the proposed changes that are outlined later in the survey.

Another issue mentioned repeatedly in commentary was that the policy has the potential to alienate one section of the community and cause division.

Positive comments tended to focus on the promotion of Irish and minority languages and how the proposed policy change was in keeping with international best practice.

Respondents also referenced the current policy. A number of comments noted that it placed an undue burden on residents and that the 66 per cent threshold was an undue barrier to the promotion of minority languages.

ii. Proposed change threshold for an application

58.7 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this proposed change compared to 40.7 per cent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Combined total	587 (58.2%)	5 (0.5%)	6 (0.6%)	0	410 (40.7.%)

Within the negative commentary around this proposed change there was a strong emphasis on the perception that this amendment may allow the minority to make a decision for the majority of a street. A range of respondents felt that having this lower threshold allowed for “minority rule” and that this had the potential to damage community relations and could become a factor in intimidation.

In the positive comments there were frequent references to support for minority languages, adherence to UN and international guidance around minority languages and how the lower threshold makes it easier for residents to have the language of their choice displayed in a street sign.

This question also elicited a number of what would be described as “pro-forma responses” or variations on pro-forma responses. These frequently referred to the UN Special Rapporteur guidelines on this issue and suggested that a lower threshold, potentially 5 per cent, would be more acceptable and make the process easier still for residents.

iii. Proposed change to not count non-responses as not being in favour

62.0 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this proposed change compared to 35.0 per cent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Combined total	611 (57.4)	49 (4.6%)	32 (3%)	38 (3.6%)	335 (31.4%)

Many of the comments opposed to this change focused on the perception that this change allows for “minority rule”; such respondents felt that a clear majority should be required to effect any change. Comments frequently focused on the potentially negative effect this would have on good relations. There was also a common misconception in relation to this proposed change with a range of comments indicating that the respondent felt that a non-response would now be counted as being in favour of the erection of a sign.

The most frequent positive responses to this change felt the previous assumption that non-respondents were not in favour was not good practice and not reflective of practice in any other referendum or plebiscite. Pro-forma responses stated that no other council has a similar provision.

iv. Proposal to carry out an equality screening exercise on each application

56.0 per cent agreed or strongly agreed with this proposed change compared to 30.7 per cent who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Combined total	443(41.7%)	152(14.3%)	141(13.3%)	35(3.3%)	292(27.4%)

Negative comments specifically in relation to this proposed change considered that any assessment could be “manipulated” by one section of the community, leading to division.

A number of comments considered that any equality exercise could potentially be used to stop an application for a dual language street sign.

It was also suggested in some comments that as the overall policy change was subject to a Section 75 equality screening and an EQIA, any further screening of individual applications would be excessive.

There was also some consideration that seeing a minority language in a sign cannot create an inequality of opportunity and therefore there is no need for an assessment for each application.

Commentary in favour of this change suggested that the assessment would help build a clear picture of local demographics and opinion which would aid the decision-making process. Some respondents felt that this would add to the transparency of the process and help to potentially avoid division and damage to good relations.

v. Issues surrounding the exercise of residual discretion in relation to this policy

Respondents were provided with the opportunity to offer views on this proposed change. Council officers reviewed the comments and assigned a sentiment tag to each. These tags indicate whether the comments are positive, negative, mixed or neutral.

48.7 per cent of the comments made in relation to this change were tagged as negative;

11.2 per cent were tagged as positive; and

36.2 per cent were tagged as neutral.

Many of the negative comments around this again focused on the policy as a whole, rather than this specific technical change. There were, however, a number of comments in relation to how residual discretion may be applied.

Some respondents felt that the residual discretion clause gave the council the power to override the street survey and go against the wishes of residents.

One suggestion that occurred repeatedly was that opinions which could potentially be deemed to be sectarian should not be considered in relation to the application of residual discretion.

Respondents also suggested that residual discretion should only be used at the end of the application process and that potential applications for street signs should not be stopped before residents have had the opportunity to voice an opinion.

Positive comments in relation to the exercise of residual discretion welcomed the clarification as to what potential factors would be considered in relation to the operation of residual discretion and that this added another level of accountability to the process and gave another method for residents to have their say on any application.

Other comments on the proposed changes to the policy

Respondents were given the opportunity to make any other comments on the proposed changes to the policy.

Similar themes in opposition to change came to the fore in this section with respondents mentioning the potential for division.

In favour of the proposed change respondents felt that the new proposals would bring Belfast City Council in line with international guidelines and that any policy change would promote minority languages, and particularly the Irish language, in a positive manner.

Written submissions

A number of written submissions were made during the period of the consultation and Equality Impact Assessment (see Appendix 9 for full versions). In summary:

- Committee for the Administration of Justice. The response broadly welcomed the proposed policy while at the same time seeking the promotion of minority language to be a criterion considered under residual discretion, a clear definition of “good relations” in line with international standards to be applied in the application of the policy and the removal of the requirement to screen each application under the revised policy due to concerns that it “appears to be misinterpreting the

good relations duty as a majoritarian veto, which conflicts with proper interpretation of the duty as well as minority rights in general".

- Conradh na Gaeilge, An Droichead, Glór na Móna, Ionadh Uibh Eachach and Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain. The content of these responses was broadly similar and generally strongly supportive of the policy changes, considering that they reflect UN and international guidance on minority language and best practice across NI, Scotland and Wales. However, the proposed change to carry out an equality assessment on all applications under the revised policy was negatively received on the basis that the policy itself has been subjected to a screening and full EQIA process.
- Two separate sets of survey responses were received in hardcopy. An Dream Dearg delivered 274 copies of the survey and Sinn Féin delivered 1081 copies. Overall, the hard copy submissions were in support of most of the proposal policy changes. It should be noted at in each submission all answers were identical. As the responses were identical it suggests that there was some coordination and cooperation between respondents.

- The hard copy submissions have been considered separately from the completed online survey.

Responses in relation to the draft EQIA

Online survey responses

There were 190 comments in response the question about the draft EQIA report (98 of which were "no comment" or similar).

These included:

- The draft report and consultation questions are biased towards supporting minority languages
- Concerns that the policy would be divisive on grounds of religious belief, national identity and political belief
- Potential for tri-lingual signs in English, Ulster Scots and Irish

- That the report “presupposes that those in the two main communities are either Catholic or Protestant, and are so defined. This is neither true, nor inclusive, and undermines the value of the methodology, embedding a well-established indicator bias through religious labelling.”
- Need to consider the requirements of disabled people, for example, typographically differentiate between languages to assist people with learning disabilities
- Need to consider the language abilities of different migrant communities and so retain all street signs in English
- Providing fairer access through an online application and petition process

Hard Copy submission

Sinn Fein submission (1081 identical copies)

There were no comments specifically to the draft EQIA, and no comments in relation to equality, good relations or rural needs issues.

An identical prepared statement was included in all submissions stating:

that the adoption of the proposed policy would make Belfast one of the leaders in the protection of minority rights. There is reference to international treaties, and a paragraph in Irish stating that bilingualism enriches, day to day life and the visibility of language is important in their promotion.

An Dream Dearg (274 identical copies)

The council can use their discretion to end an application before it even reaches the stage of the street survey for a number of reasons. This shouldn’t be used until residents have an opportunity to indicate their views, and no weight should be given to argument which are rooted in blatant sectarianism.

Legal opinion on residual discretion

Council staff sought advice from a barrister about the parameters for the residual discretion referred to in the policy and in what circumstances this could be used. The barrister advised that residual discretion could not be the subject of any rigid parameters and that elected members should consider

each application on an individual basis and discuss whether the policy needed to be departed from in any way.

7. Conclusions

Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that, in making any decision with respect to a policy, a public authority shall take into account any EQIA and consultation carried out in relation to the policy (para. 9.2).

There is no strict definition of what “taking into account” entails. However, the Equality Commission guidance on how decisions should be recorded makes it clear that a public authority must be able to record the decision-making process (as well as the decision) and that the decision must be justified.[6]

The guidance also advises that all available information should be combined in making the decision. This includes the information gathered during the research phase, the results of the consultation and the analysis as to the need for alternative policy options.[7] This information has been brought together in this report and the appendices (available as a separate document) in order to ensure that the Council is in a position to take account of all issues when making a decision.

The following analysis of the key points arising from the EQIA and the consultation responses is provided to assist the Council, but is not exhaustive and is not meant to be a substitute for the detailed information presented in the appendices.

The draft EQIA consultation report reached the following conclusions, based on the evidence gathered at that time and prior to consultation.

‘The available evidence to date, and prior to the period of consultation, did not indicate that the proposed changes would be likely to have an adverse impact on groups within any Section 75 categories in the medium to long term.

[6] Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, ECNI 2004, p.45

[7] Practical Guidance on Equality Impact Assessment, ECNI 2004, p.45

Indeed, with the appropriate safeguards in place and including the residual discretion that the council is able to operate in the case of each final decision on street naming, in the longer term it is likely that the policy may have the capacity to enhance and promote good relations by affording respect and due regard to those who choose to promote languages other than English within their locale.'

This statement positions the proposed changes to the policy in close alignment with the council's Language Strategy and its vision to, 'create a city where linguistic diversity is celebrated and respected, and where those who live, work and visit the city can expect to access what Belfast has to offer, using forms of language with which they are familiar and comfortable.

This is further supported by, the specific policy aim, which is to: 'promote regional and minority language rights, and to benefit and enhance the diverse linguistic communities within the city, through the adoption of dual language street signs as and where appropriate.' 'The promotion of equality of opportunity, good relations and respect are principles underpinning the application of the policy, in addition to supporting the rights promoted by the policy itself.

While the consultation has revealed a lack of consensus with regard to the proposed changes to the policy, and indeed has identified a strong division of opinion, there is nothing inherent in the feedback received to suggest that, at this time, the proposed changes should not now be adopted - but on the understanding that the policy should be subject to rigorous review after a period of two years.

Consultees have raised a number of issues or concerns and including the following:

> **Lower threshold to five per cent** – While the council has decided to set a threshold of 15 per cent of residents supporting an application, some argued that this figure was set too high. While five per cent falls within the guidelines established by the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues in 2017 (5% to 20%), the figure of 15 per cent is felt to represent a more reasonable accommodation of the potentially diverse views of those residing in a particular street, it should also be noted that the application

will only proceed to further consideration if this threshold is reached, but does not act as a guarantee of success.

- **Do not count sectarian responses** – It was argued that survey responses tainted by sectarianism should be deemed ineligible. However, to determine which responses fall with this category would be very difficult in practice. Instead, it is argued that the decision-making process contains sufficient checks and balances to ensure that any campaign based on sectarianism, and at the expense of good community relations, would not prove successful
- **Define good relations and its application in the application process** – At the present time there is no consensus on a working definition of good relations, and while the definition of 'tackle prejudice and promote understanding, as well as respect and diversity' enjoys support in certain quarters it would be beyond the scope of this exercise to offer a definitive choice without further consultation with all relevant agencies and including the Equality Commission and the Community Relations Council.
- **Include opportunity to promote minority language as a criterion under residual discretion** – It is argued that the primary purpose of the revised policy will be to promote minority languages, in the context of the council's Language Strategy, and hence to make this an explicit criterion attached to residual discretion would be unnecessary
- **Remove requirement to screen all applications** – It is duly recognised that the process of Section 75 assessment which is to be attached to each application moves beyond the normal practice of the council in regard to screening (which is typically relating to the process by which decisions are reached rather than each decision). At the same time, in this circumstance it is felt that this is a proportionate safeguard given the sensitivities attaching to this issue, and is a matter that can be subject to review after two years.
- **Include reference to guidance on promotion of minority language in the application process** – At this time, the information made available during each stage of the application process has yet to be decided but inclusion of reference to guidance of this type would seem relevant and useful.
- **Potential to heighten community conflict** – A considerable number of respondents argued that the proposed changes may have the potential to disrupt good relations locally and across the city. At this time the council remains confident that sufficient and proportionate checks and balances have been incorporated within the application process to minimise this

risk. Equally, the council is committed to reviewing the policy periodically and where there is evidence that the proposed changes to the policy have had this effect then appropriate remedial action will be taken.

8. Monitoring for adverse impact

Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires that a system be established to monitor the impact of the final policy in order to find out its effect on the relevant groups and subgroups within the equality categories.

The results of ongoing monitoring must be reviewed and published on an annual basis (para. 4 (2) (b)). If the monitoring and analysis of results over a two-year period show that the policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, the public authority must ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for the relevant equality groups (Annex 1, para. 7.2).

The council therefore commits to the amended policy being formally reviewed after an initial period of **two years**, together with routine monitoring of applications during this time. The formal review may involve the following:

- Quantitative data relating to the number of applications made, including the breakdown of support by community background at relevant stages of the application process;
- Qualitative data regarding comments and feedback received on applications, together with correspondence/media coverage;
- Feedback from staff involved in the application process;
- Analysis of complaints register.

Appendix 1: Relevant Belfast City Council strategies

This section considers a range of Belfast City Council strategies that have bearing on the proposed Dual Language Street Signage Policy.

Language Strategy

Belfast City Council's 2018 Language Strategy aspires to create a place where linguistic diversity is celebrated and respected. It has two key purposes.

1. To protect and promote awareness of our indigenous languages of Irish and Ulster-Scots
2. To promote access to, inclusion of and awareness of other languages including sign languages, the languages of new communities who live in Belfast and languages and communication for disabled people

Good Relations Strategy

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, all public bodies, including Belfast City Council must have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group.

The council's Good Relations Strategy was adopted in 2019. It states that it "aims to promote sharing over separation and the economic, social and environmental benefits of such. We need to continue to create spaces for communities to interact and make connections with each other, moving from parallel living to meaningful relationships and casual interactions".

It also sets down the five outcomes it seeks to achieve.

- Outcome one: Strong, positive and transformative civic leadership – inclusive governance with community changemakers
- Outcome two: Shared and connected spaces – a smart, connected city driven by inclusive and transformative place making

- Outcome three: Shared Services – focusing on co-design and social innovation
- Outcome four: Structured collaboration and partnerships
- Outcome five: An intercultural city and respectful cultural expression within the rule of law

Equality Scheme

The council's Equality Scheme (approved in 2015) sets out the council's arrangements for complying with the equality duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. It includes a commitment to provide information in alternative formats on request were reasonably practicable. The Scheme states that alternative formats may include Easy Read, Braille, audio formats (CD, mp3 or DAISY), large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

Appendix 2: Policies of other councils in Northern Ireland

Dual language street signage policies

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

In 2018, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council rescinded its English-only street signage policy following a judicial review.

In 2019, a draft policy was approved by the Community Planning and Regeneration Committee. It provided for applications to be made supported by a petition of at least one-third of residents, and an application to be approved if supported by at least two-thirds of residents during a Council-led consultation process whereby “nil responses” would be counted as not in favour of the application.

The draft policy was referred back to the Committee by the full Council following concerns that it did not meet the Council’s legal obligations. Leaders of each of the political parties are to further consider the draft policy and report back to the Committee.

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council (ACBCBC) adopted its dual language policy in September 2020 whereby applications must be supported by a petition of support from at least one-third of residents. ACBCBC will then consult to ensure there is approval from at least two-thirds of residents.

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council

If less than two thirds of a street’s residents do not respond in favour of a dual language signage proposal, a report is presented to the Environmental Services Committee recommending that the proposal does not go ahead.

Derry City and Strabane District Council

In January 2021, following a Notice of Motion “Given the increasing demand for bi-lingual street signs to be installed”, Derry City and Strabane District

Council (DCSDC) agreed to reduce the approval threshold from two-thirds of street residents to 15 per cent.

DCSDC also has a multi-language signage policy that provides for signage in English, Irish and Ulster-Scots “upon scheduled replacement” of internal and external signs on DCSDC-owned buildings, offices and vehicles.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council (FODC) has a dual language policy that “is not a blanket Policy […] Each case will be considered on its individual merits”.

On receipt of an application supported by one-third of residents, FODC will seek the opinion of all residents and make a decision based on a majority of at least two thirds. It will then write to all residents who have not yet responded to advise them that it “is minded to proceed/not to proceed with the dual naming”, and residents have a second opportunity to respond.

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council approved its dual language policy in 2018. In February 2021, a Notice of Motion to reduce the threshold by which applications could be approved from two thirds to 15 per cent was rejected.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council determines the name by which a new street or road is to be known. It “must be expressed in English and may, in addition, be expressed in a language other than English”.

Mid Ulster District Council

Mid Ulster District Council will accept applications from individual residents. It will then carry out a consultation and if at least 51 per cent of residents approve, the application will be considered by its Environment Committee.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council “will promote the inclusion of the Irish language in street nameplates while having regard of any views on the

matter expressed by occupiers of the street". Applications can be made by an individual resident or Elected Representative.

Language policies

Before local government reform, the majority of the 26 councils had policies relating to either the Irish language or linguistic diversity generally. However, at this time only four of the new councils (excluding Belfast) have formally adopted policies addressing these issues.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has adopted a Linguistic Diversity Policy which embraces all language forms but affords particular status to Irish in accord with Part III of the European Charter. To date, the Linguistic Diversity Policy is reflected in its branding strategy: English and Irish are to be included on council stationery, vehicles and external signage with the exception of Strule Arts Centre and Enniskillen's Ardhowen Theatre, where Ulster Scots is also included.

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Derry City and Strabane District Council adopted a policy for the Irish language and a separate policy for Ulster-Scots in September 2014.

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council agreed its Bilingual Language Policy in 2015, establishing the Council's commitment to facilitate and encourage the promotion and use of both the Irish language and English language in the Council area.

While procedures have been agreed, the Council has not as yet finalised an action plan to implement the commitments.

Mid Ulster District Council

The Mid Ulster District Council Irish Language Policy is based on the requirements of Parts II and III of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, thereby implementing a range of positive actions to

promote, enhance and protect the Irish language while encouraging its use in speech and writing in private and public life.

Appendix 3: Other relevant strategies and frameworks

NI strategies

New Decade, New Approach 2020

The NI Executive's New Decade, New Approach strategy sets out a number of proposals in relation to rights, language and identity. These include:

- Establishing an Office of Identity and Cultural Expression "to celebrate and support all aspects of Northern Ireland's rich cultural and linguistic heritage"
- Appointing a Commissioner "to recognise, support, protect and enhance the development of the Irish language in Northern Ireland"
- Appointing a Commissioner "to enhance and develop the language, arts and literature associated with the Ulster Scots/Ulster British tradition"
- Officially recognising both Irish and Ulster-Scots languages in Northern Ireland
- Allowing any person to conduct their business in Irish or Ulster-Scots before the Assembly or one of its committees

While the document sets out proposals that are broadly in line with previous advice and guidance, at this time it does not provide specific guidance for local government other than:

> The guidance will ask the Commissioner, as a first priority, to focus on developing best practice standards that facilitate interaction between Irish language users and public bodies, including but not limited to making information or forms available in Irish where required, enabling widely used public websites to have an Irish Language translation available, and ensuring that public bodies reply in Irish where practical to correspondence in Irish. **Public bodies will each continue to make their own decisions on other matters to do with the Irish language.**

Northern Ireland (St Andrews Agreement) Act 2006

This Act places a duty on the NI Executive to adopt a strategy for the enhancement and protection of the Irish language.

Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement 1998

Strand three of the Belfast Agreement contains a series of commitments in respect of economic, cultural and social issues, including a general provision relating to minority languages:

> All participants recognise the importance of respect, understanding and tolerance in relation to linguistic diversity, including in Northern Ireland, the Irish language, Ulster-Scots and the languages of the various ethnic communities, all of which are part of the cultural wealth of the island of Ireland.

International strategies and frameworks

European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages is an international convention designed to protect and promote regional and minority languages.

The UK has an obligation not to create barriers regarding the use of a minority language. Article 7(4) of the Charter provides that “In determining their policy with regard to regional or minority languages, the Parties shall take into consideration the needs and wishes expressed by the groups which use such languages.”

In Northern Ireland, Part II of the European Charter applies to Irish and Ulster-Scots and Part III to Irish only.

Part II places a general duty on the state to facilitate and/or encourage the use of regional or minority languages in speech and writing, in public and private life but does not place any obligations directly on district councils.

Part III of the Charter extends to public services under public control. In Article 10, it states that services need to be able to be provided in the specified language and users of the language need to be able to submit requests for services in this language. Article 10 makes it clear that public authorities

should have a capacity for translation and interpretation, allow or encourage the use of traditional forms of placenames and family names, draft documents in the specified language, facilitate oral and written applications in this language, facilitate the use of the language in debates and allow people to submit requests in the language.

The UK ratified the European Charter in March 2001, but it has not been incorporated into domestic law. At present there is no Language Act in place in Northern Ireland (unlike the position in Scotland and Wales) although policies have been formulated by central government.

UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues

Guidance from the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues issued in 2017[8] was also taken into consideration by the Council when revising this policy. The guidance notes that "Bilingual or multilingual signs used by public authorities demonstrate inclusiveness, and that various population groups share a locality in harmony and mutual respect". It goes on to advise:

> As for street and locality names and topographical indications intended for the public, their importance as markers of social identity, culture and history, a good and practical approach adopted in perhaps most of the world's countries is for authorities to provide in transparent legislation or procedures for bilingual or even trilingual signs, usually following the proportionality principle where there is sufficient concentration or demand for such signs in minority languages. While national legislation varies, the low threshold where it is considered practicable and reasonable to provide for such signs tends to vary between 5% and 20% of the local population, with the lowest threshold usually associated with the use of a minority language which also has some

[8] www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/ieminorities/languagerightslinguisticminoritieshandbook.docx

kind of official status or for traditional, historical reasons. The criteria for the display of signs in minority languages must be given a clear and unambiguous legislative basis to be effectively implemented.

Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is a multilateral treaty of the Council of Europe aimed at protecting the rights of minorities within Europe. The United Kingdom is a signatory nation to the Framework.

It does not place any directly enforceable obligation on local councils but includes a number of provisions in relation to minority languages.

Article 11 requires the state to facilitate the display of traditional local names, street names and other topographical indications in the minority language where there is a sufficient demand and in areas traditionally inhabited by substantial numbers of persons belonging to a national minority.

Appendix 4: Legal precedents

Counsel's opinion

In January 2013 in relation to the Council's Language Strategy, Belfast City Council sought the opinion of Mr Richard Gordon QC, who is widely recognised as a leading counsel on constitutional, administrative, public and civil liberties law. Mr Gordon was asked to advise

- whether the Council is in any legal conflict with the provisions of the European Charter and whether the current policies in relation to the use of Irish meet with the spirit and requirements of the Charter;
- whether the current language policies are open to legitimate criticism.

Mr Gordon advised that there would be potential for judicial review in relation to allegations of the Council's non-compliance with the European Charter and recommended that the Council should, as a minimum, have in place a clear strategy which can be shown to be implemented for facilitation of the Irish language so as to meet all the requirements of Article 10 of the European Charter. He suggested that the Council should reformulate the Language Policy in a comprehensive and easily accessible form and should attempt to itemise in the clearest terms what is being done to implement the policy.

Judicial review of street signage

In December 2014, the High Court ruled on an application for judicial review by Eileen Reid of a decision taken by Belfast City Council to refuse to erect an additional street nameplate in Irish at Ballymurphy Drive, Belfast. The application was made on five grounds, one of which was that the Council's street naming policy was inconsistent with its commitment to act in accordance with the European Charter.

In summary, Mr Justice Horner found that the Council's decision-making process was lawful; that the Council had a residual discretion within the policy to allow due consideration being given to the particular circumstances of each application; and, as a general proposition, international treaties or agreements which have not been incorporated into national law are not enforceable:

a public authority […] cannot be obliged to treat itself as bound to act in compliance with international obligation. Even where it does so it is clear from the authorities that the courts will adopt a very light touch review which will not extend to ruling on the meaning or effect of the International Treaty.

Appendix 5: Advice and guidance from other agencies

Equality Commission NI

The Equality Commission has noted that the use of Irish in signage is, in their opinion, a neutral act and that this is in keeping with political agreements.

> The Commission considers that the use of minority languages, particularly Irish and Ulster Scots in Northern Ireland for common or official purposes would normally or objectively be considered to be a neutral act that would not be discriminatory.
>
> The Commission also consider that the speaking of any language in Northern Ireland should not be perceived as a threat to any individual or group, nor should it be used in such a manner. We consider that the speaking of Irish or its more general use in the community does not diminish the entitlements of those whose right to their British identity is guaranteed in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. Similarly, the Commission considers that the wider use of Ulster Scots does not diminish the entitlements of those whose right to their Irish identity is guaranteed. (Equality Commission, 2015).

Committee for the Administration of Justice

Similar to the Equality Commission, the Committee for the Administration of Justice[9] also cautioned against "miscategorising" statistical or qualitative information as "adverse impacts": that is, equating the fact that statistically more people from a Catholic background than people from a Protestant background speak Irish and that therefore promoting Irish would constitute an "adverse impact".

[9] An independent non-governmental organisation affiliated to the International Federation for Human Rights

> there has also been a contention that a council space must remain "neutral" as a justification for refusing to adopt an effective Irish language policy in accordance with the ECRML [European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages]. However, the continued exclusion of the Irish language from civic space is neither neutral nor natural. In short there is no universally agreed "neutral" position to take […] it is a misinterpretation of the [good relations] duty to find an "adverse impact" on equality of opportunity merely because a policy is politically contentious, or attracts hostility […]
>
> It has been suggested that exposure to the Irish language itself constitutes an adverse impact on some groups, on the basis that this intrudes on the rights of persons who do not want to see or hear the Irish language. However, having to see Irish used alongside English on a logo or sign, or to hear people speaking Irish, does not breech any recognised right, domestic or international. (CAJ and Conradh na Gaeilge, 2018)

Advisory Committee to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

An advisory committee monitors the compliance of signatory nations with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. One of the themes commented on throughout their reporting is how the use of the minority language is publicly visible signage can add to a sense of belonging for the minority language community. Comments[10] include:

> Multilingual cultural and touristic signage offers considerable potential for the use of topographical names in minority languages as it uses these languages and toponyms in a field (heritage preservation) that is appreciated in all parts of society, raises awareness of the cultural

[10] The opinions of the Advisory Committee on the FCNM can be found on the HUDOC-FCNM database, https://hudoc.fcnm.coe.int/eng

> contributions made by national minorities and has a practical function. (Bulgaria, 4th, 2020, para. 141)
>
> The display of bilingual or trilingual signposts as a demonstration of the diverse character of the region, traditionally and at present. (Croatia, 4th, 2015, para. 66)
>
> Such bilingualism carries for persons belonging to national minorities as an affirmation of its presence as an appreciated and welcome part of society. (Latvia, 3rd, 2018, para. 130)
>
> The Advisory Committee recalls the important symbolic value of bilingual topographical indications as affirmation that the presence of linguistic diversity is appreciated and that a given territory is shared in harmony by various linguistic groups. (Netherlands, 3rd, 2019, para. 116)
>
> [S]ignificant symbolic value for integration that bilingual or trilingual signposts, or the re-introduction of historical place names, carry for the population as an affirmation of the long-standing presence of national minorities as appreciated and welcome part of society. (Georgia, 2nd, 2015, para. 85)

This commentary shows the positive impact of the use of minority languages in signage and how this can improve community relations and respect “shared in harmony”.

Committee of Experts for the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages

The Committee of Experts (COMEX) is the Council of Europe treaty body which monitors compliance with the Charter. COMEX has elaborated that the undertaking to take into consideration needs and wishes of speakers places a duty on councils, government departments and other public authorities to consult with representatives of users of Irish and Ulster Scots when developing policy impacting on them.

COMEX has also made reference to lower thresholds in some of their reports, including, for example, urging Parties to apply the Charter where there is a demand, irrespective of a particular threshold and noting that a 20 per cent threshold is too high as the number of people justifying protection under the Charter is commonly well below that percentage.

> The Committee of Experts urges the Czech authorities to adopt a flexible approach ensuring the implementation of the relevant provisions of the Charter to all regional or minority languages and to encourage local authorities to apply the Charter where there is a demand, irrespective of any thresholds.
>
> The Committee of Experts notes that limiting the possibility for users of regional or minority languages to submit oral or written applications in these languages to municipalities where 20% of the population belong to a minority amounts to a territorial reservation which is incompatible with the Charter. Besides, the 20% threshold appears in any case too high, as the number of people justifying protection measures under the Charter is commonly well below this percentage.

COMEX emphasises that the adoption of special measures in favour of regional or minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population which take due account of their specific conditions are not to be considered an act of discrimination against the users of more widely used languages.

On a number of occasions the Committee of Experts has pointed out that not enough is being done to promote the use of Irish or to make Irish visible in the public space in Northern Ireland.

> The committee of Experts has been informed about several instances, especially within local councils, where it was decided not to promote the use of the Irish language as it may contravene Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act. The Committee of Experts emphasises that the adoption of special measures in favour of regional and minority languages aimed at promoting equality between the users of these languages and the rest of the population or which take account of their

specific conditions is not to be considered an act of discrimination against the users of more widely used language (Committee of Experts, 3rd Cycle Monitoring Report, 2010).

General approach of the European Charter and Framework Convention

The general approach of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is that place names in a regional or minority language form an integral part of the cultural heritage of a municipality. This applies notably to languages that have traditionally been the majority language of a territory (regional languages). In municipalities where such languages are in use, one can assume that the local toponymy is mainly or wholly based on, or influenced by, that language. Place names reflect circumstances or events that have occurred during the local history, or the imagination of the population.

Topographical bilingualism contributes to the preservation and use of this "public memory" and can also quite simply help to understand the original meaning of many names. It also encourages residents to use the regional or minority language in daily life and shows to locals and visitors that the "territory is shared in harmony by different linguistic groups", as the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities has often formulated it (see ACFC Thematic Commentary No. 3, 2012, para. 67, https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/thematic-commentaries).

In addition, bilingual signage makes a municipality special (from the point of view of marketing) and is of practical use in tourism.

The adoption and use of place names in regional or minority languages is one of the most frequently implemented promotion measures for these languages in Europe. A municipality which implements this seriously can claim to comply with European standards in the field of minority language promotion and national minority protection.

Lastly, it should be recalled that Art. 10 (2) g of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (which applies to Irish in Northern Ireland in accordance with the UK instrument of ratification) does not only deal with "signs" (such as the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities) but also with the adoption of the place name in the minority language as an additional or the sole official name of the place.

Appendix 6: Belfast's population by Section 75 dimension

Religious belief

On Census Day 2011, 49 per cent of Belfast City Council's usual residents were from a Catholic community background compared with 42 per cent from a Protestant or other Christian related background.

Political opinion

In the last local government election held on 2 May 2019, 28.2 per cent of first preference votes were cast for Sinn Féin; 21.6 per cent for the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP); 15.7 per cent for the Alliance Party; 9.1 per cent for the Social, Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP); 6.2 per cent for the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP); 6.0 per cent for the Green Party; 5.2 per cent for the People before Profit Alliance; and 3.1 per cent for the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP). A total of 60 councillors were elected to Belfast City Council. The table below provides an overview of the number of councillors by each political party.

Political Party	Number of councillors elected
Sinn Féin	18
Democratic Unionist Party	15
Alliance Party	9
Social Democratic and Labour Party	6
Green Party	4
People before Profit Alliance	3

Ulster Unionist Party	4
Progressive Unionist Party	1

Racial group

Country of birth statistics taken from the last census in 2011 show that 6.55 per cent of all usual residents were born outside the UK and Ireland. Almost a third of this group (2.1 per cent of all residents) were born in Middle East and Asia.

Age

The age profile of Belfast is similar to that of the wider region. Almost one in five residents (19.23 per cent) are aged under 16, slightly lower than the Northern Ireland average (20.95 per cent). The working age population (aged 16 to 64 years) make up two-thirds (66.32 per cent) of all Belfast residents. Older people (aged 65 and over) currently account for 14.44 per cent of the Belfast population.

Marital status

Just over one third (35.6 per cent) of all usual residents in Belfast (aged 16+) are married – a relatively low proportion when compared with the Northern Ireland average (47.6 per cent). Belfast has a higher percentage (45.3 per cent) of residents who are single when compared with the Northern Ireland average (36.1 per cent). There is also a higher than average proportion of people in Belfast who are separated (5.4 per cent compared to 4 per cent NI average) and divorced (6.2 per cent to 5.5 per cent NI average). Belfast also has 353 residents (0.1 per cent) who are in a registered same-sex civil partnership, almost a third of all such partnerships in Northern Ireland.

Sexual orientation

Several UK- and NI-based studies have attempted to quantify the number of people who identify as LGBTQ+. Estimates for the LGBTQ+ population range from 0.3 to 10 per cent using different sources. A commonly used estimate of

LGBTQ+ people in the UK, accepted by Stonewall UK, is approximately 5 to 7 per cent of the population.

Men and women generally

Belfast has a higher female population (52 per cent of all residents), slightly higher than the Northern Ireland average of 51 per cent. The difference is largest in the over 65 population where 59.3 per cent of all residents are female.

Disability

Census figures show that almost one quarter (23 per cent) of Belfast residents have a long-term health problem or disability which affects their day-to-day activities. This is a higher proportion than the Northern Ireland average (20.1 per cent). Over one-third of Belfast residents reported that they had a long-term condition (defined as a condition which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months). The most common conditions were mobility or dexterity difficulty (39 per cent of all those affected), pain or discomfort (34 per cent), shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (31 per cent) and emotional, psychological or mental health condition (23 per cent).

2.02 per cent or 6,729 Belfast residents are blind or have partial sight loss.

Dependants

According to the 2011 Census, 30.4 per cent of households in Belfast include dependent children compared with the NI average of 36.5 per cent. 11.0 per cent of households consist of a lone parent and a dependant child or children, compared with the NI average of 8.1 per cent. Over 94 per cent of lone parents in Belfast are female.

11.8 per cent of Belfast residents provide unpaid care for a dependant adult, slightly higher than the NI average of 11.0 per cent.

Appendix 7: Knowledge and use of languages other than English

2011 Census

Irish and Ulster-Scots

The 2011 Census includes information on the main languages spoken by residents of Belfast and knowledge of Irish and Ulster-Scots. It found that:

- 13.45 per cent of the Belfast population (aged 3+) have some ability in Irish compared to 10.65 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland as a whole
- Over 16,000 people in Belfast speak, read, write and understand Irish
- 5.23 per cent of the Belfast population (aged 3+) have some ability in Ulster-Scots compared to 8.08 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland as a whole
- Just over 2,000 people in Belfast speak, read, write and understand Ulster-Scots

Use of languages other than English or Irish

The table below shows that 4.94 per cent of Belfast households contain at least one person who does not have English as a main language and in 2.71 per cent of households, no one has English as a main language.

	Belfast		Northern Ireland	
	No.	%	No.	%
All people aged 16+ years in household have English as a main language	134,567	95.06	678,135	96.43
At least one but not all people aged 16+ years in household have English as a main language	2,734	1.93	8,618	1.23

No people aged 16+ years in household but at least one person aged 3-15 years has English as a main language	433	0.31	1,546	0.22
No people in household have English as a main language	3,833	2.71	14,976	2.13

The Census also showed that the most commonly spoken languages in Belfast (excluding English and Irish) are Polish (1.22 per cent), Chinese (0.30 per cent), Tagalog/Filipino (0.24 per cent) and Slovak (0.17 per cent).

High proportions of residents whose main language is Tagalog/Filipino (99 per cent), Irish (98 per cent) or Malayalam (92 per cent) can speak English well or very well. However, the figures are much lower for those who speak mainly Chinese (61 per cent), Lithuanian (62 per cent), Slovak (64 per cent), Polish (66 per cent), Russian (66 per cent), Hungarian (68 per cent), Latvian (71 per cent) or Portuguese (73 per cent).[11]

There are also variations in terms of age group with over 50 per cent of those whose main language is not English aged between 25 and 44 compared with 28 per cent of the whole population whose main language is English.

School Census

The annual School Census provides information on pre-school, nursery, primary and post-primary pupils the Belfast City Council area.

- According to the 2019 school census, at October 2019 there were 3,720 newcomer pupils[12] in Belfast, accounting for 21 per cent of all newcomer pupils across NI.

[11] www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/2011-census-results-detailed-characteristics-statistics-bulletin-28-june-2013.pdf

[12] A newcomer pupil is one who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum, and the wider environment, and does not have a language in common with the teacher, whether that is

- In 2014/15, 2,216 pupils receive education through the medium of Irish in the Belfast City Council area. A further 760 attended Irish-medium youth provision. Sixteen post-primary schools in Belfast also taught Irish.

Continuous Household Survey

Knowledge and use of Irish

According to the 2017/18 Continuous Household Survey (CHS), 13.9 per cent of the population have some knowledge of Irish (that is, they can understand, speak, read or write Irish) including 6 per cent of the population who can read Irish. Of those who have knowledge of Irish, 29.5 per cent use it in the home and 29.8 per cent use it socially.

A higher proportion of people from a Catholic community background have knowledge of Irish than both those with other or no religion or from a Protestant community background.

People aged 45 years and over are less likely to have knowledge of Irish than those aged 16 to 44 years.

Knowledge and use of Ulster-Scots

According to the 2017/18 CHS, 14.5 per cent of the population have some knowledge of Ulster-Scots (that is, they can understand, speak, read or write Ulster-Scots) including 3 per cent who can read Ulster-Scots. Of those who have knowledge of Ulster-Scots, 32.7 per cent use it in the home and 33.9 per cent use it socially.

A higher proportion of people from a Protestant community background and those with other or no religion have knowledge of Ulster-Scots than those from a Catholic community background.

People aged 45 and over are more likely to have knowledge of Ulster-Scots that those aged 16 to 44.

English or Irish. It does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish medium school.

Men are also more likely to have knowledge of Ulster-Scots that women.

Appendix 8: Consultation on the Council decision to erect bilingual/multilingual signage in four leisure centres

In October 2019, Belfast City Council agreed to commission a public consultation regarding the installation of bilingual/multilingual signage in four new or recently refurbished leisure centres, namely Andersonstown, Lisnasharragh, Olympia and Templemore.

Consultees were asked to consider options for external and internal signage in English only; English and Irish; English and Ulster-Scots; and English, Irish and Ulster-Scots.

This resulted in 3,822 responses from different communities and stakeholder groups including the general public, Belfast City Council and Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL)[13] staff, politicians, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and representatives from Irish Language and Ulster Scots communities; the Council's Equality Consultative Forum; the Council's Disability Advisory Panel; and the Council's Migrant Forum.

Survey responses

3,393 completed response forms were received.

The profile of questionnaire respondents tended to be characterised by an over-representation of men (56.3 per cent); those from the west of the city (35.5 per cent), those whose national identity was Irish (47.9 per cent); and those who identified as from a Catholic community background (48.9 per cent).

Across all four leisure centres, a quarter of respondents (25.8 per cent) stated a preference for English-only external signage; 71.4 per cent indicated a preference for bi- or multi-lingual external signage; and 2.8 per cent had no preference.

[13] GLL manages Belfast City Council's leisure centres

External signage language preference across 4 leisure centres	No. of responses	% of total responses
English Only	3,463	25.8
English and Irish	8,334	62.0
English and Ulster-Scots	178	1.3
English, Irish and Ulster-Scots	1,095	8.1
No preference	375	2.8
TOTAL	**13,445**	**100**

Respondents were also asked their preference with regards to signage across all council leisure centres whereby 86 per cent of respondents agreed that there should be bilingual or multilingual signage and 4.8 per cent disagreed.

Bilingual/multilingual signage at all Council leisure centres	No. of responses	% of responses
Strongly agree	2230	65.7
Agree	689	20.3
Neither agree nor disagree	243	7.2
Disagree	42	1.2
Strongly disagree	122	3.6
Not answered	67	2.0
TOTAL	**3393**	**100**

However, there were also deep divisions across the sample in terms of preferences by national identity and community background. For example, of those who identified as Catholic, 4 out of 5 respondents (80.1 per cent) advocated external naming signage in English and Irish across the four centres, and this figure rose to 88.7 per cent in the case of Andersonstown

Leisure Centre. In contrast, 85.4 per cent of those who described themselves as Protestant indicated a preference for English only naming and signage for Lisnasharragh, Olympia and Templemore leisure centres, although this figure fell somewhat to 73.7 per cent for Andersonstown.

Qualitative survey responses

In terms of written comments in the surveys, the significant level of emotion revealed in many written responses was noteworthy.

There were those who celebrated linguistic diversity, the promotion of minority languages and the benefits of bilingualism, arguing that naming and signage in languages along with English would enhance the cultural vitality of the city. While many did not couch comments in terms of rights, others saw the promotion of minority languages as a fundamental right that was being ignored.

There were also concerns about how the use of language has been politicised and English was often described as sufficient as it was seen to represent the main language of the UK. A smaller number voiced concern that the imposition of Irish in areas where it may not be welcome had the potential to damage community relations and would be resisted by local communities.

A number of comments focused on practical considerations, including the expense and accessibility. With regards accessibility, signage in English and/or Irish and/or Ulster Scots was seen by some as potentially confusing, for example, for those with different language abilities. Others argued that the focus on these three languages could be to the detriment of considerations such as the communication needs of those with a disability or those with literacy problems. Comments included:

> “I think that multi language can be confusing especially to people with learning difficulties.”
>
> “Too much writing can be overwhelming for people who have difficulty with reading.”
>
> “Internal signs should be English and Pictorial. If another language is needed, it should be Polish or a Chinese language.”

> “There should be signs for all cultures and nationalities throughout any building”
>
> “Signs should be clear and easy to follow, not cluttered with multiple languages.”
>
> “Too many languages in a small area could cause it to be cluttered and reduce accessibility.”

Public meetings

Twelve public meetings took place in November 2019 across the four leisure centres. Attendance varied from 0 to 82 with an average of 11 people per meeting.

Regarding the series of public meetings, the atmosphere that characterised these events varied dramatically. At many, the level of attendance was disappointing, and the questions that were asked were often no more than seeking information or clarification. These smaller meetings did raise a number of interesting issues however, for example, whether names could be translated into other languages. A further discussion point was why local solutions were being sought for “citywide” leisure centres as this appeared to be a contradiction in terms.

The atmosphere at larger meetings was far more confrontational. There was a considerable level of emotion at these meetings, and a deep suspicion among participants as to the true purpose of the exercise and the Council’s long-term objectives. During these events it was often difficult to maintain order or follow an agenda as many participants’ contributions were fuelled by considerable levels of anger and frustration at the Council, and this was seen as an opportunity to vent that anger. In particular, the consultation exercise was characterised as a conspiracy or plot to impose language forms on local facilities against the will of that community.

Responses by Section 75 dimensions

Gender

Men were more likely than women to express a preference for English only signage across all four centres.

Community background

Among the 706 respondents who gave their community background, people from a Protestant community background were more likely to prefer English only signage.

Preference for English only external signage	Protestant		Catholic		Neither	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Andersonstown	571	73.7	20	1.5	162	27.0
Lisnasharragh	671	86.6	24	1.8	178	29.7
Olympia	652	84.1	24	1.8	173	28.9
Templemore	670	86.5	27	2.1	181	30.2

National identity

Differences between those who identified as either Irish or British were significant and broadly parallel the findings for community background. People who identified as a British national identity were most likely to have a preference for English only across all four centres, while people who identified as Irish were least likely to have a preference for English only.

Preference for English only external signage	British		Irish		NI		Other	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Andersonstown	566	78.0	14	0.9	166	22.7	10	3.2
Lisnasharragh	650	89.5	20	1.2	195	63.3	10	22.7
Olympia	636	87.6	18	1.1	187	60.7	10	22.7
Templemore	651	90.0	25	1.5	195	63.3	10	22.7

Age

Preference for English only signage increased with age across all four centres.

Preference for English only external signage	<18		18-24		25-44		45-64		>65	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Andersonstown	4	1.3	24	10.2	352	29.2	329	31.3	58	40.3
Lisnasharragh	3	0.9	23	9.8	401	33.2	398	46.1	63	43.8
Olympia	3	0.9	25	10.6	388	32.1	384	44.1	64	44.4
Templemore	3	0.9	25	10.6	400	33.1	402	46.2	64	44.4

A further breakdown of the sample by age and community background (n=706) was carried out. This showed that the younger age groups overwhelmingly identified as Catholic. For example, of those aged under 18 years, nine out of ten (90.3 per cent) were Catholic, while for those aged over 65 years, the figure fell to 34.0 per cent.

Health limitations

Among those members of the sample with limiting health problems, between 43 and 50 per cent showed a preference for English only signage compared to between 25 and 29 per cent of people without a limiting health condition.

Preference for English only external signage	Limited a lot		Limited a little		No		Pref. not say	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Andersonstown	88	43.4	100	39.5	505	24.9	70	31.3
Lisnasharragh	100	49.3	112	44.3	587	28.9	85	38.0
Olympia	99	48.8	106	41.9	574	28.3	81	36.2
Templemore	101	50.0	111	43.9	595	29.3	83	37.1

Summary of key findings

There was widespread agreement that, in principle and subject to appropriate consultation, the Council should consider adopting bilingual/multilingual signage at all of its leisure centres in future. However, there were also deep

divisions across the sample and in particular in terms of preferences by national identity and community background.

A number of comments focused on practical considerations including the need to be accessible to all users. In this regard, bilingual signage was seen by some as potentially confusing and that the focus on English, Irish and Ulster-Scots was detrimental of consideration of the communication needs of those with a disability, those with literacy problems or those from new communities.

Overall, the data did suggest, however, was a willingness to accept that bilingual signs would be more acceptable in some centres than others. For example, while there was considerable local opposition to bilingual signage in Templemore and Lisnasharragh Leisure Centres, these same respondents often expressed a view, either verbally or in writing, that what was decided as appropriate for Andersonstown was of little concern to them so long as the decision did not have an impact on their local facility.

While the consultation did not provoke many responses in relation to Section 75 considerations. The adverse impacts that were alluded to by a number of respondents suggested either that good relations generally may be damaged by the imposition of a council decision on a local facility or that a centre may be less welcoming to members of certain communities depending on the languages on display. The report on the consultation on the bilingual/multilingual signage at the four leisure centres considered “At this time these concerns are only conjecture and have yet to be tested but should be borne in mind nevertheless.”

Sector representatives

Meetings took place with sectoral representatives in November 2019. Each meeting was structured around the questions included in the standard response form with the opportunity to explore other issues as necessary.

Irish language community representatives

- All present were in favour of Irish and English external signage.

- It was noted that there may be a health and safety issue for children educated through the medium of Irish who have not begun reading English yet and that emergency signs should be in Irish.

- It was also argued that it would be hard to predict the distribution of Irish speakers in ten- or twenty-years' time and that this meant putting signs solely where there are larger clusters of speakers now should be avoided.

- The opinion was expressed that the Council is bound by the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and that bilingual signage comes under the "resolute action" mentioned in this.

- It was also maintained that the concept of "good relations" should not be used to avoid putting bilingual signage up and the perception that people might be offended by seeing Irish should not be factored into the decision-making process.

Ulster-Scots community representatives

A meeting of Ulster-Scots community representatives in November 2019 considered:

- There was strong support for retaining English language signs across the four leisure centres, and other centres in Belfast.

- It was noted that the primary purpose of all signage should be communication and that no one 'needs' Irish or Ulster-Scots to communicate.

- There was a widespread view that the implementation of this policy has the potential to impact adversely on good relations across the city.

Disability groups

A meeting was arranged with representatives from disability groups. The considered:

- Signage should aspire to be as inclusive and diverse as possible to enhance accessibility and encourage engagement.

- Accessible formats, including Braille, should always be included in signage wherever this is possible and sensible.

- Signage should never be an obstacle for people accessing services, and its primary purpose is to move people safely and easily

- It was not felt that the policy would have an adverse impact on any Section 75 groups if it was applied sensibly and reasonably in local circumstances.

Council Migrant Forum

- It was noted that many schools are now embracing multiculturalism and multilingualism through internal signage within the schools.

- It is also important to consider access for people with dementia.

Council's Equality Consultative Forum

- Initial discussion concerned whether the policy should adopt a local or holistic approach to signage across all facilities. Some members maintained that having languages only in particular areas to perceptions around tribalisation.

- It was felt that that when issues around one minority language became contentious then it impacted adversely on all minority languages. A holistic approach may minimise disputes and that there should be a broader conversation about how languages in general are brought forward.

- It was argued that anyone seeking to promote the concept of three indigenous traditions in Northern Ireland or who considers themselves to be ethnically Ulster-Scots is disadvantaged by having a solely bilingual approach which can foster a chill factor.

- Others felt that the concept of "good relations" should not be used as a tool to prohibit the promotion of languages and that the Council had a duty to promote both Irish and good relations.

NI Human Rights Commission

The NI Human Rights Commission broadly supported Belfast City Council's efforts in consulting on signage:

> "In human rights terms, such consultation would be viewed as promoting and implementing 'effective participation'. The principle of effective participation requires that policy makers must engage with

> persons directly affected by a particular policy change, as well as with organisations representing such persons. The opportunity to engage should be provided at every stage of the process – design, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation."

It also set out additional measures that could be taken to broaden the consultation, particularly disabled people:

> "We welcome that Belfast City Council has engaged with the Council's Disability Advisory Panel and with the Equality Consultative Forum. The Commission recommends that the Council considers how to seek views from persons with disabilities more broadly. This should include representatives from as broad a range of disabilities as possible, including physical and mental disabilities."

Appendix 9: Written responses

Conradh na Gaeilge, An Droichead, Glór na Móna, Ionadh Uibh Eachach and Cumann Cultúrtha Mhic Reachtain:

The main purpose of the Section 75 statutory equality duty is to better promote the ‘adverse impact’ on equality and equality alone, as evidenced by nine different characteristics. Political opposition or disputes against a particular policy should not be misunderstood as ‘adverse effects.’ Similarly, it would be contrary to the very reason for this duty in itself for arguments rooted in prejudice or intolerance (including sectarian bias) against minority languages to influence policy due to the Section 75 process. As well as this, there is no guidance on how the Council would approach such evidence. To that end, I do not think that a policy that promotes and facilitates bilingual signage under Section 75 would have any adverse effect and yet, if it did, restricting linguistic diversity would not solve the problem; the Council should take further action to combat intolerance and promote understanding.

However, at present, the 'good relations' section of the EQIA refers to previous consultations, referring to the 'concerns' from those 'who do not support languages other than English,' and talks about putting local protections in place to deal with these concerns. The need for ‘community support’, and the reference of bilingual signs without ‘significant opposition’ would provide a veto which would be contrary to the purpose of the obligations under Section 75 itself and minority rights in general. It would also risk contributing to institutionalisation bias in policy-making. I would call for these sections of the draft EQIA and the policy itself to be reconsidered and removed from these providers to ensure that the policy and outcomes of the EQIA are consistent with the types of action that would make the good relations duties authoritative. Indeed, the Council's own equality scheme defines good relations as seeking to promote respect and 'accept diversity of all kinds' - in contrast, the purpose of the good relations measure mentioned in the draft EQIA is to embed a veto against linguistic diversity for those 'who do not support languages other than English.'

The Council's decision to scrutinise all decisions taken to erect a bilingual street sign would be a significant change for the Council from the normal implementation of the equality scheme. If this is a new approach from the Council, its implementation would have operational implications, for example, in all, or any, other building control applications. I ask why this approach has been applied to something that is primarily concerned with the Irish language, and if the Council has a similar process in place elsewhere, in which all applications are scrutinised?

I welcome the inclusion, in the draft EQIA, of material that refers to international standards, as they relate to minority rights, the ECRML and the FCNM. The references to the Charter could be changed to obligations under Section 7 and the specific reference to the promotion and use of Irish placenames in Section 10 (2) (g), as they relate directly to street signage. I would also urge the Council to outline and incorporate these responsibilities into the circumstances that the Council will consider in reaching a decision.

Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)

: It also appears the Council may have misapplied its equality scheme in taking a decision to conduct a full EQIA and this has further delayed the policy. The criteria for a full EQIA relate to where the Screening exercise identifies possible discriminatory detriment against a protected equality group. The consultation document, however, states that the EQIA has been triggered because the language policy is ‘contentious’ and ‘divisive’.

We foresee a risk that the ‘good relations’ duty will be misinterpreted in the practical application of the policy in a way which will thwart Irish-English bilingual signage. As has been stressed by the Equality Commission and Council of Europe Experts, a proper application of the good relations duty relates to measures to tackle prejudice and promote understanding, as well as respect and diversity. The good relations duty is not to be misinterpreted as a political veto to block equality and rights measures.

The EQIA states, however, that ‘residual discretion’ will “will ensure that second language street signs will not be erected in a manner which could undermine Good Relations at a neighbourhood level” and that signs will need to be “supported by the community in that area” and “not opposed by a significant proportion of that community”. This appears to be misinterpreting the good relations duty as a majoritarian veto, which conflicts with proper interpretation of the duty as well as minority rights in general.

The draft EQIA is published on the Council Website. It is welcome that it includes considerable material in relation the aforementioned international standards.

The primary purpose of the Section 75 statutory equality duty is to prevent ‘adverse impacts’ on equality and to better promote equality across nine protected characteristics (in summary: age, disability, sex, ethnicity, religious belief, political opinion, disability ,dependents and sexual orientation) .

The concept of ‘adverse impacts’ is similar to ‘discriminatory detriment’ on a protected characteristic and should not be misinterpreted as mere political opposition or contention over a policy.

The Equality Commission has produced the following definition of adverse impact which Belfast City Council itself has incorporated into its Equality Scheme (emphasis added):

Adverse impact

Where a Section 75 category has been affected differently by a policy and the effect is less favourable, it is known as adverse impact. If a policy has an adverse impact on a Section 75 category, a public authority must consider whether or not the adverse impact is unlawfully discriminatory. In either case a public authority must take measures to redress the adverse impact, by considering mitigating measures and/or alternative ways of delivering the policy.18

It would conflict with the purposes of the statutory duty if objections grounded in prejudice or intolerance (including sectarianism) towards a minoritized

language were institutionalised into policy making as a result of the Section 75 process.

We concur with the findings of the draft EQIA that a policy promoting and providing for bilingual signage does not constitute any adverse impacts on any Section 75 group. We also consider that the policy promotes equality.

One issue in the assessment is whether bilingual signage ‘in theory at least’ could ‘discourage access or use of certain streets’. The EQIA concludes there is no evidence of this, but that it should not be ignored in any future review. However, there is no indication as to how the Council would deal with any such evidence. The appropriate response from an EQIA would not be to curtail linguistic diversity, but to take further action to tackle intolerance and promote understanding, as this is the correct interpretation of the good relations duty. Interpreting the good relations duty:

Whilst there was not a definition of ‘good relations’ on the face of the Section 75 duty in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the same concept was subsequently legislated for in Great Britain in the Equality Act 2010, which explicitly frames the focus of the duty as “tackling prejudice and promoting understanding”.

Regarding an authoritative interpretation of ‘good relations’ in international standards, the Council of Europe has set out that that:

Promoting good relations between different groups in society entails fostering mutual respect, understanding and integration while continuing to combat discrimination and intolerance.

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, which has a statutory function to advise on the Section 75 duties, has also promoted the ‘tackling prejudice, promoting understanding’ definition in the Equality Act 2010. In addition, also drawing on legislation in Britain in guidance to NI Councils, the Equality Commission elaborates that: “Good relations can be said to exist where there is a high level of dignity, respect and mutual understanding; an absence of prejudice, hatred, hostility or harassment; a fair level of participation in society.”

The Councils' own equality scheme defines good relations as seeking to promote respect and 'embrace diversity in all its forms'.

These definitions provide a sound basis of how 'good relations' at least should be interpreted by public authorities in NI. There has, however, been significant criticism from Council of Europe treaty-bodies about the interpretation in practice of the good relations duty in Northern Ireland. The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for National Minorities has referred to interlocutor reports of the 'good relations' duty appearing "on several occasions to take priority over wider equality and minority rights initiatives, which were blocked on grounds that they would lead to 'community tensions'" and elaborated that:

This would be due to the fact that, unlike the rest of the country, Northern Ireland does not interpret the 'good relations' duty as including a duty to tackle racism, including sectarianism. Instead, the lack of proper definition allows this notion to be used rather as a 'tool' to set aside politically contentious issues, such as legislating on the Irish language, and to justify a "do-nothing" attitude, eventually based on 'perceptions' rather than objective criteria. The Advisory Committee reiterates its opinion that the concept of 'good relations' apparently continues to be substituted for the concept of intercultural dialogue and integration of society, which would include other national and ethnic minorities present in the region, and regrets that this is used to prevent access to rights by persons belonging to these minorities. [85] 22

The Committee recommended that:

The authorities should begin to implement the 'good relations' duty as provided for under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 in a manner that does not run counter to the equality duty and that does not prevent access to rights by persons belonging to all national and ethnic minorities. [89].23

At present the good relations section of the draft EQIA continues to follow a model of 'adverse impacts' on good relations. Whilst it concludes the bilingual signage policy should not constitute an adverse impact on good relations, the EQIA rather than focusing on measures to 'tackle prejudice and promote understanding' makes reference to previous consultations raising the

‘concerns’ of those ‘who do not support languages other than English’. What follows are proposals for localised ‘safeguards’ being introduced to accommodate such concerns. It appears from the next section these ‘safeguards’ would be provisions ensuring that a bilingual sign “is supported by the community in that area and is not opposed by a significant proportion of that community”.24

This requirement of ‘community support’ and bilingual signs not having significant ‘opposition’ would constitute a veto entirely at odds with both the purposes of the Section 75 duties and linguistic minority rights in general. It would also risk institutionalising prejudice in policy making. Far from good relations being interpreted as ensuring that the Council will ‘embrace diversity in all its forms’, the provision would appear to vest a veto over linguistic diversity in those ‘who do not support languages other than English.’

We would urge these sections in the draft EQIA and the policy accordingly are revised to remove these provisions and instead align the policy and EQIA conclusions on good relations with the types of actions that would be consistent with an authoritative interpretation of the good relations duty.

Equality Screening & EQIA: compliance with scheme of present EQIA

The Councils’ Equality Scheme adopts the aforementioned Equality Commission methodology of a two stage process to assess the impacts of a policy.

This is first the equality screening process, which is to take place on Council ‘policies’. If this screening process identifies ‘major adverse impacts’ the Council is then to conduct a full EQIA on the policy.

The present policy has been (appropriately) subject to equality screening. The screening was not published with the consultation documents and therefore the grounds within same that triggered the EQIA are not entirely clear.

It is concerning, however, that the draft EQIA alludes to the reasons for triggering the EQIA as being “In light of the contentious and often divisive nature” of language policy.25 This itself does not constitute an ‘adverse

impact' that would trigger an EQIA under the terms of the Councils own Equality Scheme.

Equality Screening each and every bilingual signage application

As alluded to above the proposal that each and every decision to put up a bilingual sign may be subject to its own Equality Screening would appear to be a major departure from the Councils application to date of its equality scheme. Generally screening is conducted on the Councils policies, but not necessarily each application under the terms of an existing overarching policy.

It also appears, from the residual discretion criteria, that the purpose of screening is to focus on 'good relations' 'adverse impacts'. Again, it should be noted that this concept in the legislation relates only to the equality limb of the duty and not duties on good relations. The good relations duty is also expressly subordinate to the duty to promote equality.

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STRATEGIC POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	City Region Growth Deal – update
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	This report is to provide an update to Committee on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD). Including an update on the Funding & Governance arrangements for Belfast City Council as the Lead Authority and Accountable Body for the Deal.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Note the update on the role for Belfast City Council as the Accountable body and approve the creation of a post of Project Accountant to support the financial and budget management arrangements and processes at no additional cost to the Council. • Note the update in relation to the key financial arrangements for the next phase of the deal, including the Financial Agreement (Appendix 2) with the Treasury and Department of Finance.

	• Approve the Memorandum of Understanding (attached at Appendix 1). • Note the programme overview.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	Members will be aware that following the signing of the deal, Belfast City Council (BCC) took on the role of the Accountable Body ensuring that the partnership makes decisions in accordance with all legal, financial, and administrative requirements This includes the need to put in place the financial and budget management arrangements and processes to ensure the BRCD funding is managed and accounted for appropriately. The Programme Management Office (PMO) have therefore been working with partners to formalise permanent structures and resources for the delivery of the deal and to allow BCC to carry out its role as lead authority and accountable body.
3.2	In addition, the PMO has been finalising key documents with government departments which underpin the overarching signed deal document, including the development of Contracts for Funding which will be required for each of the capital projects delivered through the Deal. An update on the development of these key funding and governance arrangements is set out below.
	Memorandum of Understanding
3.3	Members were previously updated on the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) which was developed to reflect partners' commitments to invest collectively and work collaboratively to achieve the ambitions for inclusive growth through delivery of the Deal.
3.4	Importantly the MoU commits each partner that will be a recipient of the capital funding provided through the deal to jointly fund the central team in BCC to carry out the functions required of the accountable body and lead authority, as well as additional external expertise that may be required to deliver the programme.
3.5	It also details how the partners will work collaboratively to identify and respond to the skills needs that city deal investment will create and to address the barriers to employment that might hinder ambitions for greater inclusion.
3.6	The final Memorandum of Understanding, which will sit alongside the formal deal documentation is attached at Appendix 1 for approval.
	Contracts for Funding
3.7	Before funding can flow directly to projects Contracts for Funding (previously referred to as Letters of Offer) need to be agreed between departments and the Accountable Body and between the Accountable Body and Project Sponsors. Intensive work has been ongoing over

	a considerable period with departments and partners, including significant input from BCC legal team, to develop the overarching Contract for Funding which will form the framework for individual funding agreements. The BCC legal team has also drafted the first individual funding agreement which will be with Queen's University for the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) project. Once all final clauses are agreed, and approvals are in place, back to back letters will be signed between Department of the Economy (DfE) and BCC as the Accountable Body and then BCC (as accountable body) with Queen's University. Subsequent Contracts for Funding for further projects will be developed using the same framework and agreed clauses.
	Implementation Plan and Financial Plan
3.8	The overarching deal document is supported by both an Implementation Plan and Financial Plan. The Financial Plan sets out the proposed spending profile for all the projects and the overall financial framework including stewardship, protocols and controls. The Implementation Plan provides detailed information on the projects, including key milestones, financial information and funding flows, risks and outcomes. It also forms the basis of the monitoring and reporting information required for each project. Members should note that the Department of Finance (DoF) has now approved these Plans.
	Financial Agreement
3.9	The tripartite Financial Agreement between BCC, DoF and HM Treasury sets out the financial commitments and protocols in relation to funding the BRCD. The agreement formalises arrangements between the governments and the Accountable Body that have been set-out in other deal documentation. This document, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 2 has now also been finalised and issued to DoF and UK government.
	Governance and Assurance
3.10	The PMO, with the support of colleagues in Finance and the Audit, Governance and Risk Service, has been developing a Governance & Assurance Framework which incorporates the governance structures which have worked well to date, but also builds in best practice from other deals in relation to programme management and assurance which are appropriate for this new phase of delivery. This includes monitoring and reporting arrangements required by the Accountable Body to facilitate signing of the Contracts for Funding and Payment of Claims.
3.11	Given the scale of the investment and the financial management required to fulfil its role as the accountable body the team will need to recruit a dedicated Project Accountant to support the financial and budget management arrangements to ensure that BRCD funding is managed and accounted for appropriately. This will include the receipt and administration of grant

	funding including the establishment of appropriate accounting and reporting arrangements. This post will be funded through contributions, as committed to in the MoU, and will be of no additional cost to the organisation.
	Investment Priorities
	<u>Innovation</u>
3.12	Following Ministerial and DoF approval for Outline Business Cases (OBCs) the Universities have been moving projects to the next stages of delivery. To maintain momentum and avoid the potential for delays it is vital that contracts for funding are now therefore finalised and agreed for the most advanced projects.
3.13	The Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre and Global Innovation Institute have been focused on detailed design as their projects reach the end of RIBA Stage 2 as well as initiating operational workstreams. The Institute of Research Excellence in Advanced Clinical Healthcare project is also undertaking detailed design as it moves through RIBA Stage 2 and has undertaken significant stakeholder engagement, including in relation to site specific constraints. All project governance structures are now operational, including external stakeholders on project-level implementation groups and further pump-prime recruitment is well underway.
3.14	The Studio Ulster project continues to progress through the procurement process for a works contractor, with competitive dialogue agreed as preferred way forward. Pre-Market Engagement has been completed including meetings with major film studios with NI Screen and Belfast Harbour in Los Angeles.
3.15	The Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology has now received DoF approval for its OBC. Ulster University are progressing a feasibility study to consider potential alternatives to the demolition of Northland House (driven by cost and net zero carbon agenda). Stakeholder engagement continues and discussions with Royal Victoria hospital continue to finalise equipment specifications in relation to the Living Lab element of the project.
	<u>Digital</u>
3.16	The i4c Innovation Centre project, led by Mid & East Antrim Borough Council attended Casework Committee in early March and received approval from the Economy Minister during April. The project is currently addressing feedback as it seeks DoF approval.
3.17	Information in relation to the Advanced Wireless and Challenge Fund projects, led by Belfast City Council on behalf of the BRCD partners, is included in the SMART Belfast report

	Tourism and Regeneration
3.18	As previously reported the four projects with approval for OBCs, Carrickfergus, Newry Regeneration, Bangor Waterfront and Mourne Mountain Gateway, have continued development of their projects. Engagement with the Department for Communities and the Carrickfergus project team has been ongoing to agree the project specific governance document for inclusion within the Contract for Funding.
3.19	The Gobbins has been recommended for approval following Casework in February 2022 and DfE and DoF Ministerial approval is awaited. The revised Destination Royal Hillsborough OBC is currently progressing through the OBC review process and Belfast Stories will now progress design to RIBA 2 to enable a full OBC to be developed, working towards Casework review in summer 2023.
	Infrastructure
3.20	Departmental officials have commenced preparations for the procurement phase of the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge to facilitate the detailed design and construction. It is expected that it will take approximately three and a half years to deliver the procurement, detailed design and construction phases of the project.
3.21	Work on the Public Consultation Report for Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2 is approaching final draft stage. Further development of the Outline Business Case, which will help inform selection of the preferred route, is also well advanced. DfI officials are continuing to explore potential options for funding.
3.22	Design of the Newry Southern Relief Road continues and preparation of the draft Statutory Orders, along with an Environmental Impact Assessment Report (EIAR), in advance of statutory public consultation is ongoing. Consultation with Dept. for Communities Historic Environment Division regarding the type of bridge over the shipping canal continues and the timing of a decision on the bridge type will impact the project milestones
	Employability and Skills (E&S)
3.23	Recruitment has been taking place to form an E&S Project team, supported through the investment of BRCD partners, to support the programme going forward. The first successful candidate recruited by Queen's University, is expected to take up post at the end of June.
3.24	Work has also continued on the delivery of the E&S Action Plan. Key areas of update include:

	- Funding Opportunities Working Group: The group has been tasked with beginning to identify potential collaborative projects to support the skills needs in areas aligned to the city deal investment. - Skills Assessments – Construction: A task and finish group has been established to undertake a skills assessment of the construction opportunities arising through BRCD capital investment to determine if and where skills challenges may exist. - Social Value Procurement: The social value approach for BRCD projects will follow the Strategic Investment Board new 'points-based model'. To support the integration of this requirement within relevant contracts training sessions have been delivered with Project Sponsors with nearly 50 individuals completing the training to date. Guidance material is also being developed to support contractors during the construction phase as they deliver employability and skills related social value activity. - Digital Transformation Flexible Fund: a business case has been developed to create an NI wide capital fund which will provide financial assistance to small businesses to invest in 'advanced' digital transformation. The business case is based upon an overall funding pot comprising £6m of funding ring fenced through the City & Growth Deal Complementary Fund (CF) for a cross deal digital transformation project and £1.1m of funding from DAERA earmarked to support digital transformation amongst rural businesses. If the business case is approved it is estimated that 600 businesses will be supported, accessing grant support between £5-£20k, aligned to a specific digital transformation project. - To support the delivery of the project revenue funding is required from council partners to centrally manage the delivery of the fund. The cost implication for Belfast City Council is estimated at approximately £55k per annum, the cost of which has been accounted for within existing city deal budgets. The preferred delivery model for the operation of this fund would be via an existing digital partnership (Full Fibre NI Consortium) led by Newry, Mourne & Down District Council, through which a governance model and project management team are already in place, enabling the fund to be mobilised quickly. - The draft business case has been issued to Council partners for feedback, as well as informally through Invest NI and government departments. Following consideration of feedback and the necessary agreement of partners the business case will be submitted to Invest NI for formal consideration.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.25	All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.26	The approach taken to develop the City Deal has been subject to independent equality screening and rural proofing and states that;

	'BRCD is inherently inclusive, affording an opportunity for the region to grow in a way that will benefit the economy of Northern Ireland as a whole, thereby enhancing the lives and well-being of its citizens. If during further development of the programme it becomes apparent that there may be an adverse impact on certain groups or communities then the partnership commits to carrying out further Section 75 work and including screening and EQIAs as and when appropriate.'
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 – BRCD Memorandum of Understanding Appendix 2 – BRCD Financial Agreement - **RESTRICTED**

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BRCD

Memorandum of Understanding

Delivery of the Deal

February 2022

Joint Delivery of the Belfast Region City Deal

Phase 3 - Delivery

Memorandum of Understanding

Between **Belfast City Council acting as Belfast Region City Deal Lead Authority**

And the following partners (hereinafter referred to jointly as 'the Partners' and individually as a 'Partner')

(1) Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council

(2) Ards and North Down Borough Council

(3) Belfast City Council

(4) Belfast Metropolitan College

(5) Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council

(6) Mid and East Antrim Borough Council

(7) Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

(8) Northern Regional College

(9) Southern Regional College

(10) South Eastern Regional College

(11) Queen's University Belfast

(12) Ulster University

Hereafter referred to jointly as 'the Partners' and individually as a 'Partner'.

This MoU takes effect on INSERT DATE and lasts for the duration of the BRCD Deal and Partnership

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1.0 Purpose of MoU

1.1 This MoU reflects the commitments made by Partners to work collaboratively and collectively in relation to delivery of the BRCD Programme to achieve the partners' ambitions for inclusive growth. This MoU should be read in conjunction with the formal Deal Documentation including the overall Deal Document, the Financial and Implementation Plans, the Financial Agreement, the Governance Framework and the Communications Protocol. This MoU represents the additional commitments agreed by partners beyond those formally agreed through the aforementioned documents and the requirements of Letters of Offer.

2.0 Background

2.1 The Belfast Region City Deal ('the Deal') comprises the six councils of: Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, Ards and North Down Borough Council, Belfast City Council, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, Mid and East Antrim Borough Council and Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, working in partnership with Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University, the four further education colleges, Belfast Metropolitan College, Northern Regional College, Southern Regional College and the South Eastern Regional College (collectively 'the Partners') to develop and deliver a programme of investment that delivers inclusive economic growth across the region. The programme has been developed in partnership with the UK and NI governments each of which is represented within the governance structures.

2.2 The overall ambition of the BRCD is that, through a 10-year programme of the investment, it will deliver a marked step change to the region's economic performance increasing Gross Value Added (GVA) by £400m and creating up to 20,000 new jobs.

The BRCD's ambitions for inclusive growth will be delivered through the following pillars of investment;

- **Innovation and Digital -** Achieving world leading competitive advantage in key sectors - building our innovation and digital capability - facilitating invention, commercialisation and widespread adoption as a driver of economic prosperity and increased well-being;
- **Tourism and Regeneration -** Boosting tourism and regenerating our region – creating world-class visitor attractions and investing in towns and cities to provide a year-round destination that will stand out in international markets;
- **Infrastructure -** Connecting our region - connecting people to opportunity and services through enhanced and sustainable infrastructure; and
- **Employability and Skills (E&S) -** Putting in place arrangements to enable a constant pipeline of talent to support the growth created by the BRCD investments and ensure that the right skills are available within the region to support the emerging job opportunities.

2.3 Partners are fully committed to delivering the Deal and ensuring that its economic impact is maximised and that it is well placed to leverage additional investment. Partners will continue to work to identify and build on the local strengths and priorities that will help overcome some of the challenges facing the region, identifying new and more collaborative ways of working that will deliver inclusive growth for the benefit of the Belfast region, and by extension, the wider NI economy.

Phase 1 – Developing the Proposition

2.4 During Phase 1 a robust analysis of the key competitive strengths and economic challenges facing the region helped to inform the thematic priorities of the Deal and the content of the economic investment programme. The BRCD was allocated £350m of capital investment by the Treasury through its Autumn Budget statement of 2018. The NI Executive confirmed that this would be match funded by an additional £350m. Participating councils and universities have together committed a further £150m to the Deal and FE colleges have agreed to support the E&S Programme through the alignment of partner resources and plans to meet the skills needs emerging from the capital investment. Combined with direct investment from the private sector the total Deal investment package will be significantly in excess of £1 billion.

Phase 2 – Delivery Development

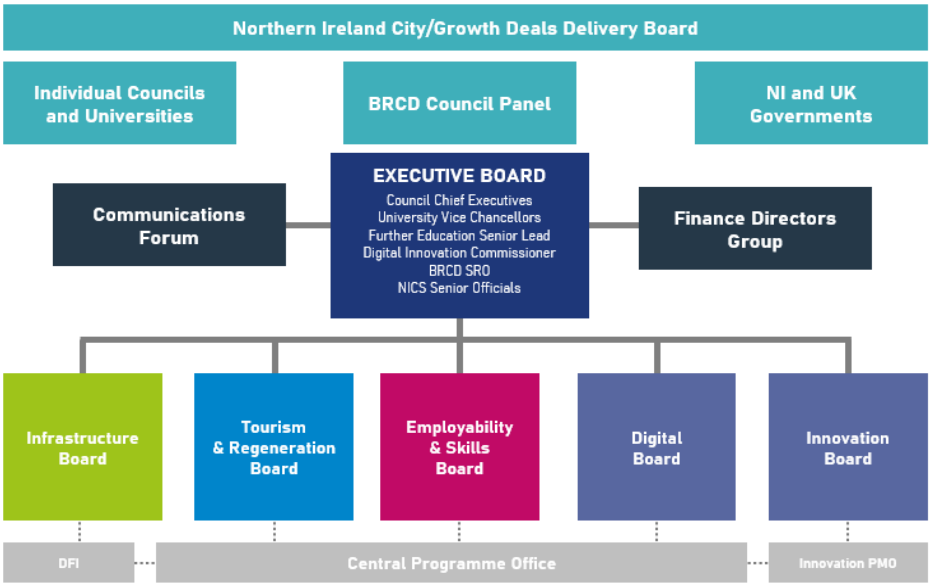
2.5 Following ratification of a Heads of Terms document in respect of the aforementioned Proposition, the Partners completed Phase 2, a detailed programme of work in preparation for delivery. This included the development of business cases for all projects, agreeing the programme of investment aligned with the budget envelope, obtaining approval for business cases for the most advanced projects and agreeing a final deal document, which commits all partners to full implementation of the deal including the specific financial commitments made for each project. It also included an Employability & Skills Proposition outlining how the partners will work collaboratively to maximise the employment and skills opportunities arising from the capital investment programme. The 'Deal Document' which is critical to the release of funding was signed in December2021.

Phase 3 – Delivery of overall Programme of Investment

2.6 This MoU brings together partners' arrangements for working together to deliver the BRCD Programme. Partners will of course also have direct responsibility for the delivery of their individual projects in accordance with the approved business cases and will therefore also put in place the resources necessary to support such delivery. In addition, and reflecting the added value that the city deal process can offer, partners will continue to build upon their commitments to collaborate in a wide range of areas beyond the BRCD.

3.0 Governance Arrangements

3.1 A diagram illustrating the BRCD governance structure is included below. It builds on the structures already in place and comprises roles for a BRCD Council Panel, the individual Councils and Universities, an Executive Board and Pillar Boards to support the continued development and effective delivery of each of the pillars of the deal.



3.2 The 'Executive Board' for the BRCD comprises Council Chief Executives, University Vice-Chancellors, the Chair of the E&S Board, a senior Lead from the FE sector, the Chair of the Digital Board, the SRO for the Deal and observers from the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The Executive Board is supported by five Pillar Boards. These represent the strands of capital investment; Tourism & Regeneration, Innovation and Digital, and Infrastructure, and an Employability & Skills Board which, through oversight of delivery of the agreed E&S Proposition, will support the emerging skills needs and job opportunities created through the investment.

3.3 Individual Councils and University Partners will be responsible for the delivery of the approved capital projects and be required to approve decisions on their own proposed investments in BRCD projects, whilst remaining in line with agreed change management processes.

3.4 Belfast City Council will act as the Accountable Body in relation to the Deal, ensuring that the Partnership makes decisions in accordance with all legal, financial, and administrative requirements. As the Accountable Body all capital grant funding for BRCD projects (with the exception of funding for infrastructure projects) from Government will be channeled through Belfast City Council which will have the authority to hold to account any of the members of the bodies within the governance structure or projects, should they present a risk to the overall programme. Belfast City Council's responsibilities in respect of its Accountable Body function are contained within the documents associated with the signed Deal.

3.5 Belfast City Council is the Lead Authority in relation to the Deal. As Lead Authority it will carry out a range of functions to support and enable regional partnership working. This will include supporting the partnership and its governance arrangements, employing the PMO and providing the necessary administrative, professional and technical support required to ensure effective delivery of the Deal.

3.6 Belfast City Council, as a recipient of funding, will also exist as an individual partner to the MoU and will be subject to the same conditions as all partners.

3.7 The activities delivered through this MoU will directly contribute towards the vision for the City Deal;

"Inclusive economic growth that delivers more and better jobs, a positive impact on the most deprived communities and a balanced spread of benefits across the region".

4.0 Delivering the Deal – Partner Obligations

4.1 All partners to this agreement will act in the best interests of the Belfast Region in delivering the Deal. Partners agree to comply with the codes of conduct of their respective organisations and the values, principles and aspirations of the Belfast Region City Deal Partnership as contained within the Deal Documentation and this MoU. This MoU outlines the rationale and principles that form the basis of the mutual partnership agreement between the City Deal partners. It sets out an agreed approach for the Lead Authority and BRCD partners to achieve the intended goals and outcomes of the City Deal programme.

4.2 This MoU brings together partners' arrangements for working together to deliver the Programme and the wider ambitions of the partners. The formal, relationship between partners and the governments is detailed in the signed Deal Document and Governance Framework, Implementation Plan, Financial Plan, Financial Agreement, Communications Protocol and associated Letters of Offer. The additional obligations outlined in this MoU are intended to capture the supporting activity that will contribute to achievement of the overall ambitions of the programme and to provide clarity and confidence in the partnership arrangements. Needs emerging from the BRCD investment programme across the lifetime of the City Deal may require changes to ways of working and this will be considered as part of a regular process of review and its resulting work programme.

4.3 It is recognised that partners have already demonstrated their commitment to the BRCD, including by investing significant financial and people resources at risk, to support both the development of this programme and the individual projects that they plan to deliver.

Shared Commitments

4.4 All 12 signatories to this MoU commit to working collaboratively in the following areas to ensure successful delivery and maximise the impact of the BRCD Programme. Partners agree to contribute to and participate as required in the following:

(i) Partnership Working:

Delivery of the Deal is predicated upon a strong partnership structure and requires a commitment from partners to work collaboratively, aligning resources and interventions as appropriate in response to the opportunities arising. By continuing to work in partnership we will be better positioned to contribute to more inclusive future growth and to act as an exemplar of what is possible and a catalyst for improvements in the wider NI economy. Partners agree that stronger collaboration over the longer term will enhance our ability to cut through traditional boundaries as we work together to shape priorities and to respond to challenges which can be more effectively addressed in partnership. To this end Partners agree to:

- Advocate and represent the interests of the BRCD to include positively profiling its activities

- Work collaboratively and proactively engage through BRCD governance structures
- Align resources and/or interventions to support the delivery of the BRCD programme
- Identify and respond to opportunities for further collaborative working aligned to the priorities of the BRCD programme e.g. complementary funding opportunities
- Provide robust, accurate and timely information, including via formal monitoring and reporting systems, to enable the partnership to operate effectively

(ii) Inclusive Growth:

To realise the BRCD's Inclusive Growth and Sustainability ambitions, ensuring that people living in the Belfast Region are primed to benefit from the jobs emerging, Partners commit to maximise the contribution to inclusive growth within their organisations, including through:

- **Procurement:** Integrating social value and sustainability considerations, where appropriate, through their procurement of works, goods and services. Partners commit to exploring opportunities to adopt consistent approaches to social value and sustainability through their future procurement activities. Partners will work together with government to agree a minimum standard in relation to the BRCD programme of investment, though will continue to be free to do more. This will help deliver wider inclusive growth impact across a range of areas including; creating employment/work experience opportunities targeting BRCD priority client groups, school engagement activities, creation of new apprenticeship opportunities etc. It will also contribute to delivering the climate change objectives of the partners.

- **Human Resources:** Working collaboratively on agreed HR priorities identified as part of the BRCD Employability & Skills Programme. As significant employers within the region Partners commit to harness their collective potential to further deliver upon our inclusive growth commitments. Partners agree to work collaboratively on agreed HR priorities which may include public sector apprenticeships, school engagement activities, pre-recruitment training programmes etc. Many of the areas highlighted will directly align to the interventions proposed as part of the BRCD Employability & Skills Programme, offering a clear demonstration of a collaborative approach.

- **Equality and Good Relations**

  Independent expertise was commissioned to conduct an equality and rural needs screening of the Belfast Region City Deal programme processes during Phase I of the City Deal development. This screening exercise recognised the overall intent of the City Deal programme to improve inclusivity. The Programme is committed to ensuring it continues to deliver for equality both at the individual project level and for the Programme as a whole. Commissioning of additional specialist support may be required in this regard.

  Partners agree to remain vigilant to ensure that equality is properly considered throughout the life of the Programme in order to address potential adverse impacts and to highlight opportunities for further positive impact, encouraging project teams to maximise the scope of these opportunities where possible.

(iii) Communication and engagement arrangements

All BRCD Programme communication with the public in respect of press, media and marketing will be coordinated and managed centrally by the Communications Forum and communication and engagement will continue to take place in accordance with the agreed Communications Protocol. Individual partners are expected to communicate within their own organisations and to maintain open communication channels with all other partners within this MoU. Communication for individual projects will be coordinated by the lead Partner Organisation.

Partners will report regularly on project engagement and communication and through the Communications Forum will agree programme level plans for public communication and strategic engagement with industry and other stakeholders.

(iv) Programme Management Office / Accountable Body

A centralised resource is required to support Phase 3. Given the BRCD is a 10-year Investment Programme, Partners recognise that appropriate full-time resources now need to be put in place to oversee the delivery of the programme over this period and in particular to carry out the functions of both:

- the lead authority and,
- the accountable body.

This includes a Programme Office as recommended under DoF guidance for programme management and will be an extension of the arrangements in place during Phase 2. The partners agree, in line with arrangements set out below, to jointly fund the central team to carry out the functions required of the accountable body and lead authority which will include, at a minimum:

- Overall programme management of all aspects of the deal
- Financial management required to fulfill its role as the accountable body in relation to the receipt and administration of grant funding including the establishment of appropriate accounting and reporting arrangements
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on projects and programmes
- Programme assurance
- Ongoing support to the BRCD governance structures including the Council Panel, Executive Board etc.
- Liaising with UK govt and NI Executive both through formal NI City Deal structures and BRCD specific arrangements

The Programme Office will work with partners to ensure, so far as practicable, that the functions are delivered in a manner that complements the project management arrangements established by partners

In addition, there will be an ongoing requirement for specialist technical support relating to the Programme in the areas of Governance and Assurance, Digital and Communication and Engagement.

The costs for this Programme resource will be shared between all partners who will contribute up to a maximum level as agreed by the Executive Board and approved by all partners.

Any underspend on the agreed level of contribution will be deducted from the contribution of partners for the following year.

Belfast City Council will provide legal, procurement, HR and communication advice in relation to the Programme from within the existing resources of the Council.

The requirements for the level of specialist or technical advice, as outlined above, will be agreed by the Executive Board, normally in November of each financial year.

Where it is agreed that specialist support is required, the BRCD PMO acting on behalf of the Executive Board will;

- procure, appoint and enter into contracts with service providers
- provide the resources required to run the procurement process
- evaluate tenders
- manage the contracts
- ensure that contracted outputs and outcomes are delivered
- ensure that funding is used in accordance with the contract for service and
- report to the Executive Board on progress of any contracted work

The Partners agree to abide by the decision as to the successful Tender. The Lead Authority will be responsible for paying the costs of the work to the Contractor(s).

As colleges receive no capital funding they will not be expected to contribute to any costs of the Accountable Body and will only be expected to contribute to PMO costs directly relating to the E&S programme.

(v) Data Sharing – GDPR

Development of data sharing agreements will be considered on an ongoing basis between partners as required.

5.0 The Approach to Employability and Skills

5.1 As an underpinning pillar of the BRCD programme of investment, the BRCD Employability and Skills proposition offers a key mechanism to enable the employment benefits of the city deal to be maximised. The BRCD Employability & Skills Proposition (approved by the Executive Board in July 2021) sets out how the partners will work collaboratively to identify and respond to the skills needs that city deal investment will create and to address the barriers to employment that might hinder ambitions for greater inclusion. This section of the MoU reflects Partners' stated commitment to support and deliver the Proposition and associated E&S work programmes that may emerge.

5.2 With a specific focus on the job and skills requirements originating from the BRCD Programme of investment, and the sectors within which they operate, Partners will develop and deliver collaborative interventions to prepare the pipeline of skills and talent required to support the city deal by:

(i) identifying the skills needs that it will create and helping to shape and inform solutions that will respond to these needs and;

(ii) addressing the barriers to employment that might hinder our ambitions for greater inclusion.

5.3 This will be undertaken in the context of the wider employability and skills environment, integrating with existing and emerging employability and skills eco-system, including local and regional structures associated with the Skills Council and Labour Market Partnerships.

5.4 The BRCD will support, enhance and contribute to arrangements emerging through the creation of Employability NI, Local Labour Market Partnerships (LLMPs) and the NI Skills Strategy for more joined-up employability and skills planning. The NI Skills Council will be the key mechanism to capture the skills and employability needs emerging across all NI City/Growth Deals and will ensure collaborative working with the NICS departments which have responsibility for the policy, delivery and investment of skills.

5.5 The approach to E&S as agreed by Partners through the E&S Proposition are:

- A sub-regional **Employability and Skills Board**[1] to provide leadership and co-ordination and enable planning and co-design for BRCD projects; to help inform delivery of employability and skills provision across organisational and funding boundaries and encourage joined-up employability and skills provision that reflects employer and resident need.
- **An E&S Programme** of partnership initiatives drawn from existing employability and skills resources and complemented by new interventions as needs emerge and funding is secured. These will be designed to add value, address gaps in provision, enhance existing delivery and respond to new opportunities. The Programme will reflect the focus of BRCD investment projects and the expected job creation in priority high value and growth sectors.
- **Promotion of inclusive growth** through the creation of socially inclusive employment opportunities across

[1] As illustrated on the diagram in Section 2

the BRCD investment projects and areas of joint activity agreed by the partners, influencing behaviours and practices. We will also actively engage and support geographical hotspots of deprivation and target client groups. E&S activities will be agreed through an annual action planning process, which will enable flexibility whilst also ensuring that activities are defined over a specific timeframe.

5.6 The E&S Programme has been designed to be agile and to align with the overall BRCD investment programme and wider labour market conditions. The overriding principle involves Partners aligning existing investments to support the delivery of BRCD E&S priorities, supplemented where need is identified by proposals for new interventions requiring additional investment.

5.7 Each partner in receipt of BRCD funding accepts responsibility for the development and implementation of plans to ensure that the required skills are in place both to deliver BRCD investments and to ensure that the stated benefits are realised. The partners recognise that this can be achieved most effectively through a collaborative approach to skills delivery.

5.8 In addition, the BRCD partners are committed to working together to leverage extensive new employability and skills opportunities, through the application of social value clauses within the contracts signed with industry partners to deliver the £1billion programme.

5.9 Partners will seek to add value to the core E&S offer by potential interventions where the need for new and innovative approaches is identified

5.9 Shared Commitments for Delivery of E&S Programme

All signatories to this Deal commit to working collaboratively in the following areas to ensure successful delivery and maximise the impact of the E&S Programme. Partners agree to contribute to and participate as required in the following:

(i) Delivering the Employability & Skills Programme:

Across the timeframe of the city deal, investment of up to 20,000 new and better jobs are expected to be created. To prepare a pipeline of skills in response to this opportunity the BRCD partners agree to:

- **Participate in joint annual action planning process** by sharing relevant organisational plans, contributing to the development of annual priorities for the E&S programme and aligning relevant partner resources and programmes as required. Partners will update and refresh the E&S work programme through an annual joint planning process to ensure its continued relevance and ability to add value.

- **Identify opportunities to realign existing resources and/or programmes of intervention** to the skills needs arising from the BRCD investments and within associated priority sectors. A number of priority interventions have been identified as core contributors to the employability and skills programmes e.g., Apprenticeships, Digital Futures etc. Partners' contribution to the Employability and Skills programme will include, but will not be restricted to, these interventions. As part of a joint action planning process, Partners will identify planned activities that align to the priorities of the BRCD and report on these through agreed reporting arrangements. As the BRCD programme progresses, there will be greater clarity around employment needs and how they might be met through existing provision. Where gaps in provision, or concerns as to the level of provision, are identified, we will collectively explore options for further investment.

(ii) Supporting the E&S Partnership:

Delivery of the Employability and Skills Proposition is predicated upon a strong partnership structure that connects and responds to the needs arising from the BRCD capital investment programme. This will require a commitment from partners (and wider stakeholders) to work collaboratively, aligning resources and interventions as appropriate in response to the opportunities arising. To this end Partners agree to:

- **Provide appropriate representation from within their organisations to the E&S Board** and to actively support the functions of the Board, as formally agreed through the BRCD Governance Framework.

- **Advocate and represent the interests of the BRCD within the wider Employability and Skills eco-system,** to include positively profiling the associated activities of the pillar and advocating for investment in areas of identified need/gaps in provision aligned to the BRCD investment projects and associated priority sectors.

- **Proactively identify and communicate opportunities for collaborative working** to include identification of funding opportunities, synergy with wider skill planning/development work etc.

(iii) Resourcing the Employability & Skills Unit[2]:

BRCD Partners will support the establishment of a centralised E&S Unit within the BRCD PMO (through financial contributions or 'in-kind' staffing resources as agreed directly with partners). This shared resource will underpin

[2] Specific details of resourcing arrangements will be agreed outside of this MoU. The commitment outlined here is therefore 'in principle'.

the work of the E&S Pillar, support the E&S Board, work collaboratively across the investment pillars and projects and; facilitate collaboration between partners. Partners also agree to supplement the team as required through representation on task and finish groups or to inform specific development tasks e.g. funding applications etc. Where identified, how funding opportunities are taken forward will depend on the subject matter and will be decided on a case-by-case basis. The proposed approach will be agreed by the E&S Board and approved by the EB.

(iv) Labour Market Intelligence:

An intelligence-led approach will underpin the priorities and delivery of the BRCD Employability and Skills Programme. A wealth of data sets are already available across the partnership and Partners agree to share relevant intelligence with the E&S Unit to help inform the prioritisation, development and targeting of the E&S programme. A central repository of data - comprising BRCD project level data and wider labour market demand and supply intelligence - will be created by the E&S Unit. Partners also commit to assist in the development of any bespoke research required for the BRCD investment programme to inform its targeting, facilitating access to key stakeholders i.e. employer etc.

(v) Promoting the Opportunities:

A central communication and marketing campaign will be undertaken to complement the work of the E&S pillar and the associated activities of the city deal partners. A centralised web platform will offer visibility on the range of BRCD opportunities and partner interventions that will support individuals and businesses to obtain the employability and skills needed to access these opportunities. It will also promote positive case studies to stimulate demand and highlight career potential in priority sectors. City Deal partners commit to supporting E&S communication activity by promoting the alignment of interventions to the city deal programme and by supplying content (e.g. participant case studies, role models etc.) where applicable.

(vi) Reporting & Evaluating Impact:

Partners agree to report progress on E&S activity related to the E&S Proposition for which they are responsible. Reporting and monitoring arrangements will be defined in association with Partners to create effective, streamlined mechanisms. Partners will support activities designed to evaluate the impact of interventions and activities delivered. A monitoring and reporting cycle will be agreed, and partners will be kept abreast of progress through an annual engagement event. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the progress of the employability and skills activity will take account of any future arrangements agreed for the BRCD at a Programme level including the overall Benefits Management Plan.

5.10 Commitments specific to FE and HE Partners

(vii) Skills Planning (FE Colleges & University Partners)

By assessing and future-proofing skills provision, Further and Higher Education Partners have a critical role to ensure that skills provision aligns to the skills needs emerging from BRCD investments and the associated priority sectors and that they are available in the right areas at the right time. FE and HE partners therefore agree to support skills assessment and planning to:

- **Develop an understanding about the skills needs associated within BRCD investment** and within linked priority sectors/sub-sectors;
- **Assess the extent to which existing skills pathways are aligned to support known skill needs** (both technically and in terms of scale). This will include assessment of skill pathways from an inclusive perspective ensuring progressive pathways exist from lower to higher level skills;
- **Co-design new skills and pathways** in areas where the need is identified;
- **Advocate for new investment** in skill areas where the need is identified and engage through appropriate structures associated with the NI Skills Strategy.
- **Inform priority areas for skills planning** through horizon scanning activity linked to the BRCD investment programme, known employer skill needs and labour market intelligence. Specific areas of focus will be agreed through the BRCD annual action planning process and the E&S Board. Skills planning activity will be undertaken through an agile task and finish project approach, framed around FE and HE partners with input from wider stakeholders (employers, Invest NI etc) as and when required. Skills planning activity related to the BRCD Programme will be coordinated by the E&S Team and agreed with FE and HE partners.

5.11 Commitments specific to Council Partners

Through its Employability NI Programme the Department for Communities has committed to work in partnership with local councils and others, through LMPs, to better co-ordinate, deliver and co-design employability interventions and ensure that provision is targeted to specific areas of need. This reflects councils' increasing remit in supporting unemployed and economically inactive people.

Responding to this evolving remit, Councils, through LMPs, have committed to lead on the delivery of the "Skills for Inclusion" element of the E&S Proposition which focuses on connecting local residents to entry level employment opportunities and addressing barriers to employment. Through these LMPs (and wider economic development programmes) Councils will work alongside BRCD partners, to align activity to reflect both local needs and the BRCD priorities to:

- Create awareness of and access to BRCD opportunities;
- Focus on supporting unemployed people (including those furthest from the labour market) to move closer to and into employment;
- Deliver employer led approaches through employment academies and new innovative programme;
- Enable inclusive growth by stimulating employers to create new and innovative pathways into priority sectors.

The E&S Unit within the PMO will share intelligence relevant to opportunities emerging through the BRCD and its associated priority sectors and will, where appropriate, help to co-ordinate activities across LMPs. Partner councils will ensure that city deal priorities are incorporated into their local delivery plans to ensure the necessary pipeline of talent is in place to align to city deal opportunities and will share information on progress to the E&S Unit.

6.0 Principles for Collaboration

All partners are responsible for the implementation and delivery of their individual BRCD projects. In addition, the following principles will guide activities and arrangements for working together, in the spirt of partnership, for delivery of the overall programme:

Partnership	Commit to working in partnership to ensure that activities are delivered and actions taken; learn from each other and develop effective working practices, work collaboratively to identify solutions, eliminate duplication of effort, mitigate risk and reduce costs;
Leadership	Recognise that effective leadership is required to deliver the vision of the BRCD**;**
Consensus	Recognise that coordinated solutions are required to respond effectively to the challenges facing the region;
Interdependencies	Understand and observe all obligations in relation to decision making and delivery;
Integration	Be open to and initiate opportunities to complement and maximise programme benefits through integration;
Commitment	Understand the responsibility to appropriately resource the programme to ensure its successful delivery;
Transparency	Facilitate and contribute to open decision making;
Communicate	Contribute to effective two-way communication and share concerns and relevant information within and outside the partnership in a timely way;
Adapting	Focus on solutions to address unplanned events;
Learning	Share experiences and learning for mutual benefit to achieve full potential;
Accountability	Take on, manage and account to each other for performance of the respective roles and responsibilities set out in this MoU;
Timeliness	Recognise the time-critical nature of the Programme and respond accordingly to requests for support;
Confidentiality	Treat confidential information as confidential not to be shared outside of the Programme without prior agreement.

7.0 Terms of Agreement

- **Status of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**

This MoU is not intended to be legally binding, and no legal obligations or legal rights shall arise between the Parties from this MoU. Partners will act in accordance with the MoU as a basis for delivering a common approach to delivery of the BRCD Programme. It will commence upon signature by all partners and will remain in effect for the duration of the BRCD Programme, subject to annual review by the PMO or on request by any Partner. Partners enter into the MoU intending to honour its obligations and agree to do nothing that *cuts across* the statutory responsibilities of other signatories. Partners enter into the MoU intending to honour their responsibilities.

- **Charges and liabilities**

Except as otherwise agreed, Partners agree to bear any costs or expenses incurred in complying with the obligations of this MoU. If a Partner receives any formal inquiry, complaint, claim or threat of action from a third party in relation to the Deal (including, but not limited to, claims made by a supplier), the matter shall be referred to the Executive Board promptly.

- **Dispute, Review and Variation**

Any disagreement arising from the interpretation of this MoU should be considered within the spirit implicit in the cooperation arrangements. Partners agree that timely negotiation of disputes will ensure stability and minimise risks to programme delivery.

Should any dispute arise between the parties, then that dispute will first be referred to the appropriate management structure within the organisations concerned. If the dispute is not settled within 14 days of such referral, it shall be referred to the respective Chief Executive/Vice Chancellor/Principal of the organisations.

If the dispute is still not settled within 14 days of this referral, either party may refer it for Mediation by a Mediator agreed by the Parties, or nominated by the Law Society of Northern Ireland in the absence of agreement.

Nothing in this MoU should prevent the making of further arrangements to meet specific exceptional needs between any combination of Partners should the MoU fall short of what is required.

The MoU will be reviewed at agreed intervals and may only be varied through the mutual written agreement of all Partners. A review at any time may be arranged through the PMO.

Partners also recognise that any identified need to revise the MoU in the light of future developments should be approved by the Executive Board in the first instance.

- **Term and Termination**

This MoU shall commence on the date of signature by all Partners and shall expire on completion of delivery of the Belfast Region City Deal or on such a date as agreed by the Executive Board. By signing this MoU Partners confirm that they have secured their own internal approvals to the conditions outlined and agree to be bound by its terms.

Signatories

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

Document is Restricted

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Belfast City Council

Subject:	Employability Update
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Christine Sheridan, Head of Human Resources

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	The Council's commitments to Inclusive Growth were published in March 2020. The document contained actions that Belfast City Council would progress over the next two years, including actions relating to the role of the Council as an employer. We recognise that as a civic leader and large employer in Belfast we can and should set a strong example for others in driving best practice around employment.
1.2	Through the Inclusive Growth Strategy, the Council is committed to providing inclusive recruitment opportunities and to improving participation in employment for under-represented groups by breaking down barriers to employment. This report provides an update on progress to date to support the Inclusive Growth Strategy.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Note the progress to date in relation to the employment commitments in the Inclusive Growth Strategy.

3.0	**Main report**
3.1	To meet our employment commitments in the Inclusive Growth Strategy we have completed the following key actions. • We have reviewed our employability and skills community outreach and engagement work in conjunction with key partner organisations and made recommendations to focus resources on agreed inclusive growth cohorts; ➢ Residents not in employment ➢ Residents with low skills levels ➢ Young people not in education, employment or training, ➢ In work low earning individuals • We have identified a number of planned recruitment campaigns which support our Inclusive Growth aims. • We have committed to ring fencing suitable entry level positions, to the four inclusive growth cohorts and providing additional support through pre-recruitment training programmes.
	Job Start Scheme
3.2	At its meeting on 5 October 2021, CMT agreed the Council's participation in the DfC funded Job Start Scheme. The scheme is designed to support young people facing additional employment challenges due to the impact of Covid-19. It has helped to create job opportunities for 16–24-year-olds by funding positions with employers across all sectors, for a period of six months, increasing to nine months for those who meet additional criteria (i.e., young people facing multiple barriers).
3.3	Corporate HR along with colleagues in Employability and Skills worked together on this project to recruit and appoint nine young people to temporary roles on 28 March 2022 across the following Council departments: • City and Organisational Strategy • The Office of the Chief Executive • Place and Economy Department • Legal and Civic Services.
3.4	Four of the young people face multiple barriers to employment and secured a 9-month placement. All are progressing well and while there have been some "settling in" issues, line managers, Corporate HR and the Employability and Skills team continue to work with these young people to ensure ongoing support, encouragement and skills development. One young person has already gone on to secure permanent employment. Staff and

	residents will be able to read about the success of this project in the June edition of City Matters.
3.5	It has been agreed with DfC that four more young people who were reserve candidates can be offered temporary roles at Belfast Zoo. It is anticipated that these young people, if still available, will start their employment by mid-June.
3.6	Under the Job Start Scheme, DfC fund participating organisations for 25 hours per week at the national minimum wage. Within BCC Job Start participants are paid the actual rate for the job role and this is funded by the employing departments.
	Ring fencing of vacancies to the long term unemployed.
	General Operative
3.7	In previous years when recruiting for generic roles with multiple vacancies, a number of vacancies have been ring fenced to the long term employed and potential applicants provided with support and guidance to prepare for the application process through a pre-recruitment and training programme.
3.8	In April with support from the Employability and Skills Unit and Workforce Training (one of the organisations contracted to deliver employment academies on behalf of the Council), a number of general operative posts were ringfenced to the long term unemployed. A pre-recruitment and training programme to support applicants facing particular barriers to employment was delivered and there was extensive engagement with employability organisations across the city and in particular with disability organisations and the women's sector.
3.9	Seven participants successfully completed the programme and have been recommended for appointment. Pre employment checks are underway, with appointments to be made as soon as these have been completed.
	Business Support Clerks
3.10	A recruitment campaign for Business Support Clerks is imminent and 25% of the permanent Business Support Clerk (BSC) vacancies (approximately 10) will be ring fenced to the long term unemployed. A two week pre-recruitment and training programme will be delivered to around 20 participants nominated from employment organisations across the city. An extensive engagement exercise with employability organisations across the city is

	planned and in particular with disability organisations and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) organisations. **Other employment academies**
3.11	Employability & Skills have also been working with HR colleagues in CNS to deliver the following Employment and Upskilling Academies for BCC as an employer: • Community Services Employment Academy to encourage and support people to apply for hard-to-fill community centre posts, with 16 people currently completing this academy in preparation for recruitment timeframes. • Transport Upskilling Academy for 20 OSS staff to gain their Category C (lorry driving) licence with the aim of gaining a better job. The plan here is to support an additional 20 staff. • Scoping and planning other academies for hard-to-fill posts such as Category C and Category C+E.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.12	There are no financial implications to this report.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
3.13	Corporate HR will work closely with external employability organisations and other partners including the ECNI, to ensure equality of opportunity and alignment to our inclusive growth aspirations. Employability outreach will be targeted at people who face multiple barriers to employment.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	None

STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Delivering the Smart Belfast urban innovation framework
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources
Contact Officer:	Deborah Colville, City Innovation Manager Mark McCann, City Innovation programme lead

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	To provide Members with feedback on the public consultation on the new Smart Belfast urban innovation framework (2022 to 2025); and to set out the key actions in the first year delivery plan 2022/2023.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked: 1. Note the consultation feedback on the Smart Belfast urban innovation framework. 2. Note the main actions for Year 1 (2022 to 2023). 3. Approve the procurement of the pilot citizen capacity building programme (CODI). 4. Agree the development of the 'Augment the City' challenge programme 5. Note the ongoing Advanced Wireless Innovation programme

	6. Note progress on the Belfast Region Innovation Challenge Fund programme 7. Note progress on the Urban Data programme
3.0	**Main report**
	Consulting on the Smart Belfast urban innovation framework
3.1	Following approval by Members at December's SPR committee meeting, the City Innovation Team have been publicly consulting on the draft 'Smart Belfast' urban innovation framework.
3.2	The framework sets out a number of actions, enablers and activities which together are designed to make it easier for the city to exploit digital technologies to better address major urban challenges while at the same time supporting innovation by our SME community. The framework also seeks to maximise forthcoming funding opportunities, including the Belfast Region City Deal investments.
3.3	The framework identifies the Belfast 'Smart District' (covering the city centre area) as key to this approach. It will act as a place where the Council and its partners can directly develop and test real-world innovative policies, interventions and new commercial models in a supportive environment.
3.4	The public consultation ran from 18 January to 15 March 2022. It included presentations to over 150 people across sectors, and an online survey on the Council's Your Say' platform promoted via the media and other communication channels. The consultation web page received 837 visitors and 37 people completed the survey. 78% of responses were submitted by individuals and 22% by organisations.
3.5	The majority of responses supported the core elements of the framework: • 65% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the eight supporting pillars of Belfast's urban innovation ecosystem. • 60% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the seven key enablers for the successful delivery of the Belfast Smart District. • 60% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the Smart District project criteria. • 63% definitely agreed or somewhat agreed with the seven challenge focus areas in the Smart District.
3.6	A significant minority of respondents disagreed with the use of digital technology in general in the city and view it as intrusive. They have concerns around data privacy, surveillance, cybersecurity and whether digital infrastructure in general is safe. This may reflect a lack of knowledge and an uncertainty in wider society about the speed and ubiquity of new

	technologies impacting our lives and our city. As a civic leader this is something the Council and its partners need to engage on proactively with residents and communities.
3.7	Other respondents noted the excellent opportunities that exist to harness urban innovation in Belfast and its potential to transform our economy and to also contribute to the city's wider ambition over the coming decade. A number pointed out that digital disruption was already being felt in the city and that leaders and institutions had an important role to play in responding proactively to digital challenges and opportunities.
3.8	Feedback from Elected Members was very supportive of the aims of the framework, and the plans for the 'Smart District' as a catalyst for urban innovation and for economic transformation. Members did note the need to ensure close links between the work taking place in the Smart District and its impact on communities and businesses elsewhere in the city particularly those living close to the centre.
3.9	The three-month public consultation phase was the culmination of a twelve-month phase of extensive engagement with local businesses, government bodies, academic institutions, charities and other city stakeholders, supported by BABLE, Fraunhofer IAO, Fraunhofer FOKUS, and Eindhoven Brainport. This wider engagement activity included five workshops with 176 participants and detailed interviews with 120 stakeholders.
3.10	Officers are now working to incorporate the findings from the consultation, and from further engagement with Elected Members and across council departments, to complete a final published version of the framework. This will be presented at the September SP&R Committee meeting prior to a public launch.
	The Smart District project portfolio for 2022/2023
3.11	Projects and activities for the first year of the framework have been developed within the context of the Smart District and are designed to stimulate collaborative innovation activity with public and private investment that can stimulate new ideas and solutions for the city's core challenges. Challenge areas where the District can make a significant contribution include: - Re-imagining the future of our 'high street' - Supporting the visitor and tourism experience - Supporting healthy urban neighbourhoods - Contributing to sustainable multi-modal travel and supporting the energy transition to zero carbon

- Building citizen/community capacity and skills to navigate the opportunities and challenges of our data-driven society and economy.
- Generating opportunities for our SME community to invest in R&D and innovation opportunities
- Supporting research excellence in our universities by providing greater opportunities for social impact.

The key project priorities for the first year are:

Citizen Office for Digital Innovation

3.12 Based on the experience of delivering 'Smart Belfast' and learning from other places (such as Dublin, Barcelona, and Portland) the team have identified the importance of pro-active engagement and capacity-building with city residents, community groups, officials and elected members on the impact of digital innovation. This is also something confirmed during the engagement phase on the current framework particularly in the relation to the Smart District.

3.13 With the right support in place citizens are better able to collaborate with researchers, public officials, and private sector innovators on the co-design of projects that exploit innovative digital technologies to address important urban challenges. Conversely, cities that do not put this foundational work are finding it increasing difficult to build the necessary understanding and trust amongst citizens to deliver innovative solutions. There is strong evidence[1] that scepticism of digital tech is having an impact on its use in supporting new solutions in health care, mobility, and urban design - and that this scepticism has to be actively challenged.

3.14 The 'Citizen Office for Digital Innovation' (CODI) is a capacity building programme designed to support the citizen in a digitally enabled world – with an initial focus on the implementation of the Smart District. This support would range from supporting people to engage in data projects to improve health outcomes, through to understanding how Internet of Things and sensors can better understand local air quality or manage traffic problems.

3.15 CODI will be part of the city's wider 'skills escalator' offering those who participate not only the chance to shape Smart District project, but also encouraging interested individuals into more formal skills and training programmes.

[1] https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/when-billboards-stare-back-how-cities-can-reclaim-the-digital-public-space/
https://dtpr.helpfulplaces.com
https://digitalrightsbarcelona.org

3.16	The City Innovation team plan to work with local delivery partners to design and test a pilot version of the capacity programme with local communities starting in autumn 2022 and completing by the end of March 2023. The learning from the pilot would then shape the content of a future 'open source' capacity programme; test its core modules; and help establish a commissioning model. The results would also be used to inform future business cases for a more ambition programme.
3.17	Running alongside this pilot will be a strand of work focused primarily on public sector officials aimed at supporting the greater adoption of digital across government. Innovation often involves a degree of risk-taking and experimentation – something that can be difficult to manage within a public organisation.
3.18	Members are asked to approve £70,000 procurement for the design and delivery of the CODI citizen capacity building programme. The design of the programme would go out the public tender with bids being particularly welcome from local organisations with strong innovation and community capacity experience. (This falls within current City Innovation budget.)
	'Augment the City' challenge competition for SMEs
3.19	As noted above, one of the early priorities of the Smart District is a focus on the visitor and tourist experience in our city centre and the 'high street'. Digital technology has already proved disruptive to city tourism offerings and, as various technologies reach maturity (such as AR/VR/5G/AI), this disruption is only likely to increase. With a large number of city and neighbourhood visitor investments planned or already underway, it is important for Belfast's partners to explore just how such technologies are likely to shape the city's unique offering.
3.20	Working with the Council's Enterprise & Business Growth unit, the Belfast Stories team, Ulster University, the Digital Catapult NI and others, the City Innovation team is designing an 'Augment the City' challenge programme to commence later in 2022. The challenge programme would encourage our SMEs and innovators to harness immersive technologies to showcase innovative ways for communities and visitors to explore our city and its stories. It would complement a proposed capacity building programme being designed by the Enterprise & Business Growth unit for the local immersive SME sector (a sector that has been receiving international attention for its creativity).
3.21	An associated challenge 'competition' in the smart district will allow our creative sector to invest further in immersive R&D, while at the same time supporting city organisations, such as Belfast Stories, to gain insights into how immersive tech can shape the future of Belfast's visitor experience.

3.22	The proposal has received strong interest from a number of global platform and technology infrastructure providers with several million pounds of co-investment funding potentially being made available. Engagement is also under way with Digital Catapult UK, which is currently planning a major Immersive XR programme with cities, to consider how the two programmes could complement each other – and potentially attract further opportunities for our local creative SMEs.
3.23	Members are asked to note the development of 'Augment the City'; following a range of planned cross sector workshops an update will be brough to committee later in the summer detailing options for industry co-investment opportunities.
	Smart District and advanced wireless innovation
3.24	Broadband fibre is currently the connectivity 'backbone' of the modern digital economy. However, the coming decade will see the rise of advanced wireless networks as the underlying infrastructure for connecting businesses, services, and new technologies. It's a technology that will allow many millions of devices to work together simultaneously across a city. It will be the basis on which 'Industry 4.0 Factories of the Future' and 'connected health environment' will be established.
3.25	Other UK cities are already vying to be first in the queue to deploy advanced wireless networks to support local innovation and research in areas such as connected health, advanced manufacturing, cybersecurity, tourism and logistics. DCMS have awarded over £250 million to UK cities and regions to trial advanced wireless and to address barriers to its deployment – and have plans to invest similar sums over the next period. Cities such as Liverpool, Manchester, Sunderland and Dublin are already investing many millions of pounds to make sure they are early adopters.
3.26	Belfast, and in particular the Smart District, is well-placed to be the home for wireless innovation. Both our universities have enviable track records in this space, and their planned City Deal Investment in Centres of Excellence will all have research strands that seek to exploit advanced wireless. Across our businesses and in our advanced manufacturing sector in particular, advanced wireless innovation is growing, with companies not only innovating in the wireless network service ecosystem, but also harnessing the technologies to transform their traditional products and processes. Belfast Harbour are currently exploring the use of 5G private networks to transform the management of Port operations. And public sector agencies are beginning to recognise the need to think about the opportunity that wireless represents.

3.27	The ambition of the Smart District is to make Belfast the natural home for the development of new commercial models for wireless services, and a place where researchers and innovators can develop new solutions. The Belfast Advanced Wireless programme is seeking to do this in four main ways: 1. Developing and managing a set of shared physical assets that can be made readily available to the mobile industry in a single, coherent and low-cost manner. 2. Removing unnecessary barriers to investment by creating a shared approach to engaging with industry. 3. Making a small number of capital investments in core telecoms infrastructure at key locations in the city which can be made available to any wireless provider in a coherent, low-cost manner. 4. Stimulating demand for wireless services by aggregating existing and future demand with key partners including our universities, businesses and public agencies. And working together to bid for new funding and investment.
3.28	The City Innovation team have been working with industry experts and UK Government advisors, Real Wireless, to design a scalable and replicable model that can be harnessed by any council in Northern Ireland. The team are also working on a £30 million City Deal business case to fund item (3) above. A first draft of the business case for investment was recently completed, and over the coming months the city will be engaging with industry, NI Government Departments and UK Government departments towards developing agreement for funding.
3.29	The Smart District programme is also about stimulating and aggregating demand for advanced wireless services (item 4 above) and we are currently engaging with a wide range of partners including a number of the large mobile network operators, a large cloud platform provider, Digital Catapult UK, and others to create collaborative innovation projects for the city.
	Challenge Funds for Innovation
3.30	The City Innovation team have recently appointed two Challenge Fund managers who are working with regional partners to develop a major funding programme to support digital innovation across the private and public sectors. This £54 million regional programme, funded via the Belfast Region City Deal, will have a number of investment mechanisms – each designed to achieve complementary outcomes.

3.31	The design of the mechanisms is at an early stage – however, early concepts include an evergreen 'Digital Innovation Venture Fund' which would invest in a small number of exciting, high potential/high growth companies in the region. In parallel an 'Innovation for Societal Impact' fund would seek to encourage greater investment by SMEs in R&D while at the same time working directly with these SMEs to harness their innovation for wider societal impact. This is aimed at providing a stimulus in the Smart District as well as across the region.
3.32	The Challenge Fund managers have commenced work on the individual business cases with the expectation that open calls for first phase one of more of the funds could be announced early in 2024. (Members should also note that the learning from the 'Augment the City' competition proposed above will provide early practical learning in the design and operation of these funds.)
	Data, Insights and Impact
3.33	A key asset of the modern economy is data. Data is the most important part of the innovation economy and the fuel for digital innovation. This is widely recognised in the private sector with the most successful companies putting in place sophisticated strategies to capture, manage and interpret data for more effective decision-making. Data is also key for the effective management of the modern city and public services. While a number of public organisations have sought to develop data strategies, there is still substantial work to be done – particularly at the integrated level of a city – in order to become a truly data-driven city. The Smart District programme seeks to encourage city partners to push the boundaries in relation to data-informed decision making. The use of real-time Internet of Things sensors, Machine Learning, cloud computing and urban digital twins together offer opportunities for Belfast to think differently about complex challenges, and the capabilities to build much more responsive and bespoke solutions.
3.34	The City Innovation Team recently completed a data maturity project to pinpoint where Belfast City Council has to build internal capabilities to lead a data-enabled city. And our work with European Data experts, Fraunhofer FOKUS have identified the frameworks, policies and infrastructure that needs to be in place to harness data to better manage mobility solutions, climate monitoring, etc.
3.35	As part of the Digital Pillar of the Belfast Region City Deal, partners have identified a potential £5 million investment in a shared urban platform that can begin to make this ambition a reality. The City Innovation team will be developing its approach over the summer months to the completion of a feasibility study on a data platform and hub for the smart district and its supporting architecture.

3.36	Running alongside this work, the team's Impact and Insights officer has begun work on a digital twin of the Smart District. This data-rich representation of the city centre will begin to bring together fine-grain detail on the physical, social, and investment characteristics of the area – providing decision-makers with the detail to inform planning and investment decisions.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.37	• Proposed projects have been identified in the existing City Innovation team budget. • Resources for activities associated with the Belfast Region City Deal have already been identified within the existing Council City Deal budget.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.38	An equality screening was carried out as part of the consultation programme.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	None

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Belfast City Council

STRATEGIC POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Subject:	Council Improvement Plan for 2022-23
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City & Organisational Strategy
Contact Officers:	Patricia Flynn, Strategic Policy & Planning Officer

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

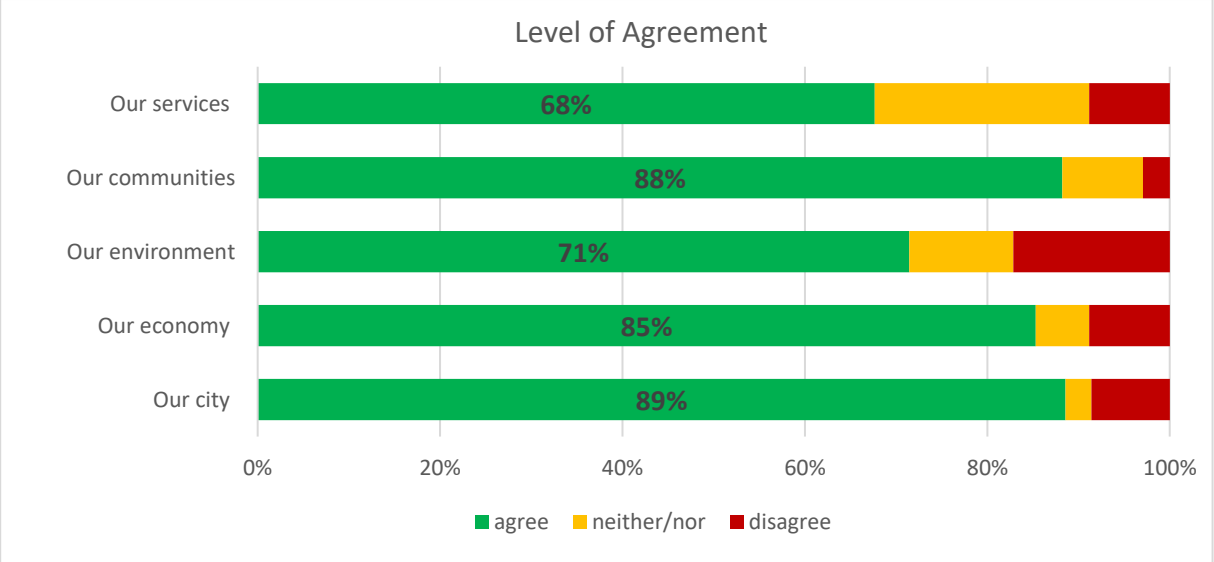
1.0	**Purpose of Report**
1.1	To update Members on the results from the public consultation on our (draft) council improvement objectives and to present for approval and publication the draft Council Improvement Plan: 2022 - 2023.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to • Approve the draft 2022-23 Council Improvement Plan attached at appendix 1. As council is legally required to publish its improvement plan by 30th June, Members are also asked to authorise its publication on the council's website subject to formal ratification by Council on 1st July.
3.0	**Key Issues**
3.1	We have a statutory duty to agree improvement objectives and produce an annual improvement plan by 30th June each year. The Improvement plan does not include everything that council

plans to do that year, but instead focuses on a smaller set of key improvement priorities, as informed by resident priorities and evidenced by need. In February, SP&R approved draft improvement objectives, which we then issued for public consultation:

Our services
We will continue to adapt and improve our services
Our communities
We will work to support our communities, helping them to become stronger, healthier and more resilient
Our economy
We will work collaboratively to support businesses, jobs and inclusive growth
Our environment
We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast
Our city
We will continue to support our city to recover and innovate in a safe, inclusive and sustainable way

Summary of Consultation Responses

3.2 The consultation ran for a period of 10 weeks and was hosted on our Your say Belfast engagement platform and promoted through the council's social media channels. A total of 35 responses were received with key results summarised below. (Note: we do not normally receive a large response to consultations of this nature.) The majority of those responding to the consultation supported the proposed improvement objectives as set out in the graph below.



3.3	Respondents were also given the opportunity to make comments, provide ideas or to suggest other areas that they felt should be included as improvement objectives. Around half of all respondents submitted comments, which related in general to: • Revitalising the city centre • Climate change and the environment • Improving public transport, cycling provision and parking • Enhancing green spaces and improving safety and wellbeing • Improving cleanliness and addressing dog fouling • Internal council processes (including comments about the survey)
3.4	The final improvement plan includes actions that reflect the commentary above, such as the city centre 'Vacant to Vibrant' scheme, digital enhancements to improve customer interactions, improvements to pest control and various environmental enhancements to our parks and open spaces, which should help council deliver the broad improvements that respondents wish to see. The written comments from this consultation have been forwarded to relevant services for information and where applicable have been fed into the ongoing review of the Belfast Agenda. Some of the issues raised are not the responsibility of council.
	Improvement Plan 2022 - 23
3.5	Given the high levels of support, as evidenced by this consultation, we did not feel it was necessary to make changes to the proposed improvement objectives. However, feedback from the consultation was shared with services to help them develop their improvement tasks and milestones. As required by the legislation, we have now drafted a detailed Improvement Plan that sets out our improvement actions and targets. This is attached at appendix 1. Members of the SP&R Committee are asked to approve the attached plan and to authorise its publication on the council website by 30th June. In order to meet the statutory deadline, the plan will be published subject to formal ratification by full Council on 1st July.
	<u>Financial and Resources Implications</u>
3.6	The Improvement Plan has been reflected in the formal planning and budgeting processes of council; there are no unplanned resource implications contained in this report.
	<u>Equality and Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs</u>
3.7	There are no equality or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**

	Appendix 1 - Draft Council Improvement Plan 2022 - 23

Improvement Plan

2022– 2023

Belfast City Council

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Introduction

Under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014, we have a statutory duty to agree improvement objectives and produce an annual improvement plan. We must also ensure that we have arrangements in place to deliver those improvements. This is referred to as our "Duty to Improve".

Our improvement plan sets out our improvement objectives for the year ahead and explains what we will do to achieve them. This document is one of a number of strategic planning documents that drives council activity. However, it does not include every initiative or improvement activity that the council intends to do. Unlike, our corporate plan, which sets out everything we want to achieve, the improvement plan focuses on a small number of improvement areas for the year ahead. This allows us to focus more specifically on key areas for improvement, agreed in consultation with local people.

When the pandemic first hit, councils were allowed to defer the publication of their improvement plans so that we could all refocus our efforts and reconfigure services to support the pandemic response. Instead, in September 2020 we published the "Belfast: Our Recovery" document that set out the areas we needed to focus on in the short term during the pandemic, and looking forward, what we needed to build on and do to lay the foundations for sustained recovery. We then used this plan to inform our 2021-22 improvement plan.

The past two years have been quite difficult for everyone around the world. Covid-19 has brought new challenges for our health, for society and for the economy. However, Belfast's response to the pandemic reflects who we are as a city - caring and resilient with a strong community spirit and a warmth and sense of humour that shines through. We want to build on this and use this year's Improvement Plan to look ahead and help our city recover and bounce back even stronger.

For us, 'Improvement' is about more than just efficiency savings or enhancements to services. Whilst these are very important, we believe our improvement plan has to make a difference to people's lives. It must improve local quality of life and it must help build a sustainable future for our ratepayers and communities. Therefore, our planned improvements comprise both service improvements and activity aimed at improving broader quality of life. Using the Belfast Recovery document as a guide, we have sought to ensure that our Improvement objectives provide a balanced approach for our residents and city by focusing on a mix of economic, social and environmental related improvements.

Statutory Guidance

Statutory guidance also requires us to consider how our improvement objectives will drive improvement in terms of: **Strategic effectiveness, Sustainability, Fairness, Service quality and availability, Efficiency** and **Innovation**. We must also assess improvement objectives against criteria requiring that they should be:

- **Legitimate -** making a demonstrable contribution to at least one of the aspects of improvement listed in the Act, this directed us toward developing objectives where the potential impact would have greatest value.

- **Clear -** setting out the visible improvement that citizens can expect. This involved considering the 'measurable' aspect of our commitments and choosing objectives that were more likely to lead to tangible improvements.

- **Robust -** with defined terms of success (quantitative or qualitative). As far as possible objectives have been aligned to performance indicators with agreed targets to help demonstrate what contribution we expect our efforts to make to each improvement activity.

- **Deliverable -** with established links to individual service programmes and budgets. Every improvement objective contains deliverables that will be managed through our programme delivery arrangements.

- **Demonstrable -** capable of being supported by objective evidence. Progress for each objective will be demonstrated through a combination of quantitative (PIs) and qualitative (project reporting) evidence.

Our Strategic Planning Framework

The Belfast Agenda

The Belfast Agenda is the city's first community plan. Published in 2017 following extensive engagement with local people, it set out a vision for Belfast and shared outcomes for the city. In collaboration with our community planning partners we are currently in the process of reviewing the Belfast Agenda and developing a refreshed plan for the period 2022-26. During September to December 2021, we carried out public engagement to help identify a set of revised priorities for the Belfast Agenda. This was followed by more focused engagement to develop action plans and performance measures for each priority. This work is ongoing.

The Belfast Agenda is an ambitious and dynamic plan that has shaped and will continue to shape the plans and priorities of the council and its partners. Our Corporate Plan reflects the outcomes and priorities agreed in the Belfast Agenda, which in turn helps shape and inform activity within our Improvement Plan. The revised Belfast Agenda priorities for 2022 – 26 are:

✓ Sustainable and inclusive economic growth	✓ Community and neighbourhood regeneration	✓ Climate, resilience and sustainability
✓ Employment and skills	✓ Health inequalities	✓ Active and sustainable travel
✓ Educational attainment	✓ Housing-led regeneration	✓ City Development
✓ Older people	✓ Children and young people	✓ Good relations

Council Planning Framework

The Belfast Agenda is an ambitious and dynamic plan that has shaped and will continue to shape the plans and priorities of the council and its partners. We have aligned our Corporate Plan to the Belfast Agenda, and together, these represent the primary and overarching strategic plans for the city and council. In November 2020, we also produced a covid recovery plan which still informs strategic planning. Beneath this, council also has a number of supporting strategic plans to help manage and direct particular activity, for example our Local Development Plan which is the spatial planning framework for the city and our medium-term financial plan which sets out the financial strategy for the council. These strategic plans, including the Improvement Plan, are supported by annual Departmental and Committee Plans to ensure activity for the year ahead is managed. This forms part of a wider strategic planning and performance framework, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: STRATEGIC PLANNING & PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK

Identifying our Improvement Objectives

We use a range of information and feedback to identify and agree our improvement objectives. The improvement plan does not include all the work we plan to do, but instead focuses on a smaller set of key improvement actions. Therefore, it is important that we get the focus right. We look at data, existing plans and priorities to decide what we think we should focus on and then we ask our residents - are we focusing on the right things, is anything missing and what are your ideas about what we need to do to achieve these improvements?

In previous years, the foundation for our improvement objectives was the Belfast Agenda. The Belfast Agenda was developed following a wide-reaching engagement process with the public and other stakeholders. Published in November 2017, it created a vision for Belfast and, based on what was important to local people, set out what the city would do together to help achieve the future Belfast everyone wanted. The Belfast Agenda is the overarching plan for improving quality of life in Belfast and guides what council and other public agencies in the city will do, along with businesses and communities, to make Belfast better. It reflects local people's ambitions and priorities for the city. By building our improvement objectives around the Belfast Agenda, we are confident that we have provided a meaningful and balanced set of improvement objectives in response to what people told us mattered most.

However, in March 2020 the world was rocked by the emergence of Covid-19. As a result of the pandemic, we adjusted last year's improvement plan and used the "Belfast: Our Recovery" document as the starting point for identifying our improvement objectives. The Our Recovery plan set out 6 broad areas of focus: Our city, our communities, our economy, our environment, our services and our digital innovation. Moving forward, we felt these headings provided the best way of grouping our improvements as it not only was simple to understand but also ensured a balanced focus across the wide range of issues that mattered to people. For 2022-23 we amalgamated the digital innovation into the 'our city' heading.

We continue to use the Belfast Agenda process to help inform our improvement plan. The Belfast Agenda is the over-arching plan for the city, so it important that what we do contributes to that work. Equally, as the public helped shaped the Belfast Agenda, we know that it is a good starting point for determining what we should focus on. In September 2021, the Belfast Community Planning Partnership began reviewing the Belfast Agenda. They started by asking people if the outcomes and priorities in the current Belfast Agenda were still valid and correct. When we began reviewing our improvement plan a number of priority areas were beginning to emerge, which we were able to incorporate into our improvement plan. The engagement and evidence base for the refreshed Belfast Agenda will continue to inform our improvement actions moving forward.

Annual review of our Improvement Objectives

Every year we review and update our improvement objectives to ensure we continue to deliver the improvements people want. We do an initial assessment, which forms part of our annual corporate planning process, and then share our draft objectives and proposed actions with the public. Only when our residents have had an opportunity to have their say, do we finalise the improvement plan.
Our annual review process for 2022-23 is set out below:

Sept 2021	• Phase 1 Engagement: Review of the Belfast Agenda commences
Oct 2021	• Preliminary budget setting and corporate planning commences
Nov 2021- Jan 2022	• Policy and strategy review of improvement objectives
Feb 2022	• Corporate Management Team (CMT) - review and assessment of 2022-23 improvement objectives
Feb 2022	• SP&R Committee - scrutiny of proposed improvement objectives
Feb - May 2022	• Public consultation on improvement objectives
May 2022	• CMT - review of consultation responses and update of improvement objectives
Jun 2022	• SP&R Committee approves Improvement Objectives and Improvement Plan
Jun 2022	• Improvement Plan published

Consultation

Each year, before we finalise our improvement objectives, we issue them for public consultation to enable residents and other interested stakeholders to influence and to have a say in agreeing them. In February, SP&R Committee approved 5 improvement objectives for consultation:

The public consultation ran for a period of approximately 10 weeks between 21 February and 4 May. Managed through our online Your Say Belfast (YSB) consultation platform, it provided residents with an opportunity to learn more about the proposed improvement objectives and included a link to an online survey. Through this survey, residents were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the proposed improvement objectives, to provide comments and to suggest other areas that they felt should be included as improvement objectives.

We used a range of communication channels, including Facebook and Twitter, to promote and direct people to the consultation. We also shared details with our Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises network and YSB mailing list to encourage wider dissemination and input.

32 individuals and 3 organisations responded to the survey. The consultation results indicated high levels of support; therefore, we did not feel it necessary to make changes to the proposed improvement objectives. However, we have updated our actions and milestones so that they reflect the feedback provided by our residents. For example, we have incorporated actions relating to pest control and included more environmental improvements linked to parks and open spaces. As some of the comments and suggestions are not the council's responsibility or require a joined-up approach with partners, we also share the consultation feedback with the appropriate Belfast Agenda Boards and the ongoing work of the Belfast Agenda.

Developing our improvement actions

During the consultation period, we begin to develop more detailed improvement actions, indicators and targets for measuring progress. We review and update these to reflect the comments and suggestions received from residents and then create our formal improvement plan. Elected Members approve the improvement plan, which is then monitored on quarterly basis.

The remainder of this plan sets out our detailed improvement objectives and improvement actions.

Our Improvement Objectives 2022 - 2023

Our services
We will continue to adapt and improve our services
Our communities
We will work to support our communities, helping them to become stronger, healthier and more resilient
Our economy
We will work collaboratively to support businesses, jobs and inclusive growth
Our environment
We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast
Our city
We will continue to support our city to recover and innovate in a safe, inclusive and sustainable way

Improvement Objective 1: Our Services

We will continue to adapt and improve our services

Why this is an improvement objective

When the Belfast Agenda was published in 2017, we decided to align our improvement objectives to the priorities in the Belfast Agenda. As a result, many of our improvements of were at a strategic city level that often required the collaboration of other agencies. Although our residents were supportive of these priorities, they told us that they wanted our improvement objectives to focus more on the services we deliver. In 2019-20, we added a new objective that focused specifically on improving council services and increasing satisfaction with council. When we consulted residents about this new objective, it was very clear and that the provision of high quality, customer-focused and efficient services was particularly important to them. For this reason, 'Improving our services' will always be a key aspect of our improvement plan moving forward.

To help ensure that our services continually meet customer expectations and can adapt to changing circumstances, we've put in place two main internal change programmes – one focusing on customer care and one focusing on improving our processes, systems and service design. We update and monitor these programmes each year and, where appropriate, reflect this ongoing work in our improvement plan. Our council-wide continuous improvement programme will continue to support services, helping them to recover to pre-covid levels or introduce new or improved internal operations. However, for this year's improvement plan our service improvement efforts will focus on our environmental health and city protection services. During the covid-19 pandemic we became increasingly aware of the importance of safeguarding the most vulnerable in society. Over the coming year we will build on that awareness and ensure that safeguarding principles are embedded across all our services. We will also continue to implement our customer focus programme, building on the learning and experiences gained throughout lockdown.

Although we don't operate the Port of Belfast, our port health service is responsible for making sure the port meets environmental health standards, including any new Brexit arrangements. Last year, we included port health in our improvement plan due to the specific challenges it faced and its importance for the city and the wider region. As our port health service continues to be impacted by ongoing uncertainties regarding the outworking of the Northern Ireland Protocol, we have retained this as an improvement for 2022- 23.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To improve our customer care practices and to increase resident satisfaction with council and our customer care

- ✓ To systematically improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our services
- ✓ To continue to adapt and improve our port health service as it responds to Brexit and the changing needs of the city

What we will do

- ❖ Ensure our environmental health and city protection services are fit for purpose post covid-19
- ❖ Continue to implement our customer focus programme
- ❖ Continue to develop new procedures and transition arrangements for port health

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
% residents satisfied with Belfast City Council	65%	76%	78%
% residents who agree that Council provides good customer service	62%	73%	75%
% residents who agree Council provides good value for money	57%	64%	66%

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Ensure our environmental health and city protection services are fit for purpose				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Facilitate an External Review process of the HMO service by Department for Communities				
Develop an operational improvement plan for delivery of pest control services				
Develop a corporate Safeguarding Policy and related procedures				
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee			

Continue to implement our customer focus programme				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Finalise Customer Hub KPIs – for example calls and emails answered within agreed standards, call abandonment, repeat calls, customer satisfaction, corporate complaints				
Roll out digital Improvements: online forms automation; soft phones roll out; generic email account inventory and standards; telephony recording				
Develop approach to transitioning services into the Customer Hub				
Pilot service design approach with Building Control system replacement				
Responsible Chief Officer **Reporting Committee**	Programme Director Customer Focus Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Continue to develop new procedures and transition arrangements for port health				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Review and update the resourcing/staffing model to reflect any new arrangements for the NI Protocol following UK/EU discussions				
Work with DAERA and FSA to develop a sustainable funding model to secure necessary funding for the Port Health service and obtain assurance for the 2023/24 financial year as a priority				
Review BCC Port Health IT systems requirements in context of emerging EU/UK system solutions and IT automations (under development regionally and nationally) to support NI Protocol implementation				
*All actions **subject to ongoing Brexit guidance***				
Responsible Chief Officer **Reporting Committee**	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services People & Communities Committee			

Improvement Objective 2: Our Communities

We will work to support our communities, helping them to become stronger, healthier and resilient

Why this is an improvement objective

Year on year, as we developed our improvement objectives it became clear that our residents wanted us to focus efforts on improving our local neighbourhoods and supporting local people. As a council, we provide a range of local amenities, invest in community development and, through our Elected Members, advocate on behalf of residents. These were seen as important roles for council and areas that should be reflected in our improvement plan. During the pandemic, the importance of 'community' and access to these local amenities became critical. Last year, we reviewed our improvement objectives and created a new focus on "our communities". This was particularly well received by residents and will therefore continue to be priority improvement objective moving forward.

Our focus for 2022-23 will be on supporting community infrastructure, including strengthening community participation, and helping to improve people's health and wellbeing by providing the best local amenities and support needed so that they can lead more active and healthier lives.

Health and wellbeing is consistently one of the highest ranking priorities for our citizens. In our 2017 resident survey, "improving health and wellbeing" was the second highest ranked priority for residents whilst, not surprisingly in 2021 it was the highest. Good quality parks and open spaces have always been essential for improving people's health and emotional wellbeing, but during the pandemic, their value became even more widely recognised. That's why our improvement plan continues to focus effort on ensuring that our parks and playgrounds are good quality, safe and welcoming as they can be. Coupled with that, will be a focus on helping people to lead heathier lives by being more active. Research by both the council and Age NI has shown that many people have become less physically active as a result of the pandemic, so it is important that we do all we can to encourage and make it easier for our residents, young and old, to get out and about and improve their activity levels. We will also continue to work with our Belfast Agenda partners to improve health and wellbeing and to help address health inequalities.

Last year we also created a new improvement objective aimed at improving how we listen to and involve residents. Although we set up a new engagement platform and established a new Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises Panel and Network, the results from our 2021 resident survey tells us that we still need to do better. Given the importance of civic voice and participation to community development and community wealth building, we have retained this as an improvement objective for 2022-23. Our efforts for the year ahead will focus on how we can improve community dialogue and deliberation.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To improve local neighbourhoods and increase resident satisfaction with their local area
- ✓ To empower our residents and local communities and give them a say on the things that are affect or are important to them
- ✓ To improve our parks and playgrounds and to encourage and enable our residents to lead more active and healthier lifestyles

What we will do

- ❖ Implementation of the £8m neighbourhood regeneration fund for capital projects
- ❖ Develop enhanced approaches to civic engagement and the involvement of the VCSE sector
- ❖ Encourage participation in sport and physical activity

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
% residents who are satisfied with their local area a place to live	84%	85%	86%
% residents who agree that their local area has good quality parks and green space	78%	78%	80%
% residents using council parks at least monthly (resident survey data)	56%	62%	65%
% of residents who undertake less than 2.5 hours physical activity per week	34%	29%	25%
% residents who agree council consults and listens to the views of local residents	63%	63%	65%
Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	Target
Number of Parks and Green Spaces with Green Flag accreditation	20	20	20
Number of registered participants on Your Say Belfast	248	2453	3000
Number of registered VCSE participants on Your Say Belfast	113	217	300

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Implementation of the £8m neighbourhood regeneration fund for capital projects				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Stage 1: Application (emerging projects) - Assess, moderate and approve applications to proceed to Stage 2				
Stage 2: Development (uncommitted projects) - Work with successful Stage 1 applicants to develop their projects				
Preparation for launch of Stage 3 in 2023-24				
Development of Outcomes Based Accountability approach to measuring success of the programme				
Responsible Chief Officer **Reporting Committee**	Director of Physical Programmes Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Develop enhanced approaches to civic engagement and the involvement of the VCSE sector				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Support council and the Belfast Community Planning Partnership to enhance civic participation, including the introduction of participatory budgeting pilots				
Work with the CPP and other partners to improve how we engage with young people and seldom heard communities				
Hold the annual VCSE conference in person (subject to covid-19)				
Work with the VCSE Panel to develop and deliver a wider programme of engagement with the sector				
Issue a quarterly newsletter to update stakeholders on the work being undertaken by the panel and raise				
Responsible Chief Officer **Reporting Committee**	Director of City and Organisational Strategy Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Improve our parks and playgrounds and encourage participation in sport and physical activity				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Maintain our Green Flag and Green Flag Heritage Award status across our parks and open spaces (20)				
Develop a 5-year action plan for the delivery of the Belfast Open Spaces Strategy				
Deliver the Playground Improvement Programme				
Initiate major capital project to improve Marrowbone Millennium Park				
Initiate major capital project to improve Pitt Park				
Initiate major capital project to improve Paisley Park				
Initiate major improvement works to Ballysillan Playing Fields in collaboration with partners				
Complete works and launch new city park and playground at Páirc Nua Chollan				
Produce the Belfast Physical Activity and Sport Development Strategy				
Deliver Boxing Strategy Action Plan				
Responsible Chief Officer	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services, Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	People & Communities Committee, Strategic Policy & Resources Committee			

Improvement Objective 3: Our Economy

We will work collaboratively to support businesses, jobs and inclusive growth

Why this is an improvement objective

During the Belfast Conversation, the engagement process we used to develop the Belfast Agenda, "jobs and employment" was the top priority for citizens. Since then, it has remained a recurring theme and key priority in all our engagements with residents. Building a strong local economy that supports jobs and encourages entrepreneurs was also seen a key priority during the Belfast Conversation. This was also reinforced in the 2019-20 engagement on our Inclusive Growth Strategy where feedback from residents, businesses and community groups highlighted the importance of proper investment, business growth and shared prosperity. In our recent resident survey, half of those surveyed selected either a stronger economy (25%) or employment and skills (25%) as the most important priority for Belfast; with only health and wellbeing attracting a higher importance rating.

Although other Government departments, particularly the Department for Communities (DfC) and the Department for the Economy (DfE), have statutory responsibility for the economy, employability and skills development, we do have an important role to play. We run a number of initiatives to support small businesses and develop entrepreneurs and provide a range of employability and skills programmes to help people to access skills and jobs. From 2017 onwards, our improvement objectives have always included actions designed to improve the support we provide and ensure that it is delivering the impact intended. This included working with partners in an integrated and strategic way to ensure that, as a city, local people are able to access decent, secure jobs that pay well and provide opportunity for progression and development.

The impact of the covid-19 pandemic and series of lockdowns has only reinforced the need for us to do all we can to support businesses and people's jobs. We have therefore retained this improvement objective for 2022-23.

A number of our planned training and employability programmes were restricted because of social distancing requirements and our priority this year will be to refresh these programmes and help match people to new job requirements and vacancies. A strong and heathy business sector is vital to for the success and wellbeing of our city and for those who live here. This is turn supports local wealth creation and employment, which allows us to deliver our vision of inclusive growth, where all people share in the success of the city. However, to help ensure everyone benefits from economic growth, we will also look at how we can better support social enterprises and cooperatives as well as our existing local businesses and new start-ups.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To refocus our employability and skills programmes in response to the new covid era challenges we now face
- ✓ To support residents into employment (through participation on our employment academies)
- ✓ To support local businesses to start up and grow
- ✓ To encourage and support the development of the social enterprise and cooperative sector

What we will do

- ❖ Deliver Employment Academies
- ❖ Deliver local business start-up programmes
- ❖ Support social enterprises and co-operatives

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2020-21	2021-22	Target
Number of participants on Employment Academies	458	816[1]	540
The 'into work' percentage of participants on Employment Academies at the end of the year	New KPI	New KPI	70%
Number of jobs promoted through the Go For It programme [**Statutory PI**]	258	311	325
Business start-up and growth activity: - Number of business plans developed - Number of participants/businesses supported	419 698	518 731	560 750
Number of social enterprises and cooperatives accessing support to start up	11	52	45

[1] This figure was artificially boosted for 2021-22 by one-off additional funding via the Labour market Partnership. Hence the 2022-23 target is lower.

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Deliver employment academies, local business start-up programmes and support for social enterprises and co-operatives				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Employment Academies				
Deliver employment academies in sectors such as construction, manufacturing, care sectors, & customer service.				
Continue to work with partners to identify, design and deliver further Employment Academies.				
Local business start-up programmes				
Continue to develop a revised approach to business start-up support to be introduced 2023-2024				
Continue to deliver the 'Go for it' programme for start up support for 2022-23.				
Social Enterprise and Cooperatives				
Increase the levels of community outreach to encourage cooperatives and social enterprises.				
Continue to support new start-up cooperatives and social enterprises.				
Responsible Chief Officer **Reporting Committee**	Director of Economic Development City Growth & Regeneration Committee			

Improvement Objective 4: Our Environment

We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast

Why this is an improvement objective

Climate change is a global concern. However, each and every one of us can take steps to help prevent this. Our Elected Members embraced this message and in 2019 declared a climate emergency in Belfast. In recognition of this and given the growing momentum within Belfast and amongst our residents around this issue, we added a new climate and sustainability improvement objective for 2020-21. Whilst a small minority of our residents disagreed with this step, explaining that they did not believe in climate change, the majority were extremely supportive. Given the significant challenges facing our environment and the behavioural changes that will be needed to truly make Belfast an environmentally friendly and sustainable city, we feel it will be necessary to keep the environment as an improvement focus for the foreseeable future. Whilst we need to transition quickly, we also need to so this fairly, so that we leave no one behind.

Our focus for the year ahead will be on 3 core areas of activity: using our civic leadership role to develop joined-up and longer-term approaches to tackling climate change; introducing local level initiatives to protect our local environment; and to critically examine how we can reduce waste by re-using or recycling more. Communication and promotion will be key to all three, as will listening and involving local people in these discussions and deliberations. We set up a new citizen engagement platform in 2021 and created a new climate and resilience engagement hub to help involve more people in these discussions.

Although much of this work will need to be done in collaboration with others, we are determined to lead by example and use our influence to make a positive difference. During 2018, we undertook extensive engagement with residents regarding our current household waste and recycling arrangements and it became very clear that this was an important issue for local people. Residents' growing concern about the impacts of waste and pollution on our environment, coupled with the significant investment required to implement better practices and positive behaviours, compelled us to prioritise this an improvement objective in 2019-20. We are still assessing the impact of covid-19 on waste and recycling and will continue to look for new and innovative approaches to build on the foundations we have already put in place.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ Embed a strategic approach to tackling climate change and position Belfast as an environmentally friendly city
- ✓ Increase the level of recycling across the city and reduce our reliance on landfill
- ✓ Increase the number of trees in Belfast, protect the biodiversity of the city and improve air quality

What we will do

- Develop council's strategic approach to climate change and facilitate partnership working to support delivery of the Belfast Climate Plan
- Continue the roll out of the Belfast One Million Trees Programme and complete the development of the Belfast Local Biodiversity Action Plan
- Reassess and improve our approach to waste and recycling, taking into account any implications from the covid-19 pandemic

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
% residents who agree that Belfast is environmentally friendly; it protects and values its natural resources	74%	73%	75%
Performance Indicators	**2020-21**	**2021-22**	**Target**
One Million Trees Programme: - Number of visitors to places tool per annum (Your say Belfast) - Number of pins submitted per annum (Your say Belfast) - Number of site assessment undertaken - Number of trees planted	 403 222 10 39,000	 580 104 20 24,000	 700 150 20 30,000
Statutory Performance Indicators	**2020-21**	**2021-22***	**Target**
Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable BCC collected waste that is landfilled	30,071	38,545	32,000
% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use)	43%	41%	42%
Amount (tonnage) of BCC collected municipal waste arisings	171,795	172,413	172,000

* *Provisional data - validated figures not available until November 2022*.

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Develop council's strategic approach to climate change and facilitate partnership working to support delivery of the Belfast Climate Adaption Plan				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Partnership Working				
Facilitate effective partnership working by leading and supporting the Belfast Climate Commission, Belfast Resilience and Sustainability Board and BCC Climate Plan Programme Board				
Belfast Climate Plan				
Develop a Belfast Climate Plan by March 2023				
Develop a Belfast Climate Investment Plan by March 2023				
BCC Climate Plan				
Produce a BCC Climate Risk Plan by December 2022				
Produce a BCC Climate Plan by December 2022				
Develop a BCC Climate Investment Plan by December 2022				
Responsible Chief Officer **Reporting Committee**	Belfast Climate Commissioner Climate & City Resilience Committee			

Reassess and improve our approach to waste and recycling				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Agree the way forward for the expansion of the Kerbside Sortation model for recycling				
Report to the council and identify actions moving forward regarding the 'More Circularity, Less Carbon' project				
Develop proposal for single use plastics policy for the council				
Responsible Chief Officer **Reporting Committee**	Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services People and Communities Committee			

Protecting our environment and local biodiversity				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Local Biodiversity Action Plan				
Complete development of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan	■	■	■	■
Review capacity to ensure compliance with Statutory Biodiversity duty	■	■	■	■
Air Quality				
Agree council approach to funding for a fleet replacement strategy in order to transition to an alternative fuel	■	■	■	
Deliver HVO plan to convert compatible vehicles from diesel to HVO	■	■		
Belfast Tree Strategy				
Development of a tree strategy for Belfast	■	■	■	■
Belfast One Million Trees				
Carry out site identification and assessment	■	■	■	■
Carry out tree planting	■	■	■	■
Conduct annual tree count	■			■
Conduct annual land call		■		
Carry out site identification and assessment		■		
Responsible Chief Officer	Belfast Climate Commissioner and Strategic Director of City & Neighbourhood Services			
Reporting Committee	Climate & City Resilience Committee and People and Communities			

Improvement Objective 5: Our City

We will continue to support our city to recover and innovate in a safe, inclusive and sustainable way

Why this is an improvement objective

We created this improvement objective so that we can focus on things that benefit the city as a whole. It includes big programmes of work that will also contribute to our other improvement priorities such as helping to grow our economy, enhance our environment or support our communities. As these are major projects, the activity spans more than one year. For example, our Leisure Transformation Programme is a 10-year programme that will see us investing £105 million to improve our leisure centres, programmes and services. This investment means our city as a whole is able to offer leisure and recreation opportunities for all, whilst also helping to improve the health and wellbeing of our residents. Similarly, work to develop strategic greenways across the city is a longer-term improvement that will benefit the environment and improve people's health. Another goal of the greenways is to connect people and improve community safety and cohesion.

Our city centre is a unique asset, not just for Belfast, but for the wider regional economy. Residents want our city centre to be vibrant, safe and welcoming. They understand that a prosperous and enticing city centre benefits everyone socially and economically. However, city centres across the globe are changing and Belfast, like other core cities, needs support to remain relevant and competitive. Our vision and commitment to the city centre began following the Bank Buildings fire, but now it's more important than ever to create a vibrant, enjoyable and well-connected city centre environment where people want to live and spend time. The pandemic had a devasting impact on our city centre, but it's time to build back stronger and better.

The city's immediate response to the pandemic highlighted the importance of digital innovation in designing and delivering effective urban services. Last year we added a new improvement objective centred on digital innovation that reflected this growing trend. Building on the council's existing commitment to digital innovation we have retained this improvement objective for 2022-23. Our aim is to drive forward an ambitious city innovation programme that will ensure Belfast can harness digital innovation to better address complex urban challenges and support our citizens and communities.

What we want to achieve

- ✓ To revitalise our city centre and support it to rebuild and develop following the impact of covid-19
- ✓ To enhance our city and people's lives by providing unique, multi-use outdoor public spaces and high-quality recreational facilities
- ✓ To encourage the adoption of digital innovation across the city

What we will do

- Initiate a 2-year pilot City Centre Capital Grant Scheme (Vacant to Vibrant)
- Improve public spaces, greenways and recreational facilities across the city
- Deliver the first year of the Smart District programme and develop a £5 million Innovation for Societal Challenge fund

How we will measure our performance and impact

Performance Indicators	2019	2021	Target
Resident satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live	86%	85%	88%
% residents who agree the city centre is vibrant and attractive, with lots going on	81%	80%	83%
% of residents who agree that Belfast: - is easy to get about - has good infrastructure	79%	85% 83%	88% 86%
Number of SMEs/companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme	New	New	30

Activities to support this Improvement Objective

Initiate a 2-year pilot City Centre Capital Grant Scheme (Vacant to Vibrant)					
Milestones		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Complete analysis of initial 'expression of interest' returns and finalise approach to the grant scheme for launch		■	■		
Launch the City Centre Capital Grant Scheme			■		
Process application and manage the scheme			■	■	■
Prepare an interim (year 1) review report for committee.					■
Responsible Chief	Strategic Director of Place and Economy				
Reporting Committee	City Growth and Regeneration Committee				

Improve public spaces, greenways and recreational facilities across the city				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Cathedral Gardens: Complete public consultation on design and initiate contractor procurement				
Forth Meadow: complete construction of sections 3 and 4 – Springfield Road and Falls Park				
Forth Meadow: commence construction of section 5 – Bog Meadows				
Upgrade of the existing access, footways and cycle path through the existing **Bog Meadows Nature Site**				
Lagan Gateway: complete Phase 2 - path connection from Lagan Land East into Belvoir Forest Park				
Ballysillan Playing Fields Initiate major improvement works to Ballysillan Playing Fields in collaboration with partners				
Boodles Dam: Complete upgrades and improvements to dam at Ligoniel Park				
Leisure Transformation Programme:				
Templemore Baths: Complete construction works and launch facility				
Girdwood: Continue to develop business case for Girdwood.				
Develop up options for **Leisure Transformation Phase 4**				
Responsible Chief	Director of Physical Programmes			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Deliver the first year of the Smart District programme and develop a £5 million Innovation for Societal Challenge fund				
Milestones	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Deliver the Augment the City challenge competition to enhance the city centre visitor experience through immersive technologies				
Deliver the first year of the Citizen Office for Digital Innovation programme aimed at working directly with citizens on Smart District projects				
Design the £20 million Belfast Regional Digital Innovation Venture Fund for SMEs				
Develop a £5 million Innovation for Societal Challenge fund aimed at innovative SMEs and city partners				
Responsible Chief	Strategic Director of Finance and Resources, Director of City and Organisational Strategy			
Reporting Committee	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee			

Continuous Improvement and Monitoring Arrangements

General Duty to Improve

The improvement objectives outlined in this Plan do not represent everything we will do in the year ahead. As on organisation we are committed to continually improving, both in terms of the services we provide and the leadership we show for the city. Through the delivery of our corporate plan and through our facilitation and leadership of the Belfast Agenda, we will continually strive to ensure that Belfast is a city that supports the needs and ambitions of local people.

To ensure that we continuously improve and meet the needs of our city and residents, we have established the following governance arrangements to manage the delivery of all of our plans, including our improvement objectives. These arrangements include:

- Formal monitoring of plans and activity through our standing committees
- An aligned planning process – where activity is 'planned' in at the relevant level (Committee, Departmental, Service, Area)
- Consideration of the full costs (including where necessary ongoing costs) is included in our estimates process
- Delivery of contributing projects through a clear programme management framework
- Appropriate risk management in relation to main programmes of work
- Appropriate monitoring, reporting and performance management arrangements in place
- Monthly monitoring and reporting (strategic planning and performance information) at a corporate management team level

Improvement Objectives - Reporting Framework

Each reporting year we publish an annual self-assessment report, setting out how we have performed against our improvement plan for the previous year, and during the year, we bring quarterly progress reports to the Audit Committee. In addition to these formal reporting mechanisms, our Corporate Management Team monitors progress against our improvement plan as part of the management team's wider performance management responsibilities.

Arrangements for Achievement of Statutory Performance Indicators

The Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 2014 requires councils to collect and publish information to allow them to measure performance against a number of indicators set by the Department for Communities. This relates to activity in respect of economic development, waste management and planning applications. We closely monitor these indicators to ensure they are progressing in line with our targets. The statutory indicators are as follows:

	Statutory Performance Indicators	Baseline		Target
		2020-21	2021-22	*2022-2023*
Environment (waste)	Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable BCC collected waste that is landfilled	30,071	38,545 (e)	32,000
	% of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (including waste prepared for re-use)	43%	41% (e)	42%
	Amount (tonnage) of BCC collected municipal waste arisings	171,795	172,413(e)	172,000
Economy	Number of jobs promoted through the Go For It programme	258	311	325
Planning	Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications	37	31	30
	Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications	14	17	15
	% of Enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks	93.2	83%	70%

Note: the waste figures for 2021-22 are estimates; validated figures will not be available until November 2022.

We have incorporated the job promotion and waste related indictors into our 2022-23 improvement plan as they relate to specific improvement activity and remain key areas we need to focus on.

The targets for planning are set by the Department for Infrastructure. These are important service standard that we will continue to monitor as part of our ongoing approach to improvement. In 2018 - 19, we introduced improvements to our planning service culminating in 10 “operating principles” of good practice for managing planning applications based around performance, customers, communication and processes. Our Planning Service continues to work to improve the planning application process in response to emerging needs and customer expectations. Unfortunately, the service was impacted quite substantially by the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly during the first quarter of

2020-21. However, we successfully introduced new processes and IT hardware to support online applications and remote working. Notwithstanding, the initial impacts of the pandemic has led to a 35% increase in live applications on hand.

It has proven very challenging to bring the number of applications on hand down to a more manageable level. This has been contributed by under-performance by statutory consultees and the intermittent technical difficulties with the Planning Portal (Public Access and back-office software) during the first two months of 2022. These factors adversely impacted on statutory performance, particularly the Local applications which make up the significant majority of all applications we receive. Belfast City Council, therefore, very much welcomes the recommendations of the Northern Ireland Audit Office and Public Accounts Committee in respect of the need to reform and improve the NI planning system so that it better serves Belfast and the wider region.

Our Improvement Objectrives: Statutory Criteria

Statutory criteria for improvement objectives:							
Improvement objectives	Strategic effectiveness	Service quality	Service availability	Fairness	Sustainability	Efficiency	Innovation
Our city	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Our Services	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Our Communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Our environment	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Our economy	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓

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Belfast City Council

STRATEGIC POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Update on Area Working Groups
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes
Contact Officer:	Omar Balite, Programme Office Coordinator

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues**
1.1	To seek Members' approval of the minutes of the most recent AWG meetings.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Approve the most recent AWG minutes *(South – 23 May, North – 25 May, West – 26 May and East – 31 May)* attached at Appendix 1. • Physical Programme – Agree the recommendations in respect of LIF projects and reallocations from the East AWG as laid out in paragraph 3.2 below.
3.0	**Main report**
	KEY ISSUES
3.1	**Area Working Group Minutes**

	Members agreed in June 2016 that the Area Working Group minutes would be taken into the SP&R Committee for approval going forward in line with the Council's commitment to openness and transparency and to ensure a consistent approach with other Member-led Working Groups. Members are asked to approve the most recent AWG minutes as attached.
3.2	**Project Updates** **East AWG – LIF project funding allocation** Members of the East AWG agreed to recommend to the SP&R Committee that the £230,009 of the Local Investment Fund (LIF) funding be reallocated as follows: - £70,000 to Cycling Ireland towards the Henry Jones BMX/ cycle track project (ELIF29); - £70,000 to the Cregagh Sports Club (ELIF30); - £30,000 to provide storage facilities for Bloomfield Football Club, Clonduff Football Club, East Belfast Football Club and Glentoran Academy (ELIF31); and - that the remainder of the funding be ringfenced for the Bloomfield Community Association (approx. £60,009).
3.3	**Financial and Resource Implications** A total of £230,009 will be allocated to the above projects under the LIF programme.
3.4	**Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment** None
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 – Minutes of the Area Working Groups

South Belfast Area Working Group

Monday, 23rd May, 2022

MEETING OF SOUTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Groogan (Chairperson); and
Councillors Bunting, Gormley, Lyons, McAteer and Spratt.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager (South Belfast); and
Ms Denise Smith, Neighbourhood Integration Manager;
Mr. S. Leonard, Programme Manager;
Mr. R. McLernon, Climate Programme Manager – City;
Ms. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Tracy Kelly.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 28th February were approved by the Working Group.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor McAteer declared that she had an interest in item 3 as she was on the Board of the Lagan Navigation Trust but there was no pecuniary conflict. She also declared an interest in item 4 as she was on the Board of Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Councillor Spratt declared an interest in item 4 as he was on the Board of the Lagan Valley Regional Park.

Councillor Lyons declared an interest in item 3 as he was the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

Update on Physical Programme

The Director of Physical Programmes provided the Members with a brief verbal update on Phase 2 of the Lagan Gateway project and advised that she would report back to the Working Group with details around the proposed consultation on Phase 2 and the timescales.

Lagan Navigation Trust – Request for Support

The Director of Physical Programmes reminded the Working Group that, at its meeting on 22nd November 2021, it had received a presentation from Ms. Brenda Turnbull, the Chief Officer of the Lagan Navigation Trust during which she outlined the work which had been undertaken by the Trust and made specific reference to the primary objective of re-opening the Lagan Navigation from Belfast Harbour to Lough Neagh.

The Working Group noted the request of support from the Lagan Navigation Trust and agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that approval be granted for officers to approach DfC to discuss the potential for constructing a lock at Queen's Quays.

Lagan Valley Regional Park Presentation

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Sara McClintock, Chairperson, and Andy Bridge, Park Manager, from Lagan Valley Regional Park Ltd. S. McClintock advised the Working Group that the regional park's team was made up of 5 staff and a band of volunteers who were passionate about sustaining the uniqueness of the park for future generations. They informed the Members of the regional park's priorities in terms of biodiversity and heritage and its mission to protect and preserve the landscape and character of N Ireland's only regional park within a Council area. The Members heard how the 2000-hectare regional park had special designation and sites of scientific interest across a mix of council, private, farm and NGO land in both Belfast and Lisburn and Castlereagh Councils and that user numbers had reached 1.97m on the Lagan Towpath.

S. McClintock advised the Working Group that the Council had provided annual funding of £66,000, which was matched by Lisburn and Castlereagh. She thanked the Council for its continued support and added that, due to inflationary pressures (energy and wages increases), Lagan Valley Regional Park would be asking the Council for an inflationary increase in the funding. She also raised the matter of Brown's Bridge and the need to identify an asset owner to maintain the bridge going forward.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Members. A Member highlighted the regional park's tourism potential and added that Brown's Bridge could be identified as a future project. There was agreement that there was a need to keep the regional park on Belfast City Council's radar due to the importance of the asset. A Member added there was a need for more bins on the towpath and acknowledged the regional park was constrained by resource and could benefit from more investment.

A Member asked Lagan Valley Regional Park Ltd for reassurance in relation to any potential danger to the park in terms of planning applications. S McClintock advised that the organisation was a Statutory Consultee which advised agencies in this regard to support the protection of the regional park. She advised that keeping vigilant was important as well as working with partners to engage and react when required.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives from Lagan Valley Regional Park Ltd for their presentation and the Group noted the information which had been provided.

Update on PEACEPLUS Programme

The Programme Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the emerging development of the overall PEACEPLUS programme. He highlighted the need for external resource to support the Co-Designed Local Community PEACE Action Plan which had gone to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Working Group also received a presentation from the SEUPB appointed consultants, Blu Zebra (T Hogg and B Enslin) and Locus Management (C Boylan), which were currently supporting local authorities to develop the approach to submitting a plan for a Local Community PEACE Action Plan for Belfast.

T Hogg informed the Members that the PEACEPLUS Programme had received €1.4bn funding across 6 thematic areas and provided an overview of the Co-designed Local Community Peace Action Plans (priority 1.1). As with previous PEACE Programmes, one of the key investment areas for the Council was the development of a Local Community Peace Action Plan for the city. This programme was under theme 1 'Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities' with investment funding of €110 Million. T Hogg provided further details of the programme timeframe and reassured the Members that Section 75 groups and geographical community engagement was a key focus.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the contents of the report.

Update on Horizon 2020 Upsurge Project

The Climate Programme Manager – City, provided the Working Group with an update on a key project within the Climate Unit portfolio, namely, the Horizon 2020 UPSURGE project, a funded research programme up to August 2025. He provided the Working Group with details about the Natural Based Solutions (NBS) process, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and advised that Belfast was one of 5 demonstration cities across Europe with the Queen's University Belfast (QUB) as a research partner. The Climate Programme Manager – City, highlighted the boundary of the demonstration site and explained why it had been selected and provided detail around the contamination investigations that were underway. He advised the Working Group that he would provide regular updates going forward and proposals would be brought to Committee for approval.

The Working Group noted the update on the project and the forthcoming stakeholder workshop scheduled to take place on Friday 27th May from 12.30 p.m. to 4 p.m. at Riddell Hall, QUB.

Several Members requested that public engagement and consultation be built into the project.

The Chairperson thanked The Climate Programme Manager – City for his presentation.

Noted.

Update on Holylands Intervention Initiative

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the progress of the Holylands Intervention initiative.

The Working Group was reminded that, in November 2019, the Community Planning Partnership had agreed to give special focus to the Wider University and Lower Ormeau area and to adopt an integrated and sustainable approach towards its regeneration through the creation of a long-term vision and development plan. Within this context, Council officers were working closely with the Department for Communities and other Government departments to develop and resource an integrated inter-agency intervention to address deep rooted societal issues, particularly around crime, anti-social behaviour, community cohesion and well-being of residents.

The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that a Project Manager had been recruited and had been in post from 16th May 2022. The Project Manager was based in the Community Planning Unit and would lead the initiative and deliver on its priorities. The Chairperson requested that the Members receive frequent updates. The Neighbourhood Integration Manager advised that she would provide bi-monthly updates and other updates as they arose.

The Working Group noted the contents of the report.

Update on Alleygating Programme

The Working Group received a verbal update on the alleygating programme, namely, the decision made at the March meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to refer the long lists of potential allegation locations submitted to that Committee be referred to each AWGs for prioritisation. The Working Group was provided with copies of the original short lists approved by the working group and the long list provided to The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Group agreed to defer until its next meeting, consideration of a report on the Alleygating Programme.

In the meantime, it was agreed that a roundtable hybrid workshop would be arranged for the Working Group to gain further clarity and detail in relation to the programme.

The Working Group also received an update on additional monies from DFC for additional alleygates in the Holylands area and requested that the Neighbourhood Services Manager (South Belfast) bring further information in relation to the DfC Letter of Offer to the proposed workshop.

Request to Present

The Group was advised that representative of LORAG wished to attend a future meeting to provide an update on the development of the John Murray Lock House, Community Garden and Shed project.

The Working Group granted approval.

Any Other Business

A Member asked for an update on the Pilot project in the Balmoral area and relayed concerns. The Neighbourhood Integration Manager agreed to provide the Members with an update at the next meeting and took the Member's concerns on board.

The Chairperson proposed that the Pilot be a standing item on the agenda going forward.

Chairperson

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North Belfast Area Working Group

Wednesday, 25th May, 2022

NORTH BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP
HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Whyte (acting Chair)
Councillors Boylan, Bradley, Ferguson, Magee, Maskey, Murphy, O'Hara

In attendance: Mr. G. Bell
Ms. K. Gilliland,
Mr. K. Heaney,
Mr. S. Lavery
Mr S. Leonard
Ms. E. McCullough, Neighbourhood Services Integration Manager;
Ms. D. McKinney
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. G. Boyd, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for an inability to attend the meeting were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 30th March, 2022 were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to item Forth Meadow Community Greenway, Councillors Maskey, O'Hara and Whyte asked that it be noted that they were members of the Planning Committee.

PEACEPLUS Update

The Programme Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the emerging development of the overall PEACEPLUS programme. He highlighted the need for external resource to support the Co-Designed Local Community PEACE Action Plan which had gone to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Working Group also received a presentation from the SEUPB appointed consultants, Locus Management (C Boylan), which were currently supporting local authorities to develop the approach to submitting a plan for a Local Community PEACE Action Plan for Belfast.

C Boylan informed the Members that the PEACEPLUS Programme had received €1.4bn funding across 6 thematic areas and provided an overview of the Co - designed Local Community Peace Action Plans (priority 1.1). As with previous PEACE Programmes, one of the key investment areas for Council was the development of a Local Community Peace

Action Plan for the city. This programme was under theme 1 'Building Peaceful and Thriving Communities' with investment funding of €110 Million. C Boylan provided further details of the programme timeframe and reassured the Members that Section 75 groups and geographical community engagement was a key focus.

After discussion, the Working Group noted the contents of the report.

PEACE IV Shared Space Project –
Forth Meadow Community Greenway

The Programme Manager provided an update for members of the Area Working Group on progress and key issues regarding the delivery of the PEACE IV Shared Space Project, Forth Meadow Community Greenway.

She highlighted a number of points for Members under the capital works element including:

- That work in Section 1 (Clarendon / Glencairn / Forthriver) had been completed with handover to council on Thursday 19 May 2022;
- That works in Section 2 (Springvale / INI site) were on hold;
- That works in Section 3 (Whiterock / Falls Park) and 4 (Bog Meadows) were progressing and remained on schedule;
- That a planning application for works in Section 5 (West-Link) had been submitted; and
- That an artist had been appointed for the three public art pieces.

And under the programming element she highlighted the following events:

- That pupils from Springfield, Springhill and St Clare's primary schools had participated in shared stories / history / heritage discussions;
- That volunteers would participate in training on all four volunteer training projects;
- That a governance model discussion event had taken place on 27 April 2022;
- "Swamp Festival" had taken place on 14 May 2022 in Bog Meadows; and
- Planned events along Forth Meadow Community Greenway in June 2022, would include a community cycle and picnic and colour run.

She advised members that a request to extend the Letter of Offer for the Shared Spaces theme to June 2023 and to reallocate underspends from other PEACE IV projects (estimated at £900K) had been submitted to SEUPB. A decision would be expected in June 2022.

The Programme Manager detailed a number of Governance Model options, further details of which were outlined in her report. She advised that engagement with key stakeholders had been challenging, and it had been identified that further engagement sessions would be necessary to address gaps. There had been a request to extend the Viatac Limited contract to July 2022, with a 10% uplift to their budget, that would be subject to SEUPB approval. The uplift would enable delivery of up to 4 engagement sessions and 2 workshops that would be delivered during May / June 22 and enable final reporting by July 2022.

The Peace IV team and Arts Ekta would continue to review and agree the events calendar, ensuring that all communities along Forth Meadow Community Greenway were included and made aware of the up-coming events / activities.

The Programme Manager advised that a monthly update on the progress of the Greenway, including events and activities, would be issued to key stakeholders. The first monthly update had been issued on Monday 9 May 2022.

A member made a request for specific information relating to the parts of the project relevant to North Belfast DEAs. The Programme Manager agreed to circulate an update to Members via email.

After discussion, the Members noted the contents of the report.

Alleygating - Verbal Report

The Working Group agreed to defer, until its next meeting, consideration of a report on the Alleygating Programme.

In the meantime, a roundtable hybrid workshop would be arranged for the Working Group to gain further clarity and detail in relation to the programme. The Chairperson asked that this be arranged in advance of June Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting. He also asked the Neighbourhood Services Manager (North Belfast) to bring further information in relation to the DfC Letter of Offer to the workshop.

Chairperson

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West Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 26th May, 2022

WEST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP
HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present:	Councillor Corr (Chairperson), Councillors Black, Canavan, Michael Collins, Donnelly, Hutchinson and McCabe.
In attendance:	Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager; Mr. G. Bell, Project Officer - Off Street Parking /Alleygating Ms. D. McKinney, PEACE IV Programme Manager; Ms. A. McGlone, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Councillors Matt Collins, Garrett, McLaughlin and Verner.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 24th February were agreed as an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

PLEACEPLUS Update

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the emerging development of the overall PEACEPLUS programme. He highlighted the need for external resource to support the Co-Designed Local Community PEACE Action Plan which had already been presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. T. Hogg, representing the SEUPB appointed consultants, Blu Zebra, who were currently supporting the Council, through the Shared City Partnership, to develop its approach to submitting a plan for a Local Community PEACE Action Plan for Belfast.

The representative provided the Members with an overview of the PEACE PLUS Programme and the €1.14bn investment in the social, economic and environmental development of Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. She outlined that the Programme comprised 6 themes and encompassed 21 individual investment areas of which Investment Area 1.1 Co-designed Local Community PEACEPLUS Action Plans had been allocated €110m. She provided further details of the programme timeframe and reassured the Members that Section 75 groups and geographical community engagement would be a key focus whilst shaping the design of the new Peace Plus Programme. She then proceeded to

provide the Working Group with further information in relation to the Local Authority PEACE PLUS Action Model and the 4 pillars contained within the Governance structure.

A Member referred to the co-design process and the need to ensure that pre application support would be available within the local community, highlighting the need for the application process to be community lead within the voluntary sector. Discussion also ensued as to how the process could overall be better aligned in terms of Community Planning and the Belfast Agenda.

The Members were advised that the design work would be being progressed through the Council's Shared City Partnership and noted that officers would be organising area information sessions with the consultant's consortium to update stakeholders on the emerging work with regards to PEACEPLUS Local Community PEACE Action Plans.

The representative suggested that the Members should read the PeacePlus Information Document available here as this provided detail on the draft content of the new programme and the 21 investments areas.

The Democratic Services undertook to e-mail a copy of the Powerpoint presentation to all Members of the Working Group.

The Chairperson thanked the representative for the presentation, and she left the meeting.

PEACE IV shared Space Project –
Forth Meadow Community Greenway

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members of the Area Working Group on progress and key issues regarding the delivery of the PEACE IV Shared Space Project, Forth Meadow Community Greenway.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Following the update circulated to members via email in April 2022, this report provides a further update on progress of the PEACE IV Shared Spaces project, Forth Meadow Community Greenway.

Key Highlights

Capital element

- **Work in Section 1 (Clarendon / Glencairn / Forthriver) has completed with handover to council on Thursday 19 May 2022.**
- **Works in Section 2 (Springvale / INI site) are currently on hold.**

- **Works in Section 3 (Whiterock / Falls Park) and 4 (Bog Meadows) is progressing and remains on schedule.**
- **A planning application for works in Section 5 (West-Link) has been submitted.**
- **An artist has been appointed for the three public art pieces.**

Programming element

- **Pupils from Springfield, Springhill and St Clare's primary schools participated in shared stories / history / heritage discussions.**
- **Volunteers are participating in training on all four volunteer training projects.**
- **A governance model discussion event on 27 April 2022 to consider suggested model options.**
- **'Swamp Festival' with over 1600 people attending, on 14 May 2022 in Bog Meadows.**
- **Planned events along Forth Meadow Community Greenway in June 2022, will include a community cycle & picnic and colour run.**

3.2 Funding and Timeframe

A request to extend the Letter of Offer for the Shared Spaces theme to June 2023 and to reallocate underspends from other PEACE IV projects (estimated at £900K) has been submitted to SEUPB. A decision is expected in June 2022.

3.3 Capital works element

3.3.1 *Springfield Park*

The site continues to be used regularly by all sections of the local communities, and by people from other areas of Belfast. The on-site modular building can be booked through Council's Outdoor Leisure Department.

3.3.2 *Wider Greenway network (Sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5)*

Works in Section 1 (Clarendon / Glencairn / Forthriver) has completed, and the site handed over to Council by the contractor, on Thursday 19 May 2022. The design of the information panels is to be finalised ahead of installation over the summer.

Work on Section 2 (Springvale / INI site) are on hold following the recent JR process which was conceded by the Council earlier this month with next steps currently being looked at.

Works in section 3 (Whiterock & Falls) and Section 4 (Bog Meadows) are progressing and remain on schedule with the estimated completion date of June 2022 for Section 3 and September 2022 for Section 4.

Due to recent instances of anti-social behaviour, in Section 3, it is proposed that the specification of the paths around the Whiterock to Falls Park, is changed from buff SMA to black SNA.

Members are also reminded that a Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Ulster Wildlife (UW) and BCC was approved by Council's SP&R meeting on 18th February 2022 and is being progressed by legal services.

The planning application for works in section 5 has been submitted.

Members should note there has been a significant increase in material costs and discussions are underway with SEUPB to reallocate underspend from other PEACE IV projects to meet the increased costs of the project.

3.2.3 ***Public Art Pieces***

Following a public procurement exercise, artist Sara Cunningham Bell, has been awarded the contract to deliver art works along the Greenway on the theme of 'down to earth'. The proposed artworks will comprise of one large flagship artwork, at the junction of the Springfield Road and the Forthriver Business Park, and two smaller art pieces, whose locations are still to be agreed. The artworks will be further developed in conjunction with local schools. It is anticipated that the planning application for the artworks will be submitted by end June 2022.

3.2.4 ***Social Value Clause***

As previously reported, a Civil Engineering apprentice and placement student, along with a General Operative, have been appointed by the contractor and sub-contractors, to work on this project. A second Civil Engineering placement student will be joining the team on 24 May 2022, for 12 months.

The contractor's site team working in sections 1,3 and 4 have issued letter drops to the surrounding properties outlining the works being undertaken in their local area.

Due to ongoing COVID restrictions any proposed presentations to local schools are not allowed until further notice.

3.4 Programming element

3.4.1 ***Shared History, Heritage and Identity Content / Narratives for Shared Space***

The delivery partners, Mediation NI and Osborne Partnership, continue to facilitate discussions with groups throughout all sections. The current focus is on establishing two groups in the communities around Section 5 (West Link) to help to develop narratives for information panels anticipated for this section.

As previously advised, pupils from Springfield, Springhill and St Clare's Primary Schools are participating in group discussions along with their parents and teacher to collate stories and bring an inter-generational aspect to the narratives.

The narratives for the Section 1 (Clarendon / Glencairn / Forthriver) information panels are being finalised with supporting photos / pictures being sourced.

3.4.2 ***Shared Space Volunteer Training***

Sustrans currently has a group of 17 volunteers participating in volunteer training and utilising the Greenway.

Volunteer Now has commenced training of 8 Shared Space Ambassadors which started on 4 May. The volunteers assisted with the Swamp Festival event on Saturday 14 May 2022 in Bog Meadows.

The Conservation Volunteers have 8 Volunteer Nature Guides recruited, who are actively participating in training and have recently completed their First Aid training. The volunteers also attended the Swamp Festival event in Bog Meadows, assisting with bird ringing, pond dipping and mini-beast sessions. Further information / recruitment sessions to attract further volunteers are being planned for Springfield Park.

3.4.3 ***Governance / Management Model***

Over 30 key community stakeholders participated in a facilitated community engagement workshop on 27 April 2022, in the Innovation Factory. The aim of the workshop, was to further consider and discuss suggested governance model/s.

Viatac Limited has provided an interim report on the development of the governance model, including an evaluation, outcomes and suggested next steps.

Model options

- **Coordination through a non-single identity organisation; Steering group function through a cross-community group of organisations: Day-to-day coordination and management responsibilities are passed to a neutral organisation. This organisation reports to a joint steering group made up of local organisations responsible for the strategic decisions and direction.**

- **Coordination through a cooperation between two or more existing community organisations in cooperation with council; Steering group function through a cross-community group of organisations: Day-to-day coordination and management responsibilities are passed to a consortium of local organisations from across the Greenway route e.g., a combination of the local Partnership Boards and/or Community Councils etc. This cross-community group reports to a joint steering group responsible for the strategic decisions and direction.**

- **Coordination through BCC; Steering group function in a newly-constituted body: Identified council officer(s)**

perform the day-to-day coordination tasks and the steering group function is delegated to a cross-community organisation that is constituted for this purpose from a list of relevant stakeholders.

- **Coordination through council contractor; Steering group function in a newly-constituted body: An existing (non-single-identity) organisation from North/West Belfast or elsewhere is contracted to perform the day-to-day coordination tasks and the steering group function is delegated to a cross-community organisation that is constituted for this purpose from a list of relevant stakeholders.**

- **Creation of a Community Interest Company (CIC) or other newly-constituted body for coordination and steering in cooperation with council: A completely new cross-community body is constituted for both the day-to-day coordination tasks and the steering group function from a list of relevant stakeholders.**

As engagement with key stakeholders has been challenging, it has been identified that further engagement sessions are necessary to address gaps. As such there is a requested to extend the Viatac Limited contract to July 2022 with a 10% uplift to their budget, subject to SEUPB approval. This uplift will enable the delivery of up to 4 engagement sessions and 2 workshops, which will be delivered during May / June 22 and enable final reporting by July 2022.

3.4.4 ***Youth Engagement & Civic Education***

Youth Link NI continues to network with local youth organisations with commitment to participate in the project from 120+ young people. Young people from Nubia, Forthspring and Blackmountain began participation in the project in mid-May 2022.

Youth Link NI participated in the Governance model discussion on 27 April, providing input from a young person / youth sector perspective.

3.4.5 ***SSS Activities and Animation Programme Co-ordinator***

The second large public spectacle event, a 'Swamp Festival', was coordinated on 14 May 2022, in Section 4 (Bog Meadows) with approximately 1,700 people attending. To address previous concerns of involvement of local communities, groups were given an 'early bird' opportunity to book tickets from Friday 29 April 2022, ahead of the public advertisement on Wednesday 4 May 2022.

The Peace IV team and Arts Ekta continue to review and agree the events calendar, ensuring that all communities along Forth Meadow Community Greenway are included and made aware of the up-coming events / activities.

- **Community Cycle and Picnic – 28 May 2022**
- **Mini Colour Run (Falls Park) – 5 June 2022**
- **Mini Colour Run (Glencairn Park – 12 June 2022**
- **Large Colour Run event (Woodvale Park) – 18 June 2022**
- **Bog Meadow Foraging Walk – 19 June 2022**
- **Big Dig Potato Harvest (St James Community Farm) – 25 June 2022**

Information on these events and booking tickets can be done through eventbrite at (https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/forth-meadow-community-greenway-40614725793)

3.4.6 ***Resource Allocation***

As reported previously, the Resource Allocation element offers funding support of up to £6,000 for three community led activities per site, across 12 sites, to animate the spaces and encourage people to move between the different shared sites.

As works on four of the sites along the Greenway are completed, Springfield Park, Clarendon Playing Fields, Glencairn Park and Forthriver Linear Park, planning is underway to commence the Resource Allocation application process. The relevant application documentation is currently with SEUPB for review. On approval, a call for applications for activities on these four sites will be opened, with supported activities / events delivered by September / October 2022.

3.4.7 ***Project Communications***

A monthly update on the progress of the Greenway, including events and activities, is being issued to key stakeholders. The first monthly update was issued on Monday 9 May 2022 and future updates will be sent to stakeholder on a monthly basis.

3.5 Financial & Resource Implications

All financial implications are covered through existing budgets

3.6 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

The recommendations of the Partnership promote the work of the Council in promoting good relations and will enhance equality and good relations impacts."

Discussion ensued in regard to the Judicial Review and it was noted that an update on this would come before the Planning Committee in due course.

During discussion, the PEACE IV Programme Manager confirmed that the budget for Shared Spaces and Services (SSS) was overspent and that underspent budgets from other areas were currently being reallocated to the SSS theme to ensure that the committed works could be completed.

The Working Group noted the update provided.

Alleygating - Verbal Update

The Neighbourhood Services Manager drew the Members' attention to two reference lists that had been compiled and circulated with the agenda in respect of alleygate requests. He advised that, at this stage, these were indicative lists. He reported that both the South and North Area Working Groups had agreed to convene a workshop for their respective Groups to enable them to consider the numerous alleygate requests in more detail which would allow for any queries that the Members might have to be addressed before progressing towards making the final selection.

It was agreed that the Neighbourhood Services Manager would liaise with the Democratic Services Officer to identify a suitable date to convene a Workshop (sometime during June, given the timeline) to progress towards the final selection of the alleygates.

Chairperson

East Belfast Area Working Group

Tuesday, 31st May, 2022

MEETING OF EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP
HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Alderman Sandford (Chairperson),
The Lord Mayor (Councillor Long);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Alderman Haire);
Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian and Rodgers; and
Councillors de Faoite, Flynn, Hanvey, Howard,
M. Kelly, Kyle, Maghie, Newton and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Ms. R. Crozier, Interim Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Ms. K. Gilliland, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor McMullan.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 3rd March were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Newton declared an interest in Item 7b, Request to present from Ulster Rugby, in that the company that he worked for provided funding to Ulster Rugby and he retired from the meeting and did not participate in the discussion on that item.

Councillor Kyle declared an interest in respect of Item 2 – Update on the Physical Programme, in that he was a Board Member of the Lagan Village Youth and Community Association. However, as the funding in respect of that group was not discussed, he did not need to leave the meeting.

Alderman Rodgers also declared an interest in respect of Item 2 – Update on the Physical Programme, in that he was a Board Member of Glentoran Football Club. However, as the issue raised was for a separate entity, namely, Glentoran Academy, he did not need to leave the meeting.

Update on the Physical Programme - Verbal update

The Director of Physical Programmes provided the Working Group with a number of updates on current projects including the Lisnasharragh Community Schools project where she confirmed that work on Cregagh Primary School was due for completion in July. She

updated that works on the Braniel Church project were due to commence the following week and that, in relation to the Lagan Village Youth and Community Centre, all of the outstanding land issues had been resolved and that confirmation in respect of a funding application was awaited. She confirmed that a further update would be brought back to a future Working Group meeting.

She reminded the Working Group that it had previously agreed to undertake site visits and recommended that the above projects be part of a future site visit.

A Member requested that an update be provided to the next meeting in respect of the Castlereagh Presbyterian Church project.

The Director of Physical Programmes advised the Working Group that, as the Westbourne Presbyterian Church/Titanic People project was no longer viable, £230,009 of LIF funding remained to be allocated. A discussion took place in respect of the reallocation of funds.

Moved by Alderman Dorrian,
Seconded by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Long) and

Resolved – that the £230,009 of the Local Investment Fund (LIF) be reallocated as follows:

- £70,000 to Cycling Ireland towards the Henry Jones BMX/cycle track project;
- £70,000 to the Cregagh Sports Club;
- £30,000 to provide storage facilities for Bloomfield Football Club, Clonduff Football Club, East Belfast Football Club and Glentoran Academy; and
- that the remainder of the funding be ringfenced for the Bloomfield Community Association.

In response to a request from the Director of Physical Programmes, the Working Group further agreed that officers should engage with the Department for Communities in relation to seek matching partner funding for the Lagan Village Youth and Community Association, given that it owned the premises.

Update on PEACEPLUS: including a presentation from SEUPB appointed consultants, Blu Zebra and Locus Management

(Ms. N. Lane, Good Relations Manager attended in connection with this item)

The Good Relations Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of the emerging development of the overall PEACEPLUS programme. She highlighted the need for external resource to support the Co-Designed Local Community PEACE Action Plan which had already been presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. C. Boylan of Locus Management, and Ms. T. Hogg of Blu Zebra, representing the SEUPB appointed consultants, who were currently supporting the Council to develop its approach to submitting a plan for a Local Community PEACE Action Plan for Belfast.

Mr. Boylan provided the Members with an overview of the PEACE PLUS Programme and the €1.14bn investment in the social, economic and environmental development of

Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland. He outlined that the Programme comprised six themes and encompassed 21 individual investment areas of which Investment Area 1.1 Co-designed Local Community PEACEPLUS Action Plans had been allocated €110m. He provided further details of the programme timeframe and reassured the Members that Section 75 groups and geographical community engagement would be a key focus whilst shaping the design of the new Peace Plus Programme. He then proceeded to provide the Working Group with further information in relation to the Local Authority PEACE PLUS Action Model and the 4 pillars contained within the Governance structure.

The Members were advised that the design work would be being progressed through the Council's Shared City Partnership and noted that officers would be organising area information sessions with the consultant's consortium to update stakeholders on the emerging work with regards to PEACEPLUS Local Community PEACE Action Plans.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their informative presentation and they retired from the meeting.

Alleygates - Verbal update

The Neighbourhood Services Manager drew the Members' attention to two reference lists that had been compiled and circulated with the agenda in respect of alleygate requests. He advised that, at this stage, those were indicative lists. He reported that the South, North and West Area Working Groups had all agreed to convene a workshop for their respective Groups to enable them to consider the numerous alleygate requests in more detail which would allow for any queries that the Members might have to be addressed before progressing towards making the final selection.

A Member requested that information be provided to the Members, at the workshop, highlighting areas whereby a small number of streets were currently left ungated and where gating the remaining streets would complete an entire area. He raised Jocelyn Street as an example.

In response to a further Member's query regarding the positive use of alleyways by communities, the Neighbourhood Services Manager explained that he would be meeting representatives from the Department for Communities on 8th June in relation to progressing the Alleyway Transformation Programme.

It was agreed that the Neighbourhood Services Manager would liaise with the Democratic Services Officer to identify a suitable date to convene a workshop within the next few weeks to progress towards the final selection of the alleygates.

Cherryvale Gate Update

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of the report is:

- **update members on the findings of the Cherryvale gate anti-social behaviour measures survey**
- **to present options as to next steps for members to consider**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Working Group is asked to:

- **Note the results of the ASB measure survey residents' survey.**
- **Note the request by residents interviewed for a meeting with either the elected members of Lisnasharragh DEA or members of the P&C committee.**
- **Consider options and agree next steps**.

3.0 <u>Main report</u>

3.1 Following a request at People and Communities Committee on 3rd March 2020, the Committee agreed to commence a consultation process with immediate neighbours and other stakeholders regarding the potential re-opening of an entrance gate into Cherryvale Playing Fields from Knockbreda Park.

3.2 At the People and Communities Committee meeting on 11 August 2020, officers were asked to arrange a site meeting to allow Elected Members the opportunity to meet with various user groups to discuss any relevant issues regarding the Playing Fields. A site meeting was held on the 3rd September 2020 and involved Elected Members, representatives from Friends of Cherryvale and various sports users of the facility. Belfast City Council Officers provided an update on works that were taking place within the Playing Fields. Officers also provided an update that 100 households within the immediate vicinity of the gate had been sent a questionnaire asking for their views concerning the potential re-opening of the gate.

3.3 At a further People and Communities Committee meeting, on 8th September 2020, officers were asked to widen the survey to incorporate additional residents. Following discussion, it was subsequently decided to extend the survey scope to a 400 metre radius (i.e. approximately within a 5 minute walk) from the gate.

The Committee, in reviewing the findings, asked that in an attempt to address the anti-social behaviour concerns, that an assessment be carried out in consultation with adjacent residents who might be affected on the possible options to prevent anti-social behaviour including new lighting options, anti-graffiti paint and anti-climb paint.

To complete this survey, Belfast City Council officers determined that 61 properties would need to be consulted in which residents who may be affected by any such anti-social behaviour issues would live. The residents identified live in the following properties;

Address	Property numbers
Knock Eden Pk	1 to 17 odd and even side
Rosetta Pk	16-36 odd and even side.
Knockbreda Rd	24 - 55 odd and even side.

3.4 **Belfast City Council received a total of 18 responses from residents who received letters requesting they be engaged with in person to discuss the potential reopening of the gate and to detail any concerns they may have.**

The respondents who had requested interviews which were scheduled for Wednesday 26th May failed to respond to any further correspondence or communication with the Open Spaces and Street Scene Manager. Interviews with the remaining 15 respondents were conducted over three scheduled days via face to face engagement or via Microsoft Teams. The respondents were asked to complete a semi structured interview with set questions and an opportunity to elaborate and detail further concerns they have during and after the questionnaire was completed. The results of the fixed questions are as attached in Appendix A on mod.gov.

3.5 **Key findings include:**

- **60% of residents surveyed are not in favour of opening the gate. 40% are in favour of reopening. (Note that overall, 89% of respondents to the wider consultation were in favour of reopening).**
- **67% of those surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed that the reopening of the gate will increase the instances of anti-social behaviour in the area.**
- **Of the three measures proposed to prevent ASB higher fencing was the most popular, although the majority of those interviewed either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the proposed measures would have any effect on reducing the likelihood of ASB.**

3.6 **During the course of the interviews, a number of measures were requested if a decision to open the gate was made. The measures detailed are as follows:**

3.7

- **The gate to be 12 foot in height in order to prevent youths entering the park during such times the park is closed.**
- **Meaningful control measures to prevent dogs running freely and fouling within the park indiscriminately.**
- **The erection of extensive two-meter security fencing at the rear of the properties in Rosetta Park to protect their private property from intrusion from people and dogs as well as potential crime.**
- **Installation of surveillance cameras (CCTV) in order to closely monitor and deter anti-social behaviour and potential crime.**
- **The erection of higher fencing around the substation to prevent youths congregating within the substation.**
- **The reduction of foliage and tree coverings within the area inside the gate in order to increase light and to discourage anti-social behaviour.**

- **Potentially installation of a lighten system to provide light within the area of access the reopening of the gate will allow as a means of security and prevention of anti-social behaviour.**
- **Increase dog poo bins if the gate is reopened to facilitate the increase in dog walkers within the area and access the park via Knockbreda Road.**
- **Kissing Gate to be installed if the decision is made to reopen the gate, this would prevent fast and speedy exit from the park from both an anti-social behaviour perspective and a child safety perspective.**

3.8 If such measures detailed above were implemented in order to manage anti-social behaviour concerns, the costs would be as follows –

- **Additional Litter bin - £800**
- **Erection of fencing around substation and rear of houses of Rosetta Park - £8000 - £10,000**
- **CCTV –based on similar CCTV being erected at Girdwood, costs would be approximately £25k.**
- **Resurfacing of the small unadopted land situated outside the gate between 36 Rosetta Park and 36 Knockbreda Road - £4000**
- **Installation of security lights within the proximately of the gate - £51,800**

3.9 During the course of the resident interviews, a number of items of note were discussed:

- **The funeral parlour at the junction of Knockbreda Road and Knock Eden Park was, according to the residents, refused permission by Belfast City Council to hold funeral services within the premises. This was due to concerns around congestion and parked cars, which according to the residents would constitute the same issues as opening the Knockbreda Road entrance into Cherryvale Park and residents have questioned should the P&C committee not have a consistent approach to the Planning committee.**

- **If parking restrictions are implemented within the area, this will de value properties within and change the areas character.**

- **The residents interviewed have requested a consultation meeting with either the elected members of Lisnasharragh DEA or members of the P&C committee.**

3.10 Officers have met on numerous occasions with Department for Infrastructure officials to discuss any implications on traffic, parking and crossings in regard to the gate. The road service has stated that no additional lighting is required. Parking restrictions lines would not be added prior to the gate opening; however, this

would be monitored and if lines are required there would be no cost to the council.

The Department for Infrastructure had identified three potential options for a traffic light system on Knockbreda Road and in a discussion between council officers and DFI officers in mid-November, DFI notified the Council officer that final plans relating to the second option (see attached) were being finalised as this was determined as the best solution.

Funding has been assigned to the project by The Department for Infrastructure and now awaiting confirmation from the department on timescales.

Options

1. **Gate remains closed: the overall survey results support the re-opening of the gate. However, concerns have been expressed by both those in favour and those against reopening the additional pedestrian access.**

2. **Gate is re-opened: the majority of initial wider survey returns (89% of those indicating a preference) would support this option.**

   Anti-social behaviour concerns have been costed and are presented in paragraph 3.6.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

4.1 Operational arrangements can be accommodated within existing budgets. Additional opening hours would incur additional costs.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

There is no identified equality impact, this will be continually reviewed."

The Interim Director of Neighbourhood Services advised the Working Group that the funding for the proposed measures listed at 3.8 within the report was not within existing budgets. She outlined that the Equality and Rural Needs Assessment were also outstanding in respect of the assessment of the opening of the gate. The Working Group was advised that there was a triangle of land between the gate and the footpath which officers had not yet been able to identify ownership of. The issue had been referred to Legal Services and that she hoped to submit a more comprehensive report to the People and Communities Committee in August which would address those issues.

A number of Members stated that, while they understood some of the residents' anxieties in relation to the opening of the gate, Anti-Social Behaviour was rare within Cherryvale Park. It was further raised that they did not foresee any major issues occurring in relation to parking in the area. The Interim Director advised the Working Group that she had looked at the statistics provided by Safer Neighbourhood Officers for ASB within the Park and that the levels had been extremely low, however, she advised that a more comprehensive ASB profile for the park would be provided to the People and Communities Committee in August.

A number of Members stated that they wished to see the gate opened. Some Members stated, however, that the proposed safeguarding measures such as the installation of higher fencing around the electricity substation and to the rear of the houses in Rosetta Park which abutted the Park should be completed before the gate was opened.

In response to a Member's request, the Working Group agreed that officers would engage with NI Electricity to request that they would consider permitting the Council to connect to the substation within the park in order to reduce the proposed cost of £51,800 for the security lighting. The Interim Director of Neighbourhood Services also advised that alternative options for security lighting were also being explored.

The Director of Physical Programmes advised the Committee that, in terms of the costs associated with the project, the main avenue would be to seek in-year non-recurrent funding.

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Long),
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – that, the Working Group:

- notes the update which has been provided; and

- after the funding options have been explored further, the Members representing the Lisnasharragh District Electoral Area would seek to have a meeting with any concerned residents.

Sydenham to Holywood Walking, Wheeling and Cycling Routes Consultation

The Working Group was presented with the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 In March 2022, Members of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee received an update report that the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) was running a public consultation on the Sydenham to Holywood Walking, Wheeling and Cycling routes. At the meeting Members voiced general support and felt that whilst this is an opportunity to deliver better cycling infrastructure the routes as set out in the document were not ideal and agreed for further engagement through the Area Working Groups.

DfI is seeking Council to submit its preferred route option so that it can begin to plan this route as part of the delivery of the Belfast Cycling Network. Council officers from across departments in Physical Programmes, City & Neighbourhood Services and City Regeneration & Development met to consider the route options and make a recommendation for Members.

The purpose of this report is to propose that Council advises DfI that Route 1 is the preferred option for delivery and seek further engagement with DfI on the development of this through engagement with the East Area Working Group (AWG) and officers.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- **Note the Officers' feedback based on deliverability, alignment with Council priorities, potential to increase connectivity to communities and amenities and agree recommendation of Route 1 as the preferred route option (Red, see Appendix 1 on mod.gov)**
- **Note the ongoing engagement with DfI and Council officers on the development of this and other routes and resume discussions through the respective Area Working Groups.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 On 3 June 2021, the Minister for Infrastructure published '*Planning for the Future of Transport – Time for Change*'. This document articulates the Minister's vision that active travel becomes a pillar of change within towns and cities to cut emissions, to improve health and wellbeing, and to better connect families and communities. It commits to the adoption of the sustainable transport hierarchy where prioritisation is given to sustainable travel by providing for walking and wheeling, then cycling, then public transport ahead of private vehicle use.

3.2 The Minister followed this by publishing '*Making Belfast an Active City – Belfast Cycling Network 2021*' on 4 June 2021. This document set out her ambition to make Belfast a more cycle-friendly city and provides a blueprint for the development and operation of the cycling infrastructure in the city for the next ten years. The Belfast Cycling Network proposes two routes between Belfast and North Down:

- **a greenway type route alongside the Belfast to Bangor railway line; and**
- **a walking and cycling path alongside Holywood Road and the A2 north of Tillysburn.**

3.3 The *Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan 2022-2031* was published 23 March 2022 and sets out schemes that will be delivered in the short (2022-2025), medium (2025-2028) and long term (2028-2031. The Sydenham to Holywood link is included as a short-term scheme and in February 2022 DfI opened a consultation on these routes and sought views as to whether priority should be given to developing one of three options (see Appendix 1 on mod.gov). Each of the proposed routes is between 4.0 and 4.8km long and all of them start at the underpass vehicular entrance to Victoria Park and terminate near Kinnegar, Holywood. The routes would also provide a link between the existing Comber and Connswater Greenways and Holywood Exchange and the North Down Coastal Path. The preferred route will determine which scheme will be included in the Belfast Cycling Network delivery plan for construction in the short term. The first two routes are

already within the Belfast Cycling Network, but the third route is not a part of the Network:

- **Route 1: a path along the railway from Sydenham through Holywood Exchange (red)**
- **Route 2: a path along Holywood Road through Holywood Exchange (green)**
- **Route 3: upgrade the cycling route alongside the Sydenham ByPass (blue)**

3.4 **<u>Route 1 (red) path along the railway from Sydenham through Holywood Exchange</u>**

This is approximately 4 kilometres long and commences at Victoria Park and continues along Larkfield Drive and Inveraray Drive, becoming 'traffic free' at Inveraray Ave. It would involve a new path around Alderman Thomas Patton Playing Field, Shorts Recreational Club and Blanchflower Stadium, near the railway line. A major element is a proposed bridge over the railway which would require significant embankments/ramps to facilitate a bridge in this location. The estimated cost for this scheme is £3,500,000 and the anticipated timeframe for delivery is approximately 48 months.

3.5 **Over the past couple of years, and in advance of the recent public consultation, there has been ongoing engagement with the DfI, the East Area Working Group and Officers on cycle routes and greenways. Drawing on the feedback from Members at the East Area Working Group in February, Council Officers in Physical Programmes, City & Neighbourhood Services and City Regeneration & Development met to consider the options and make a recommendation for Members and propose that Council advises DfI that Route 1 is the preferred option for delivery. This is based on several key factors, including that it is the most traffic free route at 25% (Route 2 is 15%, Route 3 is 0%), though all routes will be segregated from the carriageway:**

- **Route 1 appears to be the safest and most direct route and would support those commuting between Belfast and North Down**
- **It is fully segregated from traffic and approximately 25% would be traffic-free**
- **It links other green infrastructure and the Connswater Community Greenway**
- **Located in close proximity to local community centre and could improve accessibility for users**
- **Potential to augment emerging projects and enhance use of Thomas Patton Park through enhanced active travel provision**
- **Opportunity to manage the impact on biodiversity and potential user conflict**
- **Whilst the route currently shows limited connectivity to communities, officers feel this could be improved and connect to the park and other open spaces and amenities**

3.6 **Route 2 (green): a path along Holywood Road through Holywood Exchange**

This route is approximately 4.8km and is the longest route option. It commences at Victoria Park and continues along Larkfield Drive and Inveraray Drive and Alderman Thomas Patton Memorial Park. It then follows the line of the Holywood Road, but it is not yet determined which side of the road. It uses the Tillysburn grade separated cycle path and would follow the A2 dual carriageway on the east side by upgrading the existing path and providing a physical separation from traffic. Crossings would be required at the roundabout near the bridge and at Airport Road West before the route would continue near the airport fence line and continue east to Kinnegar. The estimated cost for this scheme is £950,000 and the anticipated timeframe for delivery is approximately 24 months.

3.7 **Upon consideration Officers have discounted this route due to:**

- **Less proportion of traffic-free and likely to be less appealing for commuters since it is indirect, follows the dual carriageway and approximately 15% of the route is traffic free**
- **Potentially more expensive for Council as it is likely to require enhancement or widening of pathways and possibly additional lighting**
- **Officers noted that it provides good connections to Connswater Community Greenway but there are several pinch points and areas of potential user conflict**

3.8 **Route 3 (blue): upgrade the cycling route alongside the Sydenham ByPass**

This route is approximately 4.4km long and commences in the area of Victoria Park where it would be accessed by the existing ramp to the underpass entrance to the park. It could also be extended 1.4km further towards the city centre using the existing hard shoulder as far as Titanic Quarter station active travel underpass. It would continue along the Sydenham Bypass on the existing city-bound hard should using kerbed segregation as far as the Tillysburn grade separated walking and cycling underpass and follow the path for Route 2 along the A2 dual carriageway on an updated path which would provide physical separation from the motor traffic. It would utilise the existing flyover at Holywood Exchange. Crossings would be required at the roundabout near the bridge and at Airport Road West before the route would continue in close proximity to the airport fence line and continue east to Kinnegar. The estimated cost for this scheme is £750,000 and the anticipated timeframe for delivery is approximately 24 months. This route is not currently included in the Belfast Cycling Network.

3.9 **Upon consideration Officers have discounted this route because:**

- **The East Area Working Group expressed concern about the safety of the Sydenham Road section for cyclists**
- **Lack of opportunity to connect to communities and amenities**
- **The significant amount of pollution and poor air quality**
- **Depending on which side of the street the route follows there could be connections to Victoria Park Connswater Community Greenway but there are several pinch points and areas of potential user conflict**
- **Likely to be less appealing for commuters since it follows the dual carriageway and is oppressively noisy and none of the route is traffic free, though segregated from motor traffic**

3.10 **<u>Delivery, funding and maintenance</u>**

In terms of delivery of any of the three options, DfI has advised that the exact location of each route is not yet defined and suggested that the best way to deliver it would be by DfI and BCC working together as either a joint project or with each organisation leading on the sections on their own land. For example, if it sat within the curtilage of Thomas Patton Park then it would be up to Council to determine where it is best placed, the palette of materials and consider environmental and ecological impacts. It is recommended that there is an ecological assessment at the concept design stage before to fully committing to the delivery of the route within the Park. The design and delivery of the route will need to take into account issues within the Park, including the construction of a 4m wide 'shared path' which may result in the loss of existing mature trees/vegetation along the boundary and the need for sections of the path network to be enhanced to make 'shared path' connections between this route and the Holywood Road entrance.

3.11 **As part of the design and delivery, consideration will need to be given to the long-term management and maintenance since the sections located on Council land would be the responsibility of Council to maintain. This will have an impact on revenue and future budgets. Additionally, if the route traverses through Alderman Thomas Patton Memorial Park regard will need to be given to public perceptions of safety which may necessitate amendments to the byelaws, provision of lighting and consideration of the park's opening and closing hours or alterative surrounding routes if the park is closed. Additionally, Council and DfI would need to agree exactly which party leads on the legal agreements in relation to third party land and this could entail additional time and resources to complete. Council would also need to mitigate the potential impact on assets such as pitches, playgrounds, car parks and perhaps even buildings within Council land and lands belonging to third parties. Members should note that DfI envisages that Route 1 could be delivered in approximately 48 months however, other factors such as an ecological assessment, legal process for agreements/order and planning may alter this initial projection.**

3.12 DfI has noted that there is currently no budget to deliver the scheme at this time but would like to continue to engage with Council to work up options for delivery and once the preferred route has been agreed. DfI has advised that similar to other projects, they would be open to funding Council for elements of the route through the either Green and Blue Infrastructure Fund (or something equivalent). However, this funding would not cover future management or maintenance.

3.13 Further Member engagement

DfI presented the proposed Sydenham to Holywood consultation routes at the East AWG meeting on 3 February 2022 where it was agreed that after the completion of the public consultation, DfI would return to the AWG to present the consultation findings. Given the previous feedback and engagement with DfI, it is likely that the AWG will continue to be an appropriate mechanism for DfI, Members and officers across Physical Programmes, City & Neighbourhood Services and City Regeneration & Development to enable further discussions to progress to the next stage.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

None associated with this report.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report."

A number of Members stated that they were supportive of the proposed Route 1.

The Working Group agreed to recommend Route 1 as the preferred option.

Requests to Present at a Future Meeting

Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association (NICSSA)

The Working Group noted correspondence which had been received from the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association, who were requesting to present details of an upcoming capital redevelopment programme at the Stormont Estate to the Working Group.

The Working Group acceded to the request and agreed to invite NICSSA to present at a future meeting.

Ulster Rugby

(Councillor Newton, having declared an interest in this item, left the meeting at this point in proceedings)

The Working Group noted correspondence which had been received from Ulster Rugby, who were requesting to present details of the projects which they had been working on recently to develop the organisation and offering, both within the professional, club and school game.

The Director of Physical Programmes advised the Working Group that Ulster Rugby had submitted an application for funding from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, an £8million programme to support capital projects across the city, for which the consideration process was ongoing. She outlined that it would not, therefore, be appropriate for the Working Group to receive a presentation from them in respect of their proposal under that fund. However, she explained that other issues and projects related to Ulster Rugby could certainly be discussed.

The Working Group therefore acceded to the request and agreed to invite Ulster Rugby to present at a future meeting but that it would be made clear that they could not discuss their application for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding at any such meeting.

Chairperson

Belfast City Council

Subject:	**Commercial & Procurement Service: Procurement Policy**
Date:	17th June 2022
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance & Resources
Contact Officer:	Noleen Bohill, Head of Commercial & Procurement Service (CPS) Orla McMullan, Procurement Development Manager

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of report or summary of main issues**
1.1	The Commercial & Procurement Service (CPS) presented its 3-year Transformational Strategy to Chief Officers in September 2020.
1.2	To support this, the Procurement Development Team within the CPS has developed a corporate-wide **Procurement Policy** to establish the legal authority of the procurement function within the Council and to simplify, clarify and reflect legislation governing procurement.
1.3	The Procurement Policy is important as it sets out the method and the governance arrangements (i.e. approvals required) associated with any money spent by the Council on the goods, services and works that are required to enable it to deliver its services. It details

	what the Council expects from its officers in terms of behaviour, actions taken, and the processes to be followed for all procurement activity.
1.4	This **Policy will apply to all Council Officers** involved in the execution of works, supply of products or the provision of service contracts. We recognise that procurement is cross-cutting throughout the organisation and therefore, the policy has been designed to also act as a critical link to other relevant existing (and any future) Council policies and procedures that involve procurement activities e.g. those relating to social value and sustainability.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: 1. Approve the Procurement Policy; and 2. Approve the approach to adopting and implementing the Policy.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	The overarching aim of the **Procurement Policy** is to establish the delegated authority of the procurement function within the Council and to simplify, clarify and reflect legislation governing procurement. Primarily, the Policy brings together existing legislative and policy requirements, as set out in the Council's constitution, and introduces best practice relating to procurement activity e.g. new mandatory training and a revised documented approach for all officers to adhere to when evaluating tenders.
3.2	This Policy will be important for Council Officers and suppliers as it sets out the method and the governance arrangements (i.e. approvals required) associated with any money spent by the Council on the goods, services and works that are required to enable it to deliver its services. It will act as a 'golden thread' between the Transformation Strategy and day-to-day procurement operations. It details what the Council expects from its officers in terms of behaviour, actions taken, and processes followed for all procurement activity.
3.3	This **Policy will apply to all Council Officers** involved in the execution of works, supply of products or the provision of service contracts. We recognise that procurement is cross-cutting throughout the organisation and therefore, the policy has been designed to also act as a critical link to other relevant existing (and any future) Council policies and procedures that involve procurement activities e.g. those relating to social value and sustainability.
3.4	To support the implementation of our Procurement Policy, we have taken a 'bottom-up' approach which involved the following initial steps:

	1. Developing, implementing, and monitoring processes and procedures for end-to-end procurement activity at all values and for each procurement method, including: a. Quotation and tender competitions; b. Use of framework agreements; and c. Use of Single Tender Action process. 2. Introducing supporting documentation such as template forms, process checklists and guidance. 3. Introducing the requisite levels of approval, in line with the Council's constitution. 4. Ensuring staff are equipped with the right skills to enable us to adopt best practice and to conduct legislatively compliant processes and procedures. Training is available on a regular schedule. 5. Ensuring staff are guided to relevant existing (and any future) Council policies and procedures (as appropriate) e.g. those relating to social value and sustainability. 6. Introducing a culture of continuous improvement through regularly seeking feedback on the processes, support, guidance and training available.
3.5	In terms of monitoring the performance of the processes and procedures documented within the Policy, CPS will report annually to the Commercial & Procurement Panel, Corporate Management Team (CMT) and the Strategic Policy & Resources (SP&R) Committee (as appropriate) on procurement activities. Monitoring will also continue to evolve in line with the introduction of enhanced reporting functionality through the Council's new finance system ('go-live' planned for April 2023).
3.6	The next phase of policy implementation will include the development of a communication and engagement plan to ensure Officers are equipped with the requisite skills to comply with the policy. The individual tasks related to this phase will be captured in the CPS annual Roadmap which is monitored via the Commercial and Procurement Panel.
	Financial & Resource implications
3.7	This programme of work will be managed as part of the CPS's annual revenue budget.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
3.8	No implications at this stage.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1: Draft Procurement Policy

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Belfast City Council

Commercial & Procurement Services

Procurement Policy

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Belfast City Council

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1. Background & Purpose

Introduction

The objective for Belfast City Council's (the Council's) commercial and procurement activities is about achieving the best Value for Money outcome for the ratepayer. Value for Money for the Council includes delivering on the key economic, environmental and social outcomes set out in the Belfast Agenda and the Council's Corporate Plan.

The Council's Commercial and Procurement Service (CPS) is committed to providing a strategic organisational approach to procurement and commercialisation. We developed a rolling annual roadmap of improvement activities, which sets out our plans to improve procurement and commercialisation across the organisation. These planned improvements can be seen throughout this document where a new process, procedure or training need has been identified.

To support the delivery of this Strategy, the CPS will establish uniform commercial and procurement policies throughout the Council that will ensure the fair and equitable treatment of everyone (internally and externally) who is involved with commercial and procurement activity. The development of this Procurement Policy is part of this, as it will establish the delegated authority of the procurement function within the Council and will simplify, clarify, and reflect the legislation governing procurement[1].

For the purposes of this Policy, 'Public Procurement' is defined by the Department of Finance[2] as:

> *"The process of the acquisition, usually by means of a contractual arrangement after public competition, of goods, services, works and other supplies by the public service'[3] and adopts 'Best Value for Money' as 'the most advantageous combination of cost, quality and sustainability to meet customer requirements."*

Purpose, Application and Scope

The **purpose** of this Policy is to govern the method by which the Council spends money on the goods, services and works that are required to enable it to deliver its services. This Policy acts as a 'golden thread' between the transformation strategy and day-to-day procurement operations. It details what the Council expects from its officers in terms of behaviour, actions taken, and processes followed in specific scenarios.

This Policy **applies** to all Council Officers involved in the execution of **works**, **supply** of products or provision of **service** contracts, where they are involved in a procurement process, whether as requisitioners, specifiers, purchasers or those who validate or authorise payment. This includes full-time and part-time employees on a substantive or fixed-term contract and associated persons such as agency staff, contractors and secondees.

[1] Detailed guidance relating to the implementation of procurement processes can be found on interlink.
[2] Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy Department of Finance (August 2014). In this context, cost means consideration of the whole life cost; quality means meeting a specification which is fit for purpose and sufficient to meet the customer's requirements and sustainability means economic social and environmental benefits, in support of corporate objectives.
[3] Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy Department of Finance (August 2014).

Contracts are awarded based on the provision of either **supplies; services or works**[4]. Where the different parts of a given contract are objectively not separable, the applicable legal regime shall be determined based on the main subject-matter of that contract, the subject matter of the contract is determined by the value.

Procurement activity is conducted in line with governance established corporately by CPS. CPS have incorporated the requirements of this policy into processes, guidance and forms used to award supplies or services contracts. Physical Programmes (PP) have implemented these processes, guidance, and forms into the awarding of capital works[5] contracts.

All officers engaging in procurement activity shall be aware of, and comply with, this policy and relevant and associated statutory and regulatory requirements, as detailed in section 2, when undertaking procurement activity.

The **scope** of this Policy applies to:

- All contracts made by, for or on behalf of the Council for procurement of goods, works and services over £3,000 regardless of the source of finance[6]
- All parts of the Council's business and where the Council is acting as an agent for another body unless the principal lawfully directs to the contrary.
- All officers applying relevant UK Legislation, in particular Public Contract Regulations 2015 (PCR 2015) (as amended by Public Procurement (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 (PPR 2020)
- Any person, not an officer of the Council, who is engaged to manage a contract on behalf of the Council.
- The selection of nominated suppliers and nominated sub-contractors for products, works and services covered by a main contract.
- The Council when it is a member of any consortium or similar body or is collaborating with another body which is acting as its agent, the regulations of that body shall apply. The Council shall not enter any such arrangements unless satisfied that it will thereby achieve best Value for Money and proper control within the consortium or by the agent over procurement arrangements.
- Members involved in approving procurement activity in line with Standing Order 52 (b) and Scheme of Delegation 2.5
- Members involved in procurement activity in line with The Northern Ireland Local Government Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- Members and officers involved in procurement activity in line with Local Government Employee & Councillor Working Relationship Protocol

The Policy **does not**:

- Apply to transactions for service contracts which have been identified as excluded in Regulation 10 of the PCR 2015[7], transactions such as:
  - the procurement of legal representation
  - the acquisition or rent of land or existing buildings (not for development purposes)
- Apply to transactions as excluded in Regulation 12 of the PCR 2015[8], such as public contracts between entities within the public sector when:

[4] Supplies are physical goods or products. Typical examples of goods are: office supplies and equipment, furniture, IT equipment, books, vehicles, medical supplies and other commodities.
Services can be provided by an organisation or an individual.
Works are related to civil works; this includes new construction of structures, renovations, extensions etc. as set out in Schedule 2 of PCR2015.

[5] Within BCC Capital Works refers to works related procurement activity that is managed through the Capital Programme – these procurements are initiated through the Physical Programmes department

[6] Standing Orders 52(B) and Scheme of Delegation 2.5

[7] Public Contract Regulations Section 10

[8] Public Contracts Regulations 2015 Regulation 12

    - the Council is the controlling authority, known as "Teckal" an example of which is transactions with the Waterfront Hall.
    - the contract establishes co-operation between the participating contracting authorities with the aim of ensuring that public services they must perform are provided with a view to achieving objectives they have in common, only where the contracting authority does not also provide the same service on the open market
- Apply to Grants, as defined:
    - as a transaction below the UK threshold[9] and
    - as the Council contributing to the cost of a particular purpose or activity, where the nature of the relationship created is to spend the money in accordance with the grant or return it and
    - as expenditure that does not a form payment for a contract for services, or where the Council specifies the output or outcomes to be delivered.

NB: Bodies such as Visit Belfast or Belfast City Centre Management could receive funding and provide services to the Council, therefore, Officers should ensure the appropriate process is followed for such expenditure

- Apply to statutory payments such as TV licensing, LPS rate payments, pension contributions
- Apply to cost of attending training and development events[10]; cost of study courses[11]; attendance at conferences, exhibitions, seminars, and workshops (not bespoke training designed by BCC).
- Apply to officer's professional fees required as legal necessity to perform their duties[12]
- Apply to payments to individuals such as speaker fees; organist; medical reports
- Apply to internal purchases (including petty cash)
- Inform Officers on policies and procedures related to wider commercial activity

Policy Objectives

The objectives of this Policy are to:

- Establish the delegated authority of the procurement function within the Council.
- Ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements, governance, and relevant external standards.
- Provide clear uniform guidelines and processes that are consistently followed to procure and manage contracts.
- Establish the process for selection and award for the appointment of suppliers.
- Operate an open, equal, transparent, and competitive approach to procurement.
- Award contracts that achieve Value for Money.
- Promote and achieve social value and sustainability.
- Set out the context for ethical trade practices that the Council has agreed to deliver through commissioning and procurement activities.
- Ensure that the Council's procurement is flexible, resilient, manages risk and safeguards against corruption, fraud, waste, and abuse.
- Establish and embed a commercially focused approach to procurements.

[9] Current procurement threshold as set out in Regulation 6 of PPR 2020
[10] Scheme of Delegation 2.2.8
[11] Scheme of Delegation 2.2.9
[12] Scheme of Delegation 2.2.6

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2. Legislation & Policy

This Policy sets out how the Council's procurement activity, along with its processes and procedures, will be designed and conducted to ensure compliance with relevant legislation, related Council policies and procurement 'best practice'.

Legal Context

The Council was established as a Local Authority under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. This Act states a Council may enter contracts necessary for the discharge of any of its functions[13]. To enter contracts for the supply of goods, works and services, Local Authorities are subject to and must adhere to procurement related legislation.

Regulated procurement

The Public Contracts Regulations (PCR) 2015 (as amended EU Exit Regulations 2020) establish rules for procurement for the Council with respect to public contracts and design competitions. The Concession Contracts Regulations (CCR) 2016 establish the rules on procurement by contracting authorities with respect to works or service concessions i.e. where there is income to be generated. The current UK thresholds for PCR2015 or CCR2016 to apply are £189,330 and £4,733,252 respectively. Throughout this document we have referred to PCR2015/CCR2016 collectively as "the regulations" and their applicable thresholds as the "UK thresholds".

The UK Regulations implemented the EU Directives. Post Brexit, PPR 2020 amends the Regulations to ensure public procurement law, i.e. PCR2015 and CCR2016, operate effectively across the UK.

The Government proposes to comprehensively streamline and simplify the complex framework of regulations that currently govern public procurement. The timeline for the new UK Public Procurement Regulations to take effect is currently 2023. The government proposes enshrining in law principles of public procurement: the public good, value for money, transparency, integrity, fair treatment of suppliers and non-discrimination

The Council's procurement activity will fully respect, comply with and be conducted in accordance with the following procurement specific legislation, in the order of precedence, as set out below:

- The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 in conjunction with The Public Procurement (Amendment Etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020
- Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1927, 2014. (The legislative requirements from this Act are reflected in the Council Constitution, which is set out in more details in section 6)
- WTO Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA)

Non-regulated procurement

Specific rules set out in the regulations, are only applicable when the value of a contract is above the stipulated UK thresholds. However, whilst specific rules do not apply, the Council conducts procurement activity in line with the best practice principles of **transparency**, **non-discrimination**, **fair treatment, value for money, and the public good** when conducting procurements of any value.

These principles are aligned to The World Trade Organisation (WTO) Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA). It is the pre-eminent international instrument regulating the conduct of international trade in government procurement markets. It also serves broader purposes of promoting good governance, the efficient and effective management of public resources, and the attainment of best value for money in national procurement systems. The UK have achieved independent Membership of the GPA.

[13] Article 99 Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972.

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Other relevant legislation when procuring

When conducting procurement exercises it is common that we also assess whether the bidders can comply with relevant legislation. The types of other legislation that is commonly relevant in a procurement exercise are:

- Health and Safety Regulations (Corporate Health and Safety maintain a Register of Legislation) that we can refer to
- Environmental Regulations (CPS maintain an active Register of Legislation which is used as a reference point when conducting procurement activity to consider Environmental Regulations, as part of our commitment to ISO14001)
- Employment Regulations (Further details can be sought from Corporate HR)

External Policy

Procurement Policy Notes (PPNs), issued by the Cabinet Office, are applicable to local authorities where stated. In Northern Ireland, they are often issued with supporting documentation and Procurement Guidance Notes (PGNs) to assist implementation.

Internal Policy

When conducting procurement activity, procuring officers must comply with all Council policies, which are based on relevant legislation or best practice. The CPS's processes have been designed to ensure that relevant Council policies are complied with, including:

- Council Use of Consultancy Services
- Information Governance Regulations
    - Data Protection Act 1(DPA) 2018 - General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) compliance -
    - Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulations 2004
- Social Value Procurement Policy
- Code of conduct
- Whistleblowing policy
- Fraud & bribery policy statement
- Computer Use Policy

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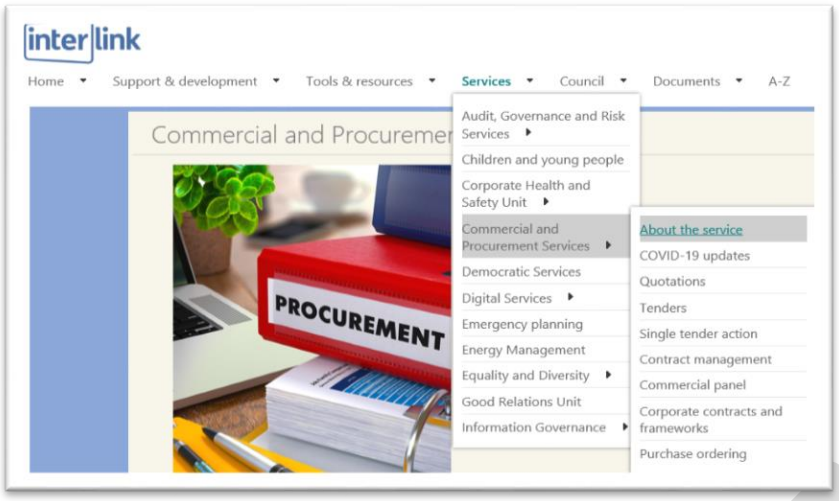
3. Procurement Methodology

Introduction

This section will take you through the end-to-end stages of a typical procurement and contracting life cycle, as shown below. Proportionate effort should be applied to each stage depending on the value and complexity of the requirements being procured. Detailed roles and responsibilities for all procurement exercises are available on interlink.

CPS has developed the processes, procedures, guidance, and templates for the stages of all procurement activity. All documentation for each stage of the relevant procurement exercise is available on Interlink.

PP have implemented CPS documentation for activity related to awarding a works contract. The documentation required for works procurement activity is available to all PP officers and where there are variations these are sign-posted within the Project Management Handbook.



CPS processes and procedures are documented and managed via an Integrated Management System, ISO9001. Best practice is incorporated into all processes, and the requirements of each stage are explained in the remainder of this section. Procurement activity at all values is subject to audit both internally and externally.

When considering a new procurement requirement officers can initially check if this requirement is covered by an existing contract - corporate contracts.

The processes that establish how all contracts are awarded are introduced in the table below.

Table 3.1: Procurement Process Types

Procurement Type	Value	Process	Description	Process managed by
All	Up to £3k	Direct award – no competition	Any supporting evidence of price checking (verbal / written) can be included when creating a Purchase Order e.g. in the internal notes field	Department
Works and Works related Services	Over £3k	Quotation	Suppliers who participate are selected by Officer in line with quotation process guidance; not publicly advertised	Physical Programmes
		Tender	Publicly advertised. Mirror principles of over UK threshold procedures	
		Single Tender Action	Direct award to a supplier for works related activity is very uncommon, and should be done so in line with STA guidance	
		Framework Agreement	A Framework agreement can be established internally. They establish pre-qualified supplier(s) that can be further engaged to award a contract.	
		External Framework Call-off	Award of contract is dictated by Framework rules	
Goods and Services	£3,000 - £30,000	Quotation[i]	Suppliers who participate are selected by Officer in line with quotation process guidance; not publicly advertised.	Department
	£3,000 - £30,000 & Over £30,000 – UK Threshold	Single Tender Action	Normally direct award to a supplier who is the sole provider in the market or as per circumstances set out in STA guidance.	
		External Framework Call-off	Award of contract is dictated by Framework rules.	
		Tender	Publicly advertised. Mirror principles of over PCR procedures	
	Over £30,000 – UK Threshold Over UK Threshold	Single Tender Action	Normally direct award to a supplier who is the sole provider in the market. Mirror the principles of over PCR negotiated procedure without prior publication.	CPS
		Framework Agreement / DPS	A Framework agreement can be established internally. They establish pre-qualified supplier(s) that can be further engaged to award a contract.	
		External Framework Call-off	Use of an external Framework Agreement let by another organisation can be considered as a contracting option	
		Tender	UK wide advertisement. Tender exercise for expenditure let in compliance with selected PCR 2015 Procedure[ii]	

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			Tender exercise for income generating requirement let in compliance with CCR 2016	
	Over UK Threshold	Single Tender Action	Must be let in compliance with PCR 2015 Procedure - Use of negotiated procedure without prior publication	
		Framework Agreement / DPS	UK wide advertisement.	
		External Framework Call-off	Use of an external Framework Agreement let by another organisation can be considered as a contracting option	

Pre-Market Engagement & Research

Pre-market engagement is the practice of consulting with suppliers before we go to market with our requirements via any of the processes set out in Table 3.1. This can involve, for example, asking suppliers to complete a questionnaire; demonstrate functionality of a system or participation in a Q&A forum or structured meeting. The benefits of premarket engagement include:

- Understanding your requirements better including:
  - Whole life costs (Especially important to consider in conjunction with procurement thresholds, as per table 3.3)
  - Informing timescales.
  - Informing a business case
- Stimulate the market up to your upcoming requirement which can encourage competition
- Understanding the potential social value contribution, a supplier could make beyond quality and cost
- Understanding the key players in the market and any potential barriers to participation.

Premarket engagement, including the testing and piloting of products, must be conducted in an open transparent and non-biased manner. No unfair advantage should be given to any supplier. Officers should document why potential suppliers were invited to engage in this early stage of the process.

Officers must consider what pre-market engagement activity is appropriate or required. This is to ensure the best value approach is taken in the procurement exercise. CPS will support Officers through the pre-market engagement process and for more complex or higher value requirements CPS should be involved at the outset of this activity.

Initiating a Procurement Exercise

Officers, in the first instance, should confirm that an existing contract is not available for use, a list of corporate contracts can be found in interlink.

Procurement activity must not be initiated without confirmation of an approved budget and will not be published without the required authority (see table 6.1), including Financial Delegations.

Documented processes and request forms to initiate each type of procurement exercise are set out on CPS Interlink page

Procurement of supplies or services can be initiated in the ways shown below. Procurement of capital works should be initiated via the Physical Programmes Department.

Table 3.2: Procurement Initiation - Supplies and Services		
Value	**Process**	**Initiation Process**
£3,000 to £30,000	Quotation	Quotation Checklist
	Single Tender Action	STA request - £3,000 to £30,000 Form
	External Framework call-off	External Framework call-off Checklist

Over £30,000	Tender	Tender Initiation Request (TIR) Form
	Single Tender Action	
	Framework Agreement	
	External Framework call-off	

Procurement Timescales

Officers must ensure the time allowed for all procurements is proportionate to the cost, nature, and complexity of the requirements. Forward planning for procurement is required to:

- Obtain necessary approvals.
- Allow time to develop well considered and sufficiently detailed procurement strategies and specifications.
- Allow time for advertising periods as legislated in the regulations. E.g. tender exercise conducted using Open procedure must be advertised for a minimum of 30 days. Best practice dictates that Officers should allow bidders a minimum of 10 working days to return a quotation.
- Allow time for an implementation period or handover to ensure the contract is ready to go from day 1
- Allow for forward planning of CPS resources by submitting TIRs in advance of project start

Table 3.3: Typical Procurement Timescales	
Procurement	Initiation to Contract Start
Quotations (£3,000 - £30,000)	Varies depending on nature of the contract
Tender below UK threshold	Allow approximately 3 months to complete
Tender above UK threshold	Allow approximately 6 months to complete

More complex projects can take up to 12 months to complete if they are conducted using a 2-stage procurement process e.g. Competitive Procedure with Negotiation.

Procurement Thresholds

In line with the regulations, the value of procurement **should not** be artificially disaggregated, split or reduced to affect UK thresholds. The figures to be considered when valuing a procurement should:

- exclude VAT[14]
- be based on 'whole life cost'[15]
- include all extension and renewal periods
- include the requirements across all departments and not be split by operational units

Unless there is an objective reason otherwise, recurring requirements should be considered over a minimum contract period of 3 years, for example, annual quotation exercises should only be considered when there is uncertainly of demand/budget and not to avoid a tender exercise.

Where a value is close to the UK threshold, an over threshold procurement route must be followed.

[14] Except for tenders close to the UK Threshold. For these tenders procuring officers should calculate the estimated value of a contract based on the total amount payable including VAT.

[15] Whole life cost includes purchase hire or lease price, expenses operating costs, maintenance, utilities, training & disposal etc.. Disposal must comply with Financial Regulations Q.4

The procurement process followed depends on the whole life cost of the contract. Budget holders are required to ensure that the appropriate process is applied, is consistent with both the requirements of the corporate governance[16] and delegated authority as detailed in Section 6.

Preparing Procurement Documents

Each procurement process contains a range of documents that is required, normally for one of the following reasons:

- Internal documents that demonstrate authority and approval
- Internal documents that demonstrate compliance with the process
- Internal documents that demonstrate decision making
- External documents presented to the market to allow suppliers to bid
- External documents presented to the market that form part of the final contract

The following table shows the range of documents required for each procurement process[17], the list is not exhaustive, and all up to date processes and documents requirements can be found on interlink:

Table 3.4: Documents required for procurement processes (led by BCC)			
Value	**Process**	**Minimum document requirements**	**Other documents for consideration**
All procurement exercises		Specification Requirements Terms and Conditions Notification letters / emails Declaration of interest and confidentiality form	UK GDPR Compliance Form Schedule of Processing form (GDPR UK) Business case
£3,000 - £30,000	Quotation	Quotation process checklist Quotation template Evaluation scorecard	
	Single Tender Action	STA request £3,000 to £30,000 STA checklist £3,000 to £30,000	
	External Framework Call-off	Framework call-off Checklist	Documents specified by the Framework Agreement Evaluation scorecard
Over £30,000	Tender / Framework Agreement	Tender Initiation Request (TIR) Form (Exercises led by CPS only) Tender Procurement Strategy[18] Tender template eSourcingNI questionnaire Evaluation scorecard (both individual and consensus elements) Delegated Authority Report	
	Single Tender Action	Tender Initiation Request (TIR incl STA) Form	
	External Framework Call-off	Tender Initiation Request (TIR) Form Tender Procurement Strategy Documents required as per Framework guidance	Evaluation scorecard (both individual and consensus elements)

Funded procurements may require additional documents to be produced and retained in line with the terms and conditions associated with the funding, commonly referred to as the Letter of Offer.

[16] Financial Regulation K.6 and K.11 (SP&R)

[17] As per Standing Order 62 Issued procurement documents must include and be based on a clear specification, evaluation criteria, scoring matrix and appropriate Council terms and conditions.

[18] Over UK Threshold Tender Procurement Strategy approved by Strategic Category Manager

Developing a specification

The use of a proportionate specification is a requirement of corporate governance[19] and the Regulations.

The purpose of a specification is to present prospective suppliers with a clear, accurate and full description of the council's needs which enables them to propose a solution to meet those needs. The specification should be relevant, equitable and proportional.

Officers should refer to CPS guidance for drafting specifications (under development) and use the specification template.

Officers should manage any potential conflicts of interest that may arise if a specification is being influenced or designed by any external members. External members involved in the specification development must be excluded from the bidding process.

Designing evaluation criteria

Evaluation criteria for qualification, selection and award should be developed in a proportionate manner to avoid unfair treatment of small suppliers.

The evaluation criteria should be clearly linked to the scope of the contract being procured.

The procurement documents i.e. the quotation template or the tender template must be used to set out clear assessment and evaluation criteria that will be used to assess bidders.

Advertising / Issuing

CPS follow the requirements of the regulations regarding advertising over UK threshold tenders by publishing a notice on the Find a Tender System (FTS). FTS provides free access to business opportunities from the UK. If deemed necessary requirements can be published manually on TED[20], the European wide system for advertising opportunities.

In addition to this legislative requirement CPS ensure compliance with Standing Orders and best practice by also advertising procurement requirements in following ways:

- CPS publish a forward plan of future tendering opportunities on the Council website.
- All current tenders are advertised in newspapers[21] and on the Council website.

On publication of notices and adverts, the procurement requirements including all relevant documentation, allowing suppliers to submit a bid, is issued electronically via the Councils electronic sourcing system, eSourcingNI. CPS manage user access to this site, and more information on this can be found here.

As committed in the CPS transformation roadmap it is our intention to let all procurement requirements via an electronic system. Currently however, procurement requirements at quotation value are issued by email.

Clarifications

Clarifications can occur at various stages from a tender being advertised until the contract is awarded. Any requests submitted prior to bids being submitted must be addressed fairly between all bidders, with consideration given to whether any response is published to all bidders.

[19] Standing Orders 62

[20] As per the NI Protocol, a notice can be considered if there is cross-border interest in a contract for the supply of goods over the UK threshold

[21] Standing Order 58

Under the regulations and in line with Standing Orders[22], where information or documentation to be submitted by bidders is or appears to be incomplete or erroneous, or where specific documents are missing, the Council may request the bidders concerned to submit, supplement, clarify or complete the relevant information or documentation within an appropriate time limit, provided that such requests are made in full compliance with the principles of equal treatment and transparency.

There are general principles when considering how to respond to post-tender clarifications requests to ensure equal treatment and transparency:

- Clarifications must be genuine and not an attempt to perfect an imperfect bid
- Bidders cannot submit by way of clarification information that was not included in its initial bid

In limited circumstances prior to contract award there may be occasions when the price element of a bid is further clarified, this should only be done in conjunction with CPS advice e.g. clarification that value for money is being achieved when there is a single bid.

Following contract award, Officers may receive final clarifications before contract implementation. These are typically related to contract delivery and should be reviewed carefully so as not to unfairly impact the original evaluation.

The procurement lead will administrate responses to tender clarifications via the eSourcingNI portal. It is incumbent that Officers provide any technical responses to the procurement lead within the stated timeframe to ensure the overall procurement timeline is not impacted.

Quotation clarifications are managed in the main by departments, with support from CPS as required.

Supplier and bid confidentiality must always be respected and maintained avoiding unfairness to potential suppliers.

Receipt of Bids

The Council does not accept late submissions[23].

The Council does not accept qualified bids, other than exceptional circumstances as advised by CPS[24].

All bids received must remain sealed until after the closing date and time. For quotation exercises this is achieved by departments using the secure central mailbox that is managed by CPS; all quotations must be returned to quotations@belfastcity.gov.uk. CPS issue bids received on time to the nominated departmental officer once the closing date & time has passed.

Bids during a tender exercise are received securely via the Council's electronic sourcing portal eSourcingNI. The system only permits bids to be opened after the pre-set closing date and time.

Evaluation

CPS have developed guidance for evaluating both quotation and tender value exercises. Officers conducting a quotation evaluation must follow the guidance points set out in *Section 5. Receive and Evaluate Responses* of the Quotation Guidance available on interlink.

The requirements for conducting or participating in an evaluation panel for a tender exercise are detailed in the Tender Evaluation Process. Officers conducting or participating in a tender evaluation process must do so in line with the process which sets out the requirements in relation to:

[22] Standing Orders 60(f)
[23] Standing Order 60
[24] The bidder should be contacted to withdraw their qualification in the first instance

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- Evaluation panels:
  - Set up requirements
  - Ethical Practices - Conflict of interest and Confidentiality
- Evaluation criteria:
  - Introduction
  - Qualification Criteria
  - Selection Criteria
  - Award Criteria
- Scoring and record keeping
  - Freedom of Information (FOI)
  - Supplier presentations / interviews
- Panel Member Roles and Responsibilities
  - Role of Chairperson
  - Role of a Panel Member
  - Role of CPS Team Member

Officers participating in tender evaluation panels must attend CPS Tender Evaluation training in advance of conducting an evaluation. This is a mandatory requirement

Delegated Authority, Debriefing Bidders, Standstill and Award

*Approval from a Chief Officer / Delegated Officer is required **prior** to award of all contracts of £3,000 and above.*

For procurement exercises valued £3,000 to £30,000 departments must ensure they have the documented authority to proceed to notifying bidders of the outcome and awarding the contract. The Quotation Checklist, External Framework Call-Off Checklist or STA request £3,000 to £30,000 will contain the delegated authority section for completion for these exercises. Follow the documented processes set out on interlink in relation to notifying unsuccessful and successful bidders of the outcome

For procurement exercises valued over £30,000 CPS will ensure that a Chief Officer provides the authority to proceed to award via the Delegated Authority Report (DAR)[25].

CPS will inform each bidder of decisions reached concerning the conclusion of a tender exercise over £30,000, or the grounds for any decision not to award a tender; or to retender.

A written debrief must be provided when informing each bidder of the outcome of the tender. The information to be provided is contained within template letters which are issued by CPS.

The characteristics and relative advantages of the tender selected as well as the name of the successful bidder must be provided in the written debrief for tender exercises over the UK threshold, as per the template letter.

Verbal debriefs should only be undertaken in exceptional circumstances and when approved by CPS.

Bidders who are excluded as part of the qualification or selection criteria must be notified by CPS with the reason for exclusion without delay.

Unsuccessful bidders not short-listed at Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) stage must be notified of the outcome following the conclusion of the PQQ stage including the reasons for not being short-listed.

Contracts above UK threshold **must not** be entered into until the Standstill period has passed.

[25] Financial Regulations K.4

After the standstill letter is issued, you must wait for a period of at least 10 days before entering the contract. The standstill period ends at midnight on the 10th day after the standstill letters are issued.

It is also important to note that this period cannot end on a non-working day (i.e. Saturday, Sunday, or public holiday). Where the 10th day falls on a non-working day, the standstill period must be extended to midnight at the end of the next working day.

A contract award notice, which includes the total value of the contract including any options to extend and any potential further modifications anticipated, must be published for all contracts that are above UK threshold.

Sealing of Contracts

All contracts of over £30,000 must be made under the Corporate Seal[26]. Sealed Contracts/signed Articles of Agreement[27] will be held by Legal Services and managed using the Legal Services' Contract Register.

Complaints & challenges

In the first instance, any complaints and challenges that arise will be dealt with by CPS as set out on the Council website; records will be maintained on the CPS Complaints and Challenges Register. If the complainant is not satisfied, their complaint will be escalated to the Head of CPS. Further escalations will be managed in line with the Council's complaints, comments and complements policy.

Should the council receive either correspondence threatening a legal challenge or a Writ of Summons suspending the procurement process, the Head of CPS and Legal Services must be informed as soon as possible to ensure that appropriate steps to be taken are agreed.

Details of complaints and legal challenges and outcomes will be recorded by CPS and lessons learned will be implemented, where applicable.

Document Management, GDPR and Freedom of Information

Adequate and auditable procurement documents and records must be maintained to demonstrate compliance[28] and transparency in line with best practice[29]. This enables faster retrieval, greater security, and continuity of information.

The management and retention of all documents relating to procurement processes must comply with GDPR UK and the council's Records Retention and Disposal Schedule. This schedule sets out the minimum time periods for which various records such as tenders or contract records should be retained and identifies their disposal arrangements.

Documents relating to funded procurement may have a specific retention period defined within the Letter of Offer.

A GDPR Schedule of Processing, developed in conjunction with IGU, must be completed for all procurements which involve the processing of personal information regardless of value.

[26] Standing Order 61a (Under Standing Order 51(b) the Corporate Seal can only be affixed when there is a resolution of the Council)
[27] Standing Order 61
[28] Public Contract Regulations 2015 84(7)
[29] PRONI Northern Ireland Records Management Standard

The Freedom of information Act (FOI) 2000 provides a legal right for anyone to request access to information held by the council. We are obliged to publish certain information about our activities and provide access to other information held. The Council's Freedom of Information Protocol sets out the procedure for dealing with FOI requests.

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4. Contract Management

Contract Monitoring

Contracts should not exceed the value as agreed in the Delegated Authority Report. Departments should monitor their expenditure against agreed contractual limits and internal financial delegated approval limits.

Where spend cannot be managed within approved limits it could result in a contract being re-tendered.

Price increase requests on contracts over £30,000 are managed centrally by CPS. Price increase requests on contracts £3,000 - £30,000 are managed by the departments and are only permitted in line with contract terms and conditions.

If an increase means you will potentially breach a threshold e.g. a price increase on a quotation resulting in a contract now being valued over £30k then you should contact CPS before agreeing with the supplier.

CPS analyse the central Contract Register (Contracts let by CPS over £30,000) to identify contracts nearing their final end date. This information is presented quarterly using a RAG status to the end users to avoid contracts not being re-tendered on time, any issues arising are escalated to the Commercial and Procurement Panel.

Contract Extension

The contract term including any options to extend / renew the contract (OTR) will be defined in the contract terms and conditions.

CPS initiates the contract extension (OTR) process (for contracts over £30k) by:

- monitoring contracts approaching their current end date.
- monitoring contract expenditure against the approved value documented in the Delegated Authority Report
- identifying any medium to high-risk contracts i.e. those approaching the value approved
- contacting the Contract Manager to confirm satisfactory performance and to approve the contract being extended.
- managing any required approvals e.g. for price increases
- issuing the supplier with a contract extension letter (Option to Renew) to agree terms going forward for the contract.

Continued use of a contract beyond the approved end date (I.e., rolling contract) is not permitted and will be considered as non-compliant expenditure.

Contract Modification

Contract Modifications are only permitted in the circumstances as defined in Regulation 72 of PCR2015 for over UK threshold contracts. The spirit of this legislation also applies to below UK threshold contracts.

CPS are currently piloting a process and guidance for requesting, managing, and documenting any required Contract Modifications for all contracts

Whilst the process is under development Departments should consult with CPS before agreeing a modification to a contract with the supplier.

The value that will be considered when assessing a contract modification is the value approved within either the:

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- Quotation process checklist
- Framework call-off checklist
- STA £3,000-£30,000 request form or
- Delegated Authority Report

For over UK threshold value contracts, the award notice must include the total value of the contract including any options to extend and any potential further modifications anticipated. This notice will be used to identify the scope of any modifications requested.

Modifications are normally documented and issued to the supplier in line with the contract Terms and Conditions using an agreed variation form.

When a contract is still live the modification of the current contract should be considered before the option to award directly to a contractor via the STA process.

Management of the Contractor

Contract Management Guidelines have been designed to establish a process and guidance for managing contracts that will ensure contract delivery is achieved in compliance with the Council's governance, procurement 'best practice' and to ensure Value for Money. It must be used when managing contracts.

Any requests from contractor for references should be conducted on factual basis only (if Officers are unsure contact CPS for advice).

Contract Termination

In some circumstances the resolutions sought throughout the Contract Management process can fail and result in the only option being to consider terminating a contract.

The reasons under which a contract can be terminated are set out in the Councils terms and conditions. Contract Managers must consult with CPS and Legal Services to ensure contract terms around termination are met. For example, in a contract where there is unsatisfactory performance the contract cannot be terminated until the contractor has been given notice and allowed 14 days for corrective action.

CPS and Legal Services will ensure the appropriate approval[30] is sought to terminate a contract which may include prior consultation with the Chairman of the relevant Committee

To help reduce the risk of contracting with suppliers who previously had a contract terminated CPS will apply the conditions as set out in PCR2015 to all tender exercises which permits exclusion of contractors from the bidding process *"where the economic operator has shown significant or persistent deficiencies in the performance of a substantive requirement under a prior public contract, a prior contract with a contracting entity, or a prior concession contract, which led to early termination of that prior contract, damages or other comparable sanctions"*

CPS are developing standardised tender templates which will ascertain whether a bidder had a contract that was terminated in the previous 3 years. In these circumstances the bidder(s) will be required to present evidence of rectifying i.e., "self-cleaning" the issues identified, otherwise they will be excluded from progressing further in the process.

[30] Scheme of Delegation 2.5.6

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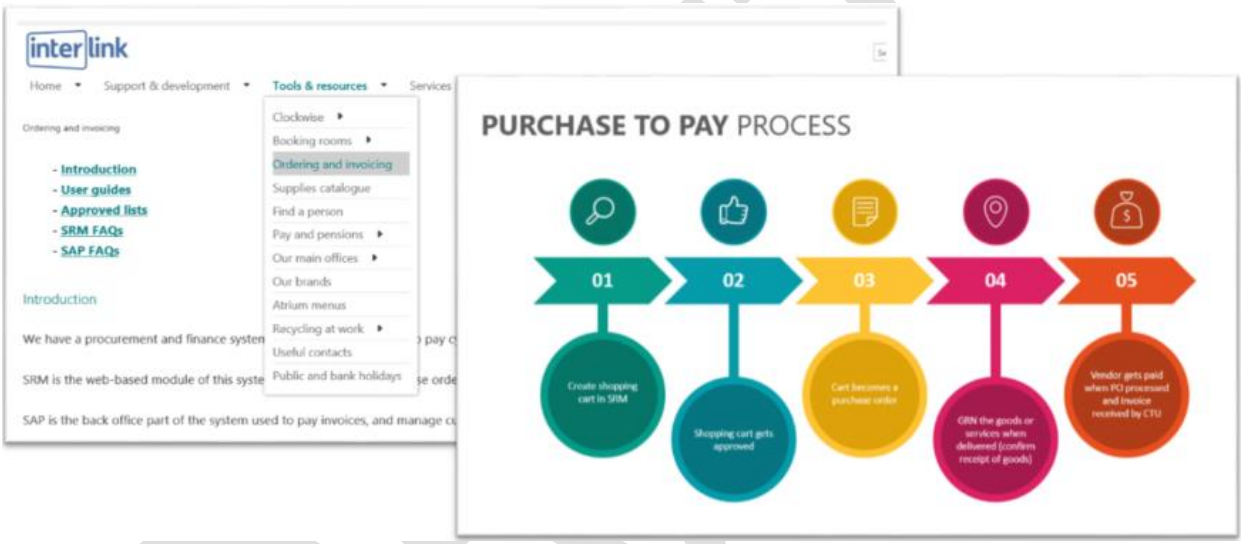
5. Ordering and Invoicing

We have awarded a new procurement and finance system that spans the budget to pay cycle, i.e., Budgeting, sourcing, creating purchase orders, goods receipting, payment of invoices, contract management and analytics. This system is due to go-live late 2022

The council's current system SAP has a web-based module (SRM) for creating purchase orders and good receipting. SAP, managed by Central Finance, is the back-office part of the system used to pay invoices, and manage customer and supplier accounts.

CPS maintain an information page on interlink, Ordering and invoicing, which provides users with further details on the process shown below including user guides; standard reports; links for system requests e.g. new vendors



SRM process and forms have been designed to improve the management information we hold enabling effective procurement decisions. They ensure that it is possible to determine:

- who requested, made and or approved the expenditure,
- the purpose of the expenditure,
- the process by which all key decisions were arrived at, and by whom,
- the destination of any goods or services received and
- any payments made

Follow the best practice shopping guide to ensure compliance with the council's governance and produce the most useful spend management information[31].

New procurements should have a contract or catalogue created on SRM where possible. Limit Orders (LO) should only be used when the cost of the contract is unknown (e.g. taxi) and must terminate at the end of each Financial Year

SRM Requisitioner training must be completed in advance of using the SRM system. The Digital Services Training Team run online SRM requisitioner training courses and can be contacted for availability at DigitalServicesTraining@belfastcity.gov.uk.

[31] Financial Regulation G.4-G.6

CPS have also developed quick start guides, available on page linked above, which are intended to help requisitioners hit the ground running after their SRM training or to refresh users if they do not use SRM on a regular basis.

Purchase ordering – Disaster recovery

If circumstances arise and the council's electronic procurement system cannot be used e.g. hacking, power outage etc. a manual process to raise, approve and issue purchase orders must be used. If this occurs and or a verbal order is placed a Purchase Order must be issued via SRM within 2 working days[32].

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[32] Financial Regulations J.6

6. Governance & Decision-Making

Council Governance

This Policy sets out in further detail the mechanisms within the Council's governance arrangements for commercial and procurement related decision making, as per the Council's Constitution. The Constitution sets out how the Council conducts its business, how decisions are made and the rules that are followed to ensure that these decisions are effective, efficient, and transparent. This Policy will guide Council Officers to comply with the Constitution when establishing contracts on behalf of the Council.

The Council's Constitution refers to conducting commercial and procurement activity within:

- The Standing Orders.
- The Scheme of Delegation.
- The Financial Regulations.

The Standing Orders (55-64) confirm the Council's internal organisational, administrative and procurement procedures relating to:

- Advertising and or issuing of procurements (Standing Order 58 & 60).
- Required approvals to procure, as specified:
    - Scheme of Delegation 2.5
    - Standing Order 56 for exceptions to Standing Orders i.e. Single Tender Actions (STA).
    - Financial Regulations G.26 for capital works.
- The use of a clear, relevant, and definite specification (Standing Order 62).
- Management of submissions received after the closing date/time (Standing Order 60.c).
- Management of errors/discrepancies within submissions (Standing Order 60.f).
- The use of frameworks (Standing Order 58).
- Sealing of Contracts (Standing Order 61).

Under the Scheme of Delegation (2.5), general procurement functions are delegated to Chief Officers[33] and include:

- Which powers can be sub-delegated and how these should be recorded (Scheme of Delegation 1.7 & 1.16).
- Procuring and authorising contracts below and above £30,000, and above £100,000 (Scheme of Delegation 2.5.1 - 2.5.3).
- Direct Award contracts (Standing Order 56, Scheme of Delegation 2.5.4).
- Incurring expenditure in cases of emergency (Scheme of Delegation 2.3.1).
- Assurance and reporting including the assurance framework (Scheme of Delegation 1.23).
- Management of contracts (Scheme of Delegation 2.5.7 & 2.5.10).
- Determining a breach of contract is in breach (Scheme of Delegation 2.5.6).

The Financial Regulations (J.1 - K.21) set out the overarching responsibilities of the Council and its staff, providing a framework within which the Council's financial affairs, including procurement are managed. This includes:

[33] Scheme of Delegation Appendix A In this Scheme the expression Chief Officer means: Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services, Strategic Director of Finance & Resources, Strategic Director of Place and Economy, City Solicitor / Director of Legal & Civic Services, Director of City and Organisational Strategy

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- Procurement thresholds and procedures (Financial Regulations K.3 & K.6).
- Electronic procurement (K.12).
- The use and management of registers (K.12).

The Council's procurement processes have been designed to ensure that corporate governance is complied with.

Council Decision Making

The following table provides an overview of the established authorities as set out within the Council's constitution. These authority and process approval requirements are built into all documented procurement processes and procedures.

Table 6.1 Delegated authority limits for procurement activity

Process / Activity	Contract Manager	Head of CPS	Legal Services	Chief Officer (or Delegated Officer)	Chief Officer only	C&P Panel	CMT	SP&R	Full Council
Approve expenditure (below £3k) **Approval typically by budget holder*	✓								
Initiate									
Approve invitation to tender (over £30k)				✓				✓	✓
Approve invitation to quote (£3k- £30k)	✓								
Award									
Approve award of contract (above £100k) (DAR)					✓				
Approve award of contract (£30k - £100k) (DAR)				✓					
Approve award of contract £3k to £30k quotation; framework				✓					
Approve Single Tender Actions (over £30k) (Retrospective STA[34])		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓
Approve Single Tender Actions (£3k - £30k)		✓		✓					
Contract Management									
Approve contract extensions (OTR[35])	✓								
Approve contract modifications / variations (over £30k)[36]		✓		✓				✓	✓
Management of breach of contract (£3k-£30k)	✓				✓				
Management of breach of contract (over £30k)	✓	✓						✓	
Terminate a contract		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓

[34] Requires consultation with the Director of Finance and Resources and Chair of Strategic Policy & resources Committee

[35] When Option to Renew has been approved in original Delegation Authority Report

[36] SP&R approval required for contract modifications where the term of the contract is being extended beyond the term approved

Governance									
Commercial and Procurement Strategies and Policies		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Commercial and Procurement procedures, templates, and guidance		✓							
Category Strategies		✓		✓					
Commercial Project Prioritisation & Activities		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓

The Strategic Director of Finance and Resources has overarching responsibility within the Council for procurement, which includes confirmation of budgets and ensuring spend controls are followed. Under the Scheme of Delegation (1.7), the Strategic Director of Finance and Resources has delegated procurement activity for supplies and services to the Head of the CPS.

The Strategic Director of Finance and Resources has delegated capital works procurement activity to the Director of Physical Programmes. Physical Programme officers should reference the project management handbook for further information on conducting a capital works procurement

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7. Sustainable Procurement

CPS Environmental and Quality Policy outlines the approach that CPS take to integrate sustainability into the procurement of goods works and services to optimise the economic social and environmental benefits.

Corporate objectives for Sustainable Procurement are set out in the Belfast Agenda and Inclusive Growth Strategy. These are implemented via the Social Value Procurement Policy and 2-step Social Value Toolkit and manage striking the right balance between considering the impact of environmental, economic and social factors along with price and quality.

The Social Value Procurement Policy will apply to all tenders over £30,000. Officer support and training in the application of the policy is being implemented during 2022.

Officers conducting a procurement exercise will be prompted to consider Social Value in their contract when completing the procurement strategy document. The procurement strategy will direct Officers to complete the Social Value Toolkit in order to determine the Social Value criteria and points to be assessed.

When the value of the contract is below £30,000 and Officers want to include social value criteria in their assessment, they can contact CPS for more information

8. Ethical Procurement

Ethics refers to the use of recognised social principles that involve fairness throughout the business relationship and being ethical means following a behaviour perceived as fair by the business community and wider society.

It is fundamental for procurement professionals to ensure the practices undertaken in business are above reproach. Being ethical means treating suppliers in a just, fair, honest, and fitting manner; preferential treatment is considered unethical. Council departments are in control of large budgets; hence it is important to set out:

- The legislative context in which we operate
- The expected behaviours for all Officers and how these are built into our processes
- What we expect from our suppliers and how we can assess that within our procurement exercises

Legislative context

As previously established, the Council conducts procurement activity in line with the best practice principles[37] of **transparency**, **non-discrimination**, **fair treatment, value for money, and the public good** when conducting procurements of any value.

The procurement regulations set out the specific types of qualification, selection and award criteria that may be used to assess bidders to ensure suppliers are treated in a fair and transparent manner. Assessing suppliers on criteria considered as non-commercial is not permitted. Non-commercial considerations could include, for example, a supplier's political affiliation.

[37] The Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (legislation.gov.uk)

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Expected Officer behaviour

To embed this approach officers involved in procurement activity must adhere to the principles of conduct and minimum standards of behaviour expected as detailed in the Council's Code of Conduct:

- Conflicts of Interest (4.4) which requires officers to ensure that private interests must not lead to allegations of impropriety or partiality bringing the council into disrepute. Officers who deal with, engage, or supervise, or process or determine applications from contractors with whom they have had, or currently have, a relationship in a private or domestic capacity, must declare that relationship to the appropriate manager as soon as they are aware.
- The Chief Executive reports to Council any instance where Members have interests in procurement activity38
- Gifts & Hospitality (4.12) which requires that officers must not accept money, significant personal gifts, or any other reward, other than items of token value (pens diaries etc.) from any organisation, body or individual who may benefit from work provided by the council. Hospitality should only be accepted if there is a genuine need to impart information or represent the Council in the community and must be properly authorised and recorded in line with council procedure. Officers should be sensitive to the timing of offers particularly if those providing the hospitality are associated with or involved in bidding for a contract.
- Fraud and Bribery (4.10) officers must be aware that it is a serious criminal offence39 for them to receive or give any gift, loan, fee, reward, or advantage for doing, or not doing, anything or showing favour, or disfavour, to any person in their official capacity. If an allegation is made the officer must demonstrate that any such rewards were not corruptly obtained.
- Disclosure of Information (4.2) which requires that officers do not use any information obtained in the course of their employment for personal gain or benefit, nor should they pass it on to others who might use it in such a way.
- Whistle blowing Policy (4.14) which requires that if officers are aware of activities which they believe to be illegal, improper, unethical, or otherwise inconsistent with the Code of Conduct should report the matter using the confidential Whistleblowing Procedure.

The CPS team is committed to ensuring that processes have ethical consideration built in as standard, and as part of that the team are committed to ensuring best practice in this area. As such, we have achieved the recognised Ethics Kite Mark from the professional body Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply.

Council Officers can complete this training annually – see CPS training on Interlink for more information.

Assessing suppliers

The council exercises due diligence in assessing bidder's ethical practices by the following means:

- Mandatory exclusion of bidders who have been convicted of offences including conspiracy; corruption; bribery; non-payment of taxes etc. as set out in detail within PCR2015 (for over-threshold contracts)
- Discretionary consideration of excluding bidders who are guilty of violating labour laws; professional misconduct; being involved in distorting competition etc. as set out in detail within PCR2015 (for over threshold contracts)

[38] Standing Order 64
[39] Bribery Act 2010

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- Confirmation that bidders comply with Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998
- Confirmation that bidders have not and will not take part in canvassing, soliciting or have any conflicts of interest
- Confirmation that bidders comply with the requirements of the Modern Slavery Act 2015.
- As part of the Social Value Procurement Policy, we will assess bidders:
    - prompt payment i.e. that our suppliers pay their supply chain promptly and
    - policies relating to ethical procurement and fair treatment of their supply chains

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9. Organisational Capability

The CPS Strategy sets out our objectives for organisational capability throughout the procurement and contract lifecycle.

CPS develop and roll-out training courses to ensure consistency and the implementation of best practice throughout the council. All council officers involved in procurement should attend the following courses as appropriate:

- Quotation process training
- Tender Evaluation training **mandatory training if participating in tender evaluation panels*
- STA Process training
- Contract Management (to be developed)
- Specification Development (to be developed)
- CIPS Ethical Procurement training (available annually February – April)
- Related policies – Social Value Procurement Policy and Toolkit (under implementation 2022)

To book relevant training visit the CPS Training page on Interlink

CPS can deliver bespoke training courses as required on the requisite skills to achieve our commercial aspirations including developing a business case, options appraisal, market analysis financial modelling and forecasting etc.

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10. Monitoring & Reporting

CPS will report annually to the Commercial & Procurement Panel, CMT and SP&R Committee as appropriate on the following activities as a performance indicator of the processes and procedures as documented within this Policy:

Pre-procurement phase

- Local spend
- SME spend
- Tender pipeline monitoring

Procurement

- Spend via procurement portal

Award

- Collaborative contracts awarded
- Low and no bid tracking
- Volume of contracts - quotes; tenders; STA; framework (call-off) - over and under threshold breakdown*

Contracts

- Contracted spend*
- Category management spend tracking
- Savings / benefits
- Contract management activity*

Feedback & Training

- Feedback - training rating
- Pre-training versus post training capability attitude breakdown
- Feedback - internal team
- Feedback - external supplier
- Rating on accessibility of tender info (for SMEs)

Compliance monitoring (procurement processes)

1. Below £30k
    a. procurement activity is monitored by departments i.e. the delegated officer confirms a compliant process has been undertaken when approving a contract award.
    b. As part of CPS Integrated Management System (ISO: 14001 and ISO: 9001) we monitor the quality of quotation documentation issued to suppliers as set out in our annual plans on a quarterly basis
2. Above £30k
    a. As part of CPS Integrated Management System (ISO: 14001 and ISO: 9001) we monitor the quality of the end-to-end procurement process on a quarterly basis.

This policy will be reviewed annually and updated in line with new government legislation or guidance, as part of CPS Integrated Management System.

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[i] As per Financial Regulations (K.6) the following procurement control limits apply to quotation exercises:
£3,000 - £8,000 Minimum of 3 suppliers, of which 1 supplier should be Belfast based where possible (per Social Value Policy)
£8,000 - £30,000 Minimum of 4 suppliers, of which 2 suppliers should be Belfast based where possible (per Social Value Policy)

[ii] PCR 2015 Tender Procedures include:
Open
Restricted
Competitive procedure with negotiation
Competitive dialogue
Innovation partnership
The Open procedures is a single stage open competition for all suppliers who want to bid; all other procedures can involve a minimum of two stages which allow for a first stage pre-qualification assessment in order to short-list which bidder can bid

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Belfast City Council

Subject:	Contracts Update
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
Contact Officer:	Noleen Bohill, Head of Commercial and Procurement Services

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
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**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: • Seek approval from members for tenders and Single Tender Actions (STA) over £30,000 And to ask members to • Note Retrospective Single Tender Actions (STAs) • Note the award of contracts by Arc 21 on behalf the council
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Approve the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 1**) • Approve the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 2**)

	• Note the award of retrospective STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 3**) • Note the award of contracts by Arc 21 on behalf the council **(Table 4)**
3.0	**Main report**
	Competitive Tenders
3.1	Section 2.5 of the Scheme of Delegation states Chief Officers have delegated authority to authorise a contract for the procurement of goods, services or works over the statutory limit of £30,000 following a tender exercise where the council has approved the invitation to tender
3.2	Standing Order 60(a) states any contract that exceeds the statutory amount (currently £30,000) shall be made under the Corporate Seal. Under Standing Order 51(b) the Corporate Seal can only be affixed when there is a resolution of the Council.
3.3	Standing Order 54 states that every contract shall comply with the relevant requirements of national and European legislation.
	Single Tender Actions (STAs)
3.4	The following STAs are being submitted for approval: • Contract for £135,000, for up to 3 years, awarded to McCreath Taylor NI Ltd for procurement of Scarab Truck Mounted Road Sweepers Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet. Therefore ensuring that parts and components are replaced and fitted in keeping with the manufacturer warranty, operational safety terms and conditions. • Contract for £75,000, for up to 3 years, awarded to CDR Group for the renewal of support and maintenance for MapInfo mapping software. The platform has been extensively used to provide developed functionality and projects. It would be a major exercise to replace or change this product and the cost would be prohibitive. * Previously approved CMT Feb 2022 & SP&R Mar 2022 for £57,000 • Contract for £100,000, for up to 18 months, awarded to VanRath for a temporary experienced accountant required in Finance to support the implementation of the new finance system. The existing contracted provider for T1792 Provision of Temporary Agency Resources: Matrix SCM have confirmed they are unable to fulfil the required

	role of Temporary Accountant within the contractually agreed time period to find a suitable candidate. • Contract for £135,000, for up to 3 years, awarded to NI Trucks Ltd for procurement of Iveco Trucks Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet. Therefore ensuring that parts and components are replaced and fitted in keeping with the manufacturer warranty, operational safety terms and conditions. • Contract for £120,000, for up to 3 years, awarded to TBF Thompson Ltd, for procurement of DAF Trucks Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet. Therefore ensuring that parts and components are replaced and fitted in keeping with the manufacturer warranty, operational safety terms and conditions.
3.5	The following retrospective STAs were awarded: • Contract for £100,000 (funded), for up to 6 months, awarded to MCS Group for requirement for Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and Technical Support Officers (TSOs) are required for 24hr shift rota cover for essential service delivery within the Port Health service. The existing contracted provider for T1792 Provision of Temporary Agency Resources: Matrix SCM have confirmed they are unable to fulfil the required roles of Environmental Health Officer (Port Health) and Technical Support Officers within the contractually agreed time period. The Committee is also asked to note that a 6 month extension of contract has been agreed with our supplier for the contract for the interim treatment and disposal of residual waste until 31st December 2022. It is envisaged that a replacement contract will be put in place by Arc 21 in the coming months.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.6	The financial resources for these contracts are within approved corporate or departmental budgets
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.7	None

4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 Table 1 - Competitive Tenders Table 2 - Single Tender Actions Table 3 - Retrospective Single Tender Actions

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Estimated Total Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Home safety equipment – supplied to families following a home safety assessment. Funded by Public Health Agency	Up to 4 years	£200,000	S Toland	A new regional tender for home safety equipment is being set up by AND Borough Council – BCC is named on this tender.
CPD Contract for Procurement cards for use throughout the organisation	Up to 3 years	£180,000	R Cregan	Used for expenditure that cannot be procured through SRM ordering processes. Contract generates 1% payback on expenditure. Utilising CPDs contract (BCC contract ref T2088).
Procurement of an operator for the two-year temporary Active Travel Hub at Cathedral Gardens Fully Funded	Up to 2 years	£35,000	C Reynolds	BCC has received an offer of funding from PHA and Ulster University to fund an operator for the Active Travel Hub in Cathedral Gardens, that will be responsible for providing active travel information, programming and training from the Hub.
Collection and Treatment/Recycling of Mixed Materials from Recycling Centres	Up to 4 years	£2,000,000	C Matthews	Current contract is ending and a new procurement process is required. Supports the Council with its waste management operations.
Provision of Kitchen Canopy Assessment /Cleaning for Cooking Protection at various Council Properties	Up to 4 years	£200,000	S Grimes	Service required to ensure than all kitchen canopies in Council property have an assessment and clean carried out by a competent contractor.
A grants management system providing online application and management of grants streams	Up to 4 years	£95,500	R Cregan	Current contract expires August 2022. Continuity of service required to support grant applications process.

Develop and pilot a bespoke capacity building programme and toolkit that will enable citizens and communities to fully engage and collaborate in digital innovation	Up to 7 months	£70,000	J Tully	There is currently no provision in place to support the participation of citizens and communities in digital innovation. Support is needed to enhance public understanding of data and digital technologies in the public realm.
Procurement of consultancy team to develop an Outline Business Case for the Innovation for Societal Impact Challenge Fund under the Belfast Region City Deal's Digital Pillar	Up to 6 months	£100,000	J Tully	An Innovation for Societal Impact fund is a key element of the overall suite of BRCD (City Deal) Innovation Challenge Funds as outlined in the digital pillar Programme Business Case.
Develop an Outline Business Case (OBC) for a £20m risk capital, Venture Fund, funded by the Belfast City Region Deal	3 months	£50,000	J Tully	An equity debt fund is a key element of the innovation Challenge Fund as outlined in the digital pillar Programme Business Case.
Further develop a suitable governance structure for the future management of the North Meadow Community Greenway Peace IV	Up to 9 months	£60,000	S Toland/R Crozier	This will be a key step in the Greenway's development and the applicant will need to further engage with all the relevant community stakeholders and with the co-designed, together with those who will be involved and affected.
Supply and installation of wet pour safety surfacing repairs	Up to 4 years	£400,000	S Toland/R Crozier	Repairs to safety surfacing – Council playgrounds
Supply and delivery of cleaning materials for BCC stores	Up to 5 years	£360,000	S Grimes	BCC stores manage the purchasing and disbursal of these items to facilitate departmental requisitions

Appendix 1

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Total Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
To procure Scarab Truck Mounted Road Sweepers Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet	Up to 3 years	£135,000	S Toland/ R Crozier	To ensure that the OEM approved engineering parts and components are replaced and fitted to Scarab Truck Mounted Road Sweepers in keeping with the manufacturer warranty, operational safety terms and conditions.	McCreath Taylor NI Ltd
Renewal of support and maintenance for MapInfo mapping software *Previously approved CMT Feb 2022 & SP&R Mar 2022 for £57,000	Up to 3 years	£75,000	R Cregan	MapInfo has 130+ users across the council and is used to provide council-wide mapping functionality. Significant investment has been made in user training and existing knowledge. The platform has been extensively used to provide developed functionality and projects.	CDR Group
Temporary experienced accountant required in Finance to support the implementation of the new finance system	Up to 18 months	£100,000	R Cregan	The existing contracted provider for T1792 Provision of Temporary Agency Resources: Matrix SCM have confirmed they are unable to fulfil the required role of Temporary Accountant within the contractually agreed time period to find a suitable candidate.	VanRath
To procure Iveco Trucks Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components, warranty support and specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet	Up to 3 years	£135,000	C Matthews	To ensure that the OEM approved engineering parts and components are replaced and fitted to Iveco Vehicles in keeping with the manufacturer warranty, operational safety terms and conditions.	NI Trucks
To procure DAF Trucks Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components, warranty support and	Up to 3 years	£120,000	C Matthews	To ensure that the original equipment manufacturer (OEM) genuine approved parts and components are fitted to DAF Trucks in keeping with the manufacturer warranty terms and conditions.	TBF Thompson Ltd

specialist repairs ensuring they are safe and road worthy as part of Council fleet					
Development of PEACEPLUS Local Community Action Plan	Up to 4 years	£48,500	R Crozier	There has been 2 failed procurement attempts through quotation and tender exercise. Blu Zebra and Locus Management (consortium bid) have been identified as the most appropriate contractor for this piece of work.	Blu Zebra and Locus Management

Table 3: Retrospective Single Tender Actions

Title of Contract	Duration	Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
Requirement for Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and Technical Support Officers (TSOs) are required for 24hr shift rota cover for essential service delivery within the Port Health service Fully funded	Up to 6 months	£100,000	S Toland	The existing contracted provider for T1792 Provision of Temporary Agency Resources: Matrix SCM have confirmed they are unable to fulfil the required roles of Environmental Health Officer (Port Health) and Technical Support Officers within the contractually agreed time period.	MCS Group

Table 4: Contracts awarded by Arc 21 on behalf of the Council

Contract Title	Duration	SRO
Municipal Waste Disposal Contract – Lot 2	Extend for 3 months until 31st October 2022	Cathy Matthews

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Audit & Risk Panel Annual Report to Strategic Policy & Resources Committee including draft Annual Governance Statement
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Finance and Resources
Contact Officer:	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	The Audit and Risk Panel is constituted as a working group of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The purpose of the Panel is to provide an independent assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and associated control environment. The Panel also oversees the Council's financial reporting process.
1.2	The purpose of this report is twofold; ▪ To provide a summary to Committee of the key issues that have been considered and discussed by the Panel during the 2021/22 financial year, the assurances received and the areas requiring attention. ▪ To present the Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22, for consideration and inclusion in the unaudited statement of accounts which will be certified by the Chief

	Financial Officer by 30 June 2022 and then subject to NIAO audit. The Statement has been considered by the Audit & Risk Panel but must be approved by the Committee Chair, the Chief Executive and the Chief Financial Officer.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Note the summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel during 2021/22 set out at Section 3. • Review and approve the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22 at **Appendix A** and, in particular, the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained in the statement. • Note the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 7th June 2022 at **Appendix B.**
3.0	**Main report**
	Key Issues **Summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel in 2021/22**
3.1	In March 2021 the Panel approved the internal audit strategy and plan for the 2021/22 year. The plan was designed to allow AGRS to provide independent assurance over the councils changed risk, control and governance frameworks, which is of particular importance during the pandemic response and recovery. The plan covered: ▪ Key financial systems / income generating activity ▪ Key programmes / projects ▪ Management of key corporate risks ▪ Meeting external grant funding requirements ▪ Governance arrangements
3.2	During 2021/22, the Panel met four times over MS Teams. At these meetings the Panel considered progress reports on delivery of audit plans and issues arising from audit activity, including the findings, assurance levels and recommendations arising from audit work and the progress being made to implement audit recommendations. It also received regular updates on: ▪ the Council's financial position, as set out in its financial statements ▪ reports from the Council's external auditors

	▪ risk management ▪ business continuity ▪ fraud, financial irregularity and whistleblowing / raising concerns investigations ▪ governance related matters ▪ financial control ▪ health and safety ▪ performance management ▪ staff attendance.
3.3	The key assurances that the Panel received are as follows: ▪ the Council's **financial statements and annual governance statement**, as prepared by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources and their team; this provided a management assurance on the Council's financial position ▪ the audited accounts and the associated **external audit annual letters for 2020/21** (providing an opinion on the accounts) **and report to those charged with governance** (setting out control issues arising from the annual external audit), as prepared and presented by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. This provided an external assurance on the Council's financial position for 2020/21. (The accounts for 2021/22 are to be prepared by the end of June 2022) ▪ the **Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement** on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management, control and governance arrangements, based on the findings of audit work completed throughout the year.
3.4	The Panel received assurance from the NIAO regarding their performance improvement audit and assessment for the Council which resulted in a standard, unqualified opinion. The Panel also received regular reports on the development of the Improvement Plan in line with Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act.
3.5	Where areas for improvement have been identified, these have been reported and implementation of agreed recommendations is actively monitored and reported back to the Panel. The Panel has, on occasions, raised issues where either audit reports have identified significant issues or progress against recommendations has not been satisfactory, with Directors asked, where necessary, to attend the Panel and provide further explanation. The key areas considered during 2021/22 include:

	▪ **internal audits** of key areas such as Accounts Payable, Payroll, Procurement and Contract Management, Externally Funded Projects, Grants, Fleet Management, Event Safety, Income and Accounts Receivable and Developer Contributions ▪ **audits of the management of corporate risks** such as Waste Management, City Regeneration and Development, Safeguarding and Organisational and Operational Recovery ▪ **assurance and advisory work over key programmes** including the project to replace the Accounting System, the Belfast Region City Deal programme, the new HR system, the Planning Portal and the Customer Focus Programme
3.6	In terms of areas that require attention, the Panel has received regular reports on the progress being made by management to implement agreed audit recommendations. These reports indicates that each time progress in this area is reviewed, the review finds that management have implemented approximately a third of recommendations. While there are a variety of reasons for delays in implementation, the Panel highlights that it is vitally important that agreed audit recommendations arising from internal audits are implemented in a timely manner in order to ensure that the Council's risk and control framework is maintained.
3.7	The Audit and Risk Panel have also received updates during the year on the Council's risk management arrangements, including reports on the management of the Council's key corporate risks.
	Annual Governance Statement
3.8	At their meeting on 7th June 2022, the Panel considered the draft Annual Governance Statement for the Council for 2021/22 and, in particular, the five significant governance issues contained in the statement.
3.9	The Annual Governance Statement is an important document, and it is important that the Committee is fully aware of its contents. The disclosures in the statement are based upon the Council's corporate risk register and take into consideration the disclosures made by Chief Officers in their individual annual assurance statements. The Annual Governance Statement also incorporates a summary of the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement.

	Minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel meeting on 7th June 2022
3.10	In line with usual protocol, the minutes of the Audit & Risk Panel meeting would be presented to the following Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.11	None
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.12	None
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix A – Annual Governance Statement for 2021/22 Appendix B – Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 7th June 2022

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Annual Governance Statement 2021/2022

The Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) follows the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK 2021/22 and comprises the following sections:

- Scope of responsibility
- The purpose of the governance framework
- The governance framework
- Review of effectiveness
- Update on the significant governance issues that were declared last year
- Significant governance issues for the year-end 2021

Scope of responsibility

Belfast City Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and is used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to make arrangements for continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has prepared an Annual Governance Statement, which is consistent with the principles of the new CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016 edition)*. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and meets the requirements of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2015) in relation to the publication of an annual governance statement.

The purpose of the governance framework

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework continues to be in place at Belfast City Council for the year ending 31st March 2022 and up to the date of approval of the Annual Governance Statement

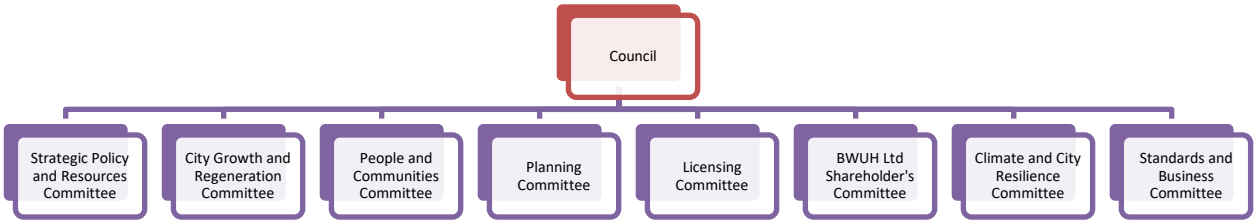
and statement of accounts. The following section sets out the key elements of the governance framework.

The governance framework

As reported in last year's statement, a process for committee decision making under delegated authority was in place for the period March 2020 – June 2020 in response to the pandemic and the need to follow guidance on social distancing and essential travel.

The process for committee decision making under delegated authority was reintroduced on 4th May 2021 following the expiry of the legislation permitting the hosting of remote meetings from 6th May 2021. This process involves continuing to hold remote committee meeting, with the committee making recommendations to the Chief Executive or appropriate Chief Officer to exercise delegated authority to implement the recommendations. New legislation came into effect on 27th August 2021 providing for the return of remote/hybrid committee meetings with full decision making authority.
The Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Local Authority Meetings) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 provides councils with the flexibility to hold meetings by remote or hybrid means until 24 September 2022. The extension is an interim measure until such time as permanent legislation can be made.

Our committee structure, which is based on the full council and eight standing committees is illustrated and described below.



Through the work of committees, our Members oversee the work of the council. All committee decisions need to be ratified by the full council except where committees have been granted delegated authority to make decisions.

The full council, which consists of all 60 elected representatives, is the overarching decision-making body.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Council through the development of its corporate plan and other key corporate and cross cutting strategies and policies. It will also ensure effective use of resources and value for money for ratepayers, and oversee the Council's relationship with a number of key agencies and partners.

The City Growth and Regeneration Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects directed to the regeneration and growth of the city in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The People and Communities Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects aimed at improving life at a local level in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The Planning Committee is responsible for all of the Council's planning functions, except those matters, which are delegated to officers or reserved to full Council.

The Licensing Committee is responsible for the consideration of all matters pertaining to policy and legislation in relation to licensing issues.

The Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd Shareholders' Committee is responsible for making the decisions required by the Shareholders' Agreement and ensure that the company complies with the contract for the operation of the venues.

The Brexit Committee which was responsible for researching, monitoring, and reviewing the financial, resource or operational impact upon the council and the district as a result of the UK leaving the European Union and for making recommendations to council on such issues (or the relevant standing committee where appropriate), was reconfigured as the Climate and City Resilience Committee with effect from 9 February 2022.

The Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for political oversight of the resilience strategy for Belfast, liaising with Belfast Resilience and Sustainability Board who are responsible for monitoring and delivery with the support of Belfast Climate Commission, supporting a targeted approach through existing structures to those issues which pose the greatest risk to the city, its economy and its people. This includes considering the potential implications of climate change for the city of Belfast and for making recommendations to the Council on Belfast City Council's approach to addressing the climate crisis and Council's role and responsibilities at city level.

The new Standards and Business Committee had its first meeting in October 2021. The terms of reference of the committee are to: promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Councillors within the Council; promote a collaborative working relationship between senior officers and Members; ensure the probity of all the council's proceedings; and review and improve processes in relation to bringing business before the Council, including review of all Notices of Motion, any review of Standing Orders and the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

In addition to the Committees listed in the diagrams above there are 14 Working Groups established which include the Audit & Risk Panel and four Area Working Groups. In addition there is a Party Leaders' Consultative Forum.

The Audit & Risk Panel provides an independent assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and associated control environment. It provides an independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance, which is relied upon by the Council, to the extent that it exposes it to risk and weakens the control

environment. The Panel reports to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Audit & Risk Panel met four times during 2021/22.

The Council's Code of Governance is based on the seven core principles set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework (2016 edition). How we meet these seven core principles is reviewed and updated annually, and in particular for this year, ensuring that our update reflects Covid-19 related changes to our governance arrangements. A summary of the key elements of our governance framework are set out in the following table:

Our seven principles of good governance

A: Behaving with integrity

- Shared values communicated via corporate plan, community plan and key strategies
- Codes of conduct for Members & staff
- PDP / appraisal process for Members & staff
- Gifts and hospitality and conflicts of interest policies & registers in place
- Fraud & whistleblowing (raising concerns) policies and investigations
- Good Relations Unit
- Equality & Diversity Framework
- Council constitution, standing orders & scheme of delegation
- Expert professional advice
- Partners and contractors required to comply with relevant policies
- Achieving Through People Framework and development of organisational values and behaviours
- Establishment of Standards and Business Committee
- Accessibility Statement for the updated website

B: Ensuring openness

- Council / committee meetings open to the public and agendas / minutes on website
- Belfast Agenda developed via extensive consultation and engagement.
- Corporate plan and annual improvement plan are subject to consultation before agreement
- Statement of Community Involvement for production of the Local Development Plan
- Ongoing consultation and engagement with staff & trade unions
- Corporate communications
- Annual financial report published on the BCC website
- Annual report to Equality Commission available through the BCC website
- Partnership / legal agreements with GLL, Active Belfast, arc21, BWUH Ltd, Visit Belfast, Innovation City Belfast
- "Your Say" consultation hub
- Working with Belfast Region City Deal partners

C: Defining outcomes

- Belfast: Our Recovery plan
- Belfast Agenda outlines long term economic, social and environmental benefits and is refreshed every 4 years
- Development of a Belfast Region City Deal Investment Plan
- Cultural Strategy
- Corporate plan outlines the annual contribution to the Belfast Agenda
- City centre regeneration & investment strategy
- Physical Investment Programme
- Leisure transformation programme
- Grant funding processes
- Equality Impact Assessments
- Belfast Resilience Strategy – the city's first climate plan

D: Optimising the achievement of outcomes

- Corporate plan aligned to delivery of Belfast Agenda and Belfast: Our Recovery
- Key partner in the Belfast Region City Deal
- Consultation and engagement processes
- Strategic financial management framework in place, including quarterly challenge process.
- Performance management framework
- Regular reports on progress of our performance improvement plan to CMT and SP&R
- Risk management strategy & framework

E: Developing capacity & capability

- Achieving Through People Framework and development of organisational values and behaviours
- Benchmarking activity
- Efficiency programme
- Regular performance monitoring of the delivery of improvement objectives
- Learning and development policy
- Health and wellbeing strategy
- Appraisal scheme in place for Chief Officers, Operational Directors / Heads of Service and Senior Managers
- PDPs for officers and Members
- Member capacity building delivered in 2021/22
- Continuing Development Programme in place for the Planning Committee
- Party group briefings

F: Finance, performance and risk management

- Five Step Financial Strategy to address impact of the pandemic
- Strategic financial management framework in place
- Assessment of compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code
- Efficiency programme
- Performance management framework
- Financial resilience review
- Risk management strategy
- Corporate risk management framework
- Regular reporting of finance, risk & performance
- Audit and Risk Panel
- Internal audit function / annual internal audit strategy & plan in place
- Recommendations Monitor process
- Data protection policy and procedures
- Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment
- Increased data security controls

G: Transparency, reporting & effective accountability

- BCC website regularly updated
- Publication of key reports including the annual financial report; annual governance statement; performance improvement report and annual report to Equality Commission
- Committee support framework to approve papers prior to submission to Members
- AGRS (internal audit) annual assurance statement within the annual governance statement
- Internal Audit effectiveness annually reviewed against public sector internal audit standards, with an independent external review every five years
- Internal / external audit recommendations followed up as part of recommendations monitoring process every six months

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources is the Council's designated Chief Financial Officer under the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.

The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016).

We have re-assessed our compliance with the principles of the CIPFA Financial Management Code and have reached the overall conclusion that we are compliant, with improvement identified over better integration of strategic plans and resources and more robust option appraisal. The work for the 2022/23 year will include the integration of strategic plans and resources through the alignment of reserves and the preparatory work for the revenue estimates and medium term financial plan process for 23/24 will also follow these principles. In addition it is hoped that the implementation of a new financial system will aid whole life costing, medium term planning and scenario planning .

Having considered all the principles of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (2014), subject to the implementation of the Corporate Fraud Risk Action Plan, the Council has adopted a response that is appropriate for its fraud and corruption risks and commits to maintain its vigilance to tackle fraud.

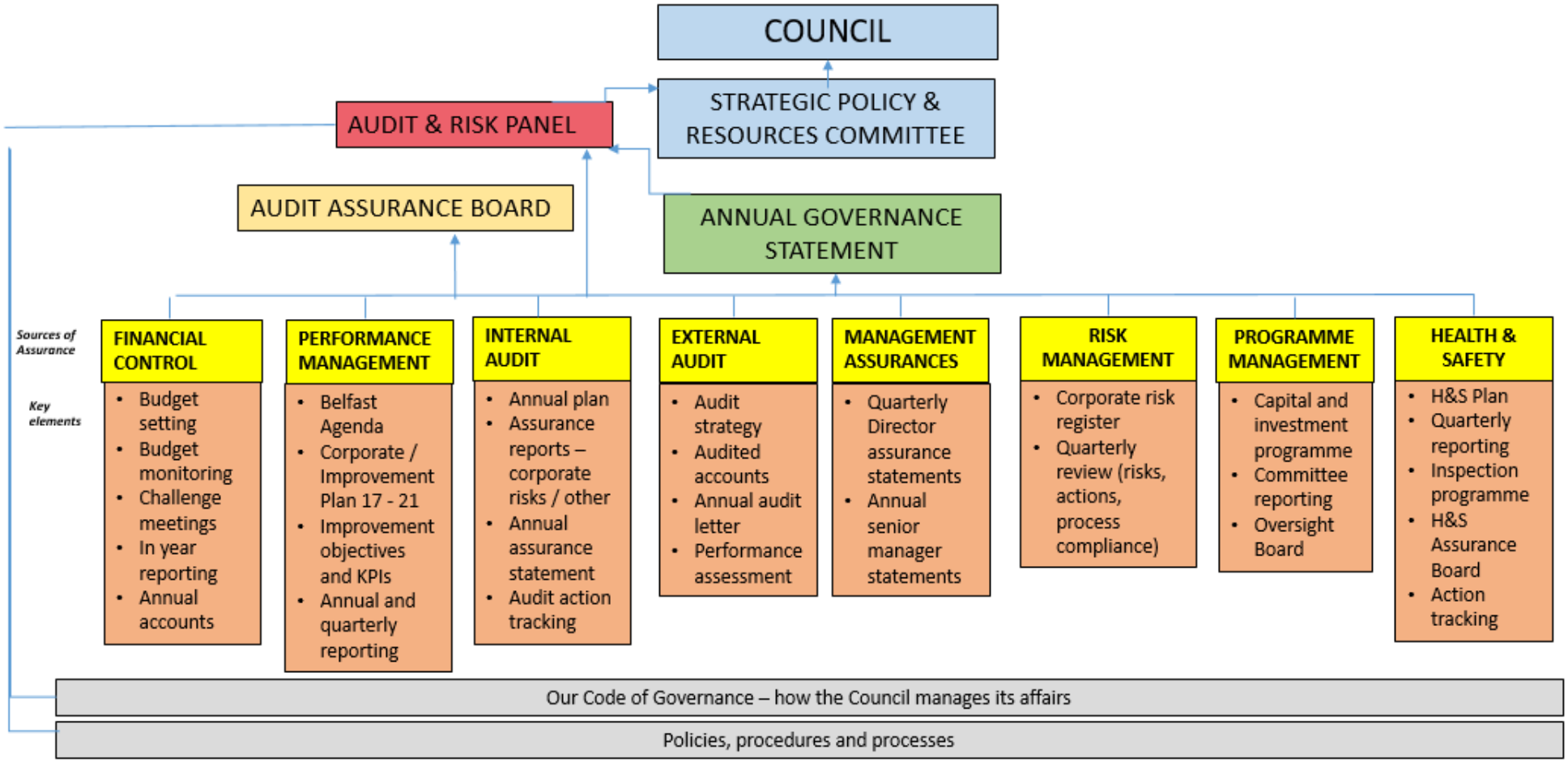
The CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019) outlines the five principles that set out the organisation's responsibilities to ensure the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) is able to operate effectively and perform their core duties. The Statement also sets out the core responsibilities of the HIA along with the personal skills and professional standards expected of the HIA. The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), and the supporting operational arrangements in place, conform to the five principles set out in the CIPFA Statement. This is demonstrated through a self-assessment exercise undertaken by the Head of AGRS. While the principles state that the HIA should not be responsible for preparing the annual governance report, the arrangements within the council, involve AGRS co-coordinating the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement which is then reviewed and agreed by the Corporate Management Team, Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel, before being reviewed by Strategic Policy and Resources committee and signed by the Chair of Strategic Policy & Resources, the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources.

The Council reported one breach of personal data involving six members of staff to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) during 2021/22. The ICO took no regulatory action.

Review of Effectiveness

The following diagram illustrates the Assurance Framework in place that provides information on compliance with the various elements of the Council's Governance Framework, including performance reports, health and safety reports, finance reports, internal audit reports and risk management reports.

Key Components of the Council's Assurance Framework



The various in year and year-end reports arising from the Assurance Framework are reviewed and approved by the Audit and Risk Panel and Strategic Policy and Resources Committee annually.

In addition, the review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework is also informed by:

- the annual review and update of the Code of Governance;
- comments or recommendations made by the external auditors during their annual audit; and
- the Head of Audit Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) annual assurance statement for the period ending 2021/22, which gives an opinion on the Council's risk and control environment.

Head of Internal Audit Opinion

An extract from the Head of AGRS Annual Assurance Statement for the period ending 2021/22 is given below:

As Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), on the basis of work carried out, I can provide a reasonable assurance regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control.

We developed our audit plan in consultation with management to ensure that our audit work was focussed on the areas where assurance was most valuable and was timed and conducted in a way that minimised interruption, while complying with public health guidelines. Member and management agreement of this plan combined with delivery of the majority of this plan, during a time when the organisation was continuing to operate while responding to and recovering from the impact of the pandemic, signifies members and managers recognition of the importance of receiving independent assurance over the council's risk, control and governance frameworks and provided me with sufficient evidence to support my assurance statement. As such there is no limitation of scope on my assurance statement.

My opinion is based on completion of audits in the audit plan for 21/22; programme and project assurance and advisory work undertaken for a number of fundamental corporate IT projects; other advisory work completed in relation to new processes and; quarterly assurance statements from senior management on compliance with risk management and internal control systems.

Specifically my opinion is based on the following:

- Evidence from areas subject to detailed internal audit during 2021/2022, in that AGRS has been able to provide positive statements of assurance with the majority of audits falling into the 'some improvement needed' category - the 2nd tier of assurance in the four tier model.

- Provision of assurance and advisory work for major programmes and projects in addition to real time advisory work on key processes.

- The work that was undertaken to support management in their quarterly review and update on the management of the corporate risks that could potentially impact on delivery of our corporate plan and priorities.

- The work that was undertaken to complete the review of the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessments in the light of the impact Covid-19 and to support management in the development of associated fraud risk mitigation plans.

- Completion of the National Fraud Initiative for 2020/21.

- Quarterly assurances from senior management on the management of key risks and maintenance of internal control systems during the pandemic response and recovery efforts.

- The evidence set out in the review of the Council's Code of Governance and Annual Governance Statement regarding the range of key assurance and governance arrangements that the Council has in place to direct / oversee its activities.

However, some weaknesses and areas for improvement have been identified through audit work. These have been reported in detail to the Council's Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel during 2021/22 through quarterly progress reports. In addition, I have highlighted, where appropriate, where further action is required to implement agreed audit actions. The key issues I would highlight in this statement are as follows:

While AGRS was able to provide positive statements of assurance in the majority of audits completed in 2021/22, three areas resulted in `major improvement' assurance levels:

- Fleet management
- Income and Accounts Receivable
- Developers Contributions (Planning)

It is important that the action plans to address these are implemented in as timely a manner as possible.

In addition, while our audit of the grant funding provided to support communities and businesses during the pandemic resulted in an overall opinion of some improvement, it is important that the level of control that was acceptable during the emergency situation is not be seen as acceptable on an ongoing basis and I have highlighted this to management.

Looking ahead, the ongoing recovery from the pandemic, changes at Chief Officer level and the planned implementation of a number of major IT systems during 22/23, has the potential to affect the adequacy and effectiveness of the councils risk control and governance arrangements. It is important that; management continue to place importance on maintenance of these risk, control and governance arrangements and that they have sufficient oversight of the effectiveness of these arrangements; that audit recommendations to address control weakness are implemented timely; and that AGRS continue to receive cooperation on delivery of the audit plan throughout 22/23.

I can confirm that the AGRS Service has conformed to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards during 2021/22. A quality assurance and improvement programme is in place including internal review of work, annual assessment against professional standards, quarterly progress and performance reporting to the Assurance Board and Audit & Risk Panel. An external review of AGRS took place in 2017/18 and this confirmed the Service's compliance with professional standards. An external quality assessment of AGRS commenced in May 2022 and will be reported to the next Audit & Risk Panel.

Continued effort has been put into developing and implementing the key elements of an assurance framework within the Council with the key elements being:

- a process whereby senior managers are required to sign annual assurance statements;
- a process whereby Directors are required to sign quarterly assurance statements;
- embedding risk management and developing the arrangements for oversight of the management of these risks;
- business planning and related performance reporting arrangements;
- an Audit and Risk Panel;
- a professional internal audit function, which has been reviewed for effectiveness against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards; and
- a Health & Safety Assurance Board.

Update on the Significant Governance Issues that were declared last year

Seven issues were declared last year and four of these continue to be declared as issues in this year's statement. An update on the work that was completed last year to manage the three issues that are no longer considered significant, is set out below.

In response to the previous significant governance issue around **Organisational Recovery** management put in place governance arrangements over the recovery process; agreed a recovery approach; sought specialist advice / support and; put in place operational support. In April 2022, Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed a phased approach to recovering frontline services followed by a wider return to office, in line with the review of the relevant risk assessments.

In response to the previous significant governance issue around **City and Community Recovery**, management are put in place programmes of work to support city and community recovery which are now mainstreamed into corporate and departmental plans and are being monitored through the relevant governance structures.

In response to the previous significant governance issue around **the relationship between Elected Members and officers**, management continue to recognise the crucial strategic importance of maintaining good working relationships between Members and officers. To help ensure this relationship is maintained there is regular reporting to standing committees and Party Leaders' Forum; Established political management arrangements; Member development programme (including media training) and Members and Officers Codes of conduct, working relationship protocol and dispute resolution protocol (which are communicated via the Member Development Programme). Management have also established the Standards & Business Committee and a process for managing Notices of Motion; .

Significant Governance Issues for the year-end 2022

The significant governance issues for the year-end 2022 were identified through a fundamental review of the risks in the Corporate Risk Register and review of the Directors' Annual Assurance Statements.

The most significant issues for the Council are listed below and include four issues carried over from last year (issues one – four) and one new issue:

1. Financial planning
2. Digital information security
3. Brexit implementation programme for Port Health

4. Recruitment challenges
5. Belfast Region City Deal

More information on these significant governance issues is provided on the following pages.

1. Financial Planning

Our financial planning processes take on greater importance given the current economic climate and the local government elections in 2023.

It is critical that we have adequate financial resources in place to fund the councils future requirements, ambitions and priorities regarding waste management, climate, innovation, and capital investment. In addition, we are cognisant of the current economic backdrop and the impact this will have on future pay negotiations as well as other cost implications. The implementation of a new financial accounting system by 1st April 2023 adds another layer of complexity to our financial planning processes.

Work is now underway for capital programme planning over a longer timeframe. Thematic sessions have been held exploring capital requirements in line with the refreshed Belfast Agenda priorities. The information gathered, along with an assessment of other financial factors, will enable the production of a new medium term financial plan.

Project management and governance arrangements are in place to support the delivery of the new financial accounting system.

2. Digital Information Security

Digital Information Security will continue to be a significant governance issue and is overseen through the Council's risk management processes by the Council's Corporate Management Team. There has been a major increase in security threats from March 2020, and this is set to continue. The National Cyber Security Centre has provided advice to public sector organisations to continue to take action to improve their cyber resilience due to the heightened cyber threat due to the war in Ukraine.

Digital Services has already implemented additional controls to deal with and have better visibility of the growing threats including:

- Two factor authentication across Office365 accounts
- Logons to Office365 accounts have been blocked outside UK and Ireland
- Logons to VPN accounts have been blocked outside UK and Ireland
- Two factor authentication for F5 VPN accounts for all Council staff
- Covid19 themed phishing exercise
- Initial stages of implementing a PKI infrastructure to enhance network access controlWeekly information sharing across local government
- Regional WARP (Warning, Advice and Reporting Point) in place

Delivering a secure infrastructure is a constantly evolving process and consideration is being given to changing threats and risks which must be aligned the delivery of the council's goals and objectives. Consequently, after the completion of a refreshed maturity assessment of our security controls with

our contracted external security specialists, a new security strategy and a revised programme of work is being implemented.

The Digital information Security programme will continue to focus on priority areas from the maturity assessment that are most important to enhance the council's Cyber security controls. These areas will include:

- Cyber Security Incident Response
- Identity management
- Cloud Strategy
- Maturity Assessment Priorities

A desk based Cyber Incident response exercise has already taken place with key services and a follow-up presentation has been given to the Council's critical services to ensure a co-ordinated corporate response to any cyber incident. All critical services are in the process of reviewing their business continuity plans with particular focus on the actions required in the event of a serious cyber incident. Feedback from the refreshed business continuity plans will be used to ensure alignment with the council's emergency, cyber incident response and critical services business continuity plans.

This work will enhance the security controls that are already in place which include:

- Regular vulnerability (internal and external) and penetration testing to determine vulnerabilities and issues
- Security contract with external security experts
- ICT Infrastructure designed for resilience, redundancy and security in conjunction with contracted security experts
- Business Continuity Plan in place and regularly reviewed
- Cyber Incident response plan
- Key support & maintenance contracts with key suppliers
- Robust change management controls
- Maintaining knowledge of advanced threats
- Regular staff phishing simulation exercises.

3. <u>Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health</u>

Whilst the Council does not operate the Port of Belfast, it is responsible for making sure the port meets environmental health standards. The Council's duties include overseeing the import of food into Belfast, including checks on High Risk Food not of Animal Origin and fish and fishery products for human consumption. The Council is also responsible for carrying out inspections on board ships and other vessels to check they comply with food safety and hygiene standards and monitoring the Port of Belfast and George Best Belfast City Airport for infectious disease.

There has been a significant impact on these duties as a result of Brexit and the additional responsibilities resulting from the NI Protocol. Clarification will be required as to the roles and responsibilities of the central Competent Authorities in relation to funding, provision of IT systems and other responsibilities relating to carrying out inspections at Belfast Port.

Significant political uncertainty remains, and this has caused delays to completion of new inspection facilities, development of IT processes, and development of a sustainable resourcing model for the future.

In the interim the programme of work over the past year has focused on securing temporary funding for 2022/23, implementing and reviewing a temporary staffing model (including addressing

recruitment and retention issues relating to the professionally qualified specialist staff that are required to carry out its functions), and upgrading the temporary facilities at Corry Place to enable the Council to carry out its duties.

Further work being taken forward under this programme includes further development of processes and IT systems, inputting to the design and development of a new build purpose built inspection facility at Belfast Port, development of a longer term staffing model and securing a sustainable funding arrangement to support the service going forward.

The key strategic risks around EU exit and being accountable for the Port Health function remain in relation to political uncertainty, sustainable financial funding model, capacity and resilience of people. Our management of these risks are through a number of mechanism, CMT Brexit Board reporting, reporting to Brexit Committee / Climate and City Resilience Committee and having a SOLACE lead on DAERA Project Board.

4. Recruitment Challenges

There has been significant change at Chief Officer level and recruitment is either underway or being planned for a number of senior staff posts during 2022/23, including the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy and the Strategic Director of Finance & Resources. The council has been unable to recruit the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services, following two previous recruitment exercises and there is a recognition that it may be difficult to attract people into these posts. In addition, there are other challenges around recruitment across the organisation, for example security staff, environmental health officers and quantity surveyors, combined with difficulties in engaging agency staff.

As we move forward there needs to be a stronger focus on attracting and recruiting a younger diverse pool of talent to the organisation and upskilling our existing talent to have adequate succession plans to fulfil vacancies at all levels including senior management. This action will be taken forward as part of the review and implementation of the People Strategy.

5. Belfast Region City Deal

Prior to the signing of the deal document for the Belfast Region City Deal, Outline Business Cases were required for each of the projects to be included in the deal and to have approvals in place for the most advanced projects across the programme. Alongside the challenges of creating the deal and progressing the business cases during the pandemic, this has delayed the signing of the deal document until December 2021.

Updated governance arrangements, including arrangements for the operation and financing of the accountable body for BRCD funds, have been developed for the next phase of the deal. However, these could not be finalised and implemented until agreement is reached on the Contract for Funding between government departments and the Accountable Body. The above mentioned delays in agreeing the deal and the need for specific arrangements to reflect the approach to City Deals in NI will prevent agreement on the Contract for Funding and implementation of the arrangements for the Accountable Body until the first quarter of 2022. Delays beyond this period would create additional costs and risks for the most advanced projects.

Signed: ……..
Chair Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Signed: ……..
Chief Executive Officer

Signed: ……..
Chief Financial Officer

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Audit and Risk Panel

Tuesday, 7th June, 2022

MEETING OF AUDIT AND RISK PANEL
HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Alderman Rodgers (in the Chair);
Councillors Hanvey, Hutchinson, and O'Hara; and
Ms. G. Fahy.

In attendance: Mr. R. Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources;
Ms. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services;
Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager;
Mr. T. Wallace, Head of Finance;
Ms. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager;
Ms. H. Lyons, Corporate Finance Manager;
Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Also attended: Mr. M. Heery, Audit Manager, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor Carson.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 8th March were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Election of Chairperson

The Panel was reminded that it was required to elect a Chairperson for the forthcoming year.

Moved by Councillor Hanvey
Seconded by Councillor Hutchinson and

Resolved – That, given the absence of some Members, Alderman Rodgers takes the Chair for the duration of the meeting of 7th June, with

the election of the Chairperson for the year to take place at the next meeting.

Absence Rates Year Ending March 2022

(Ms. C. Sheridan, Head of Human Resources, attended in connection with the following two items.)

The Head of Human Resources submitted for the Panel's consideration the following report:

"1 Purpose

1.1 This report

- **Provides sickness absence data at the end of quarter four, 2021/22, (April 2021 to March 2022)**
- **Compares performance to targets at the end of quarter four, 2021/22, (April 2021 to March 2022)**
- **Compares this year's performance to the same period last year, (April 2020 to March 2021)**
- **Provides information on the impact of COVID19 on general attendance, use of discretion, disability related absence, top two absence reasons (mental health and Musculo-skeletal) and how long-term absence has been managed.**
- **Outlines proposal for managing absence.**

2 Relevant Background Information

2.1 On 22 June 2020, the Corporate Management Team agreed that departments should continue to work towards a target of 10 days, to be achieved by the end of the current Council term, that is, by the end of March 2023. To achieve this target a reduction of 9.7% would be required each year.

2.2 It was therefore agreed that that the corporate target for 2021/22 should be 11.07.

3 Key Issues

3.1 Absence rates:

- **At the end of March 2022, the average number of day's sickness absence per full time employee was 12.99 days. In addition, the average number of day's sickness absence due to covid equated to 3.34 days per full time employee. This is a total**

increase of 5.47 days compared to absence for the same period last year (10.86). Please note that the absence rate for the same period in 2019/20 was 13.58 days. It would be more appropriate to compare this year with 19/20 figures given the exceptional nature of last year (20/21).

- **Further information on COVID 19 related absence is set out at paragraph 3.5.**
- **There was a decrease in the number of staff with no absence this year (39.37%), compared to 61.85% last year.**
- **There has been an increase in absence classified as long term (20+ days) this year (22710.18 days) compared to the same time last year (16782.24 days). Please note that long term absence in 2019/20 was 18914.96 days. It would be more appropriate to compare this year with 19/20 figures given the exceptional nature of last year (20/21).**

3.2 The table below shows the trend in sickness absence per full time employee since 2014/15.

2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
10.3 days	10.3 days	12.4 days	13.72 days	13.71 days	13.58 days	10.86 days	16.33 days

3.3 The table below provides an indication of how the council is performing against the agreed corporate target of a reduction of 9.7% (11.07 days per FTE).

It should be noted that the figures provided for the new departmental structures have been manually configured as the new HR system cannot yet provide this information.

End of year target	11.07					
Department	FTE	Total days Lost	Days lost per FTE	Variance	% of workforce	% of absence
City and Neighbourhood Services	1192.66	22860.50	19.17	8.10	59.01%	69.27%
City and Organisational Strategy	117.22	738.38	6.30	-4.77	5.80%	2.24%
Finance and Resources	188.48	1370.73	7.27	-3.80	9.33%	4.15%
Legal and Civic Services	153.73	3231.54	21.02	9.95	7.61%	9.79%
Physical Programmes	125.65	2424.12	19.29	8.22	6.22%	7.34%
Place and Economy	243.45	2378.70	9.77	-1.30	12.05%	7.21%
Totals:	2021.19	33003.97	16.33	5.26		

3.4 Three out of six departments met the annual corporate absence target of 11.07 days: Finance and Resources, City and Organisational Strategy and Place and Economy.

3.4.1

- **<u>City and Neighbourhood Services</u>.**
  Overall, there was an increase of almost 6 days when compared to 2020/21 (19.17 days compared to 13.14). There has been a significant rise in COVID related absence, with a total of 4489.15 days (almost 20% of the departments total absence) attributable to COVID19 infections. CNS absence figure reduces from 19.17 days to 15.4 days when COVID19 related absences are excluded.

  CNS also saw an increase in musculo-skeletal type absences compared to the previous year (5234.19 days in 21/22 compared to 3701.18 in 20/21), however there was an actual reduction when compared to 2019/20 (5855.44 days) figures.

  Stress/depression/anxiety (SDA) absence increased by approximately 700 days (10% rise) when compared to the previous t year's figure (6959.79 days in 2021/22 compared to 6216.4 days in 2020/21).

  Disability related absence accounted for approximately 41% of the total absence within CNS in 21/22 and 63% of this absence was managed under LTA.

3.4.2

- **Legal and Civic Services**
  There was an increase of almost 7 days per employee from 14.08 in 2020/21 to 21.02 days in 21/22. Whilst this figure has increased it is worth noting that the figure is approximately 2 days higher in 21/22 when compared to the figure in 2019/20 (18.96 days).

  199 employees were absent in 2021/22, which accounted for 3231.54 days absence. A small number of cases had a significant impact on the department's overall absence figures with 20 cases accounting for almost half of the absence within the department (48%).

Covid related absence accounted for approximately 390 days (12% of the total absence), LCS absence figure reduces to 18.5 days when Covid related absence is deducted.

3.4.2

- **Physical Programmes**
  There was a significant increase in absence from 1185.72 days in 20.21 to 2424.12 days in 21/22.

  101 employees were absent during 2021/22, which accounted for 2424.12 days absence. 7 cases accounted for half of the absence within the department (50%). Of these 7, six were disability related and one was a case of long covid.

  Covid related absence accounted for approximately 553 days (23% of the total absence), Physical Programmes absence figure reduces to 14.9 days if Covid related absence is deducted.

3.5 <u>COVID19 Related Absence:</u>

The Council was significantly impacted by absence directly related to COVID19 in Quarter 4.

725 employees were recorded as absent due to COVID19, a significant increase of 547 employees when compared to 2020/21 (178 employees). This accounted for 20.42% of the Councils total days lost in 2021/22.

The Council's year end absence figure reduces from 16.33 days to 12.99 days when covid 19 related absence is excluded. On average, COVID19 absence equated to 3.34 days per FTE employee.

The average duration of a covid related absence was approximately 9.3 working days. In accordance with guidance from LGA, ten working days was discounted for all sickness absence related to COVID19 (or symptoms) for absence trigger points and potential warnings.

3.6 <u>The use of discretion (April 2021 to March 2022):</u>

An analysis of the use of discretion was undertaken (see appendix 1).

From 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022, 1361 employees were off due to sickness absence Discretion was

applied to 290 of these employees (21%) and their absence accounted for approximately 29% of the total absence for 21/22. The average length of absence where discretion was used was 32.9 days per occurrence.

The reasons for discretion were as follows:

- **Underlying medical condition and/or disability related (2012.68 days or 27.04%)**
- **Surgery and recovery (1155.49 or 15.52%)**
- **Work related stress (835.98 or 11.23%)**
- **Bereavement**
- **Personal stressors**
- **Industrial injury**
- **Maternity / Pregnancy related**
- **COVID 19**
- **Cancer**
- **Employee Relations**
- **Hospitalisation**
- **Broken bone**
- **Previous long service and clear record**

3.7 <u>Compliance (January to March 2022):</u>

Compliance meetings continued during Quarter 4 and the table below illustrates the number of cases which have been discussed with departments.

Department	**Number of cases**
City and Neighbourhood Services	59
City and Organisational Strategy	0
Finance and Resources	0
Legal and Civic Services	12
Physical Programmes	6
Place and Economy	0
Grand Total	**77**

Examples of compliance matters discussed were:

- **Delayed scheduling of stage meetings**
- **Failure to organise absence review meetings**
- **Delayed referral to Occupational Health and/or Employee Counselling**
- **Failure to update actions taken on corporate absence management system (PSE)**

- **Delays in dealing with other issues such as grievance, discipline, that has impacted on the management of absence**
- **Lack of a holistic approach to dealing with all issues relating to an employee.**

Corporate HR continues to work with departments and make recommendations to improve case management.

3.8 **<u>Disability Related Absence:</u>**

Disability related absence was analysed (see appendix 2).

In summary:

- **Approximately 37.74% of absence (12454.4 days) is recorded as disability related**
- **65.82% of disability related absence was managed as long term**
- **The use of discretion and reasonable adjustments is considered in such cases**
- **Employees who reported absence with depression / anxiety (33.81%), chronic back (9.98%) and heart conditions (9.83%) accounted for almost 54% of all disability related absence days.**

3.9 **<u>Stress/Depression/Anxiety (SDA) related absence (see appendix 3):</u>**

There has been a slight increase in SDA related absence in the Council rising from 9166.22 days (5650.46 personal and 3515.76 work related) in 2020/21 compared to 9995.4 days (5815.94 personal and 4179.6 work related) in 2021/22. Personal stress accounts for most of the stress related absence (approximately 58%).

The main reasons for stress related absence in the council in 21/22 were:

- **underlying mental health conditions (mainly depression and anxiety) -18.07%**
- **family caring/sickness reasons (such as a sick partner or child) -12.12%**
- **Personal / Relationship Issues (breakdown in marriage, relationships) -16.34%**
- **bereavement (10.66%);**

- **work issues (relationships, workload and employee relations issues)-25.13%**

The reasons outlined above account for 82% of the total days lost due to stress related absence.

329 employees were off due to SDA type absences in 2021/22. Whilst all employees were initially referred to employee counselling, 264 (80%) attended at least one session with employee counselling. 205 employees also attended occupational health for SDA type absences.

A benchmarking exercise was conducted with other NI Councils, in summary, all reported stress related absence as the number one reason for absence in their organisation and accounted for a similar percentage of overall absence.

3.10 <u>Musculo-skeletal related absence (see appendix 4):</u>

There was an increase (59%) in days lost due to musculo-skeletal type absences, from 4368.59 days in 2020/21 to 6956.99 days in 21/22. However, it is worth noting that there was a decrease in this year's absence figure, for musculo-skeletal type absences, when compared to 2019/20 figure (7596.74 days)

CNS accounted for approximately 75.24% (5234.19 days) of all musculo-skeletal type absence within the council. 79% of musculo-skeletal absence is attributable to employees in manual roles. However, only 8.41% (or 584.96 days) of musculo-skeletal absence was recorded as work related.

Approximately 56% of all musculo-skeletal absence was attributed to underlying medical conditions which included arthritis, chronic back pain, prolapsed discs and tendonitis.

299 employees were off due to musculo-skeletal type reasons during 21/22. Of these, over half (154) were referred to occupational health and reasonable adjustments were recommended and implemented for 74 employees. Reasonable adjustments would have included lighter duties, phased return to work, adjustments to absence trigger points.

3.11 <u>Long Term Absence Management (see appendix 5):</u>

Any period of absence longer than 20 days would normally be regarded as 'long term' if the employee has an underlying condition which is likely to result in continuing or further absence. In such cases, the council will seek to support the employee and evolve a strategy to enable them to return to the workplace as quickly as possible. However, if an underlying condition is not present then an employee, who has been off over 20 continuous days, will be managed under the standards of attendance.

390 employees were absent for 20 or more continuous days, which is 68.5% (22620.46 days) of the total absence for 2021/22. 162 (41.5%) of these cases were managed under the long-term absence (LTA) procedure with managers appropriately making decisions to manage long term absence under the standards of attendance to ensure effective, robust management of the cases

3.12 **Review of Attendance Policy:**

The Attendance Policy is under review and consultation with management, Occupational Health and Employee Counselling has taken place. Consultation with trade unions is ongoing and Corporate HR continue to address this matter with the Trade Union Co-ordinators.

3.13 **Stage 4 and final absence hearings:**

A number of employees reached a Stage 4/final absence hearing (FAH) between January 2022 and March 2022.

In summary:

- **8 employees met the trigger for a Stage4/FAH.**
  - **Three employees were ill health retired prior to their FAH convening.**
  - **Discretion was applied to three of the cases which did not proceed to Stage4/FAH due to efforts taken by an employee to improve their absence and two long term Covid cases**
  - **Two FAH's were delayed/cancelled due to incomplete documentation.**

In addition to the above eight cases, there were a further two final absence hearings conducted. These cases were in relation to employees who had met the trigger

prior to January 2022. One employee was re-issued with a stage three warning and the other employee was dismissed.

Corporate HR continues to monitor departmental compliance with the attendance policy. Non-compliance issues, in relation to the final stages of the attendance policy, are raised with senior management when necessary.

3.14 <u>Departmental improvement plans and Absence reporting to DMT:</u>

Departments continued to submit departmental improvement plans and absence reporting dashboards as requested.

Looking forward Corporate HR will meet departments over the coming weeks to discuss specific departmental improvement plans and assist with identifying areas for departments to consider adding to their improvement plans. Absence dashboards will be reviewed to identify improvements to the reporting of absence data to DMTs.

3.15 <u>Conclusion</u>

The Council did not achieve its target of 11.07 days for 21/22.

Covid related absence had a significant impact in 2021/22 and as indicated previously when Covid related absence is excluded the year-end figure for the Council is 12.99 days per FTE.

Chest and respiratory related absences increased in 2021/22 and it is likely that this may linked to the secondary effects of covid related infections.

A number of health and wellbeing initiatives were delivered throughout the year including Mental Health First Aid Training and webinars to raise awareness and provide support and signposting for staff. It should also be noted that there has been a significant increase in the demand for our Employee Counselling service.

Council employees can access a range of health and wellbeing information and signposting via the Interlink Health and Wellbeing Support page. This in turn provides a further link to the online health and wellbeing

hub Staywell, which has information on a wide range of physical and mental health and wellbeing topics.

In addition, an Active Travel Working Group has been set up to encourage more staff to walk, cycle or use public transport when they can. As well as the obvious health benefits, there are clear links to our aspirations around climate and the environment in our city. The Health and Wellbeing Action Plan will also be reviewed this year and an updated action plan developed.

3.16 Recommendations / Target

Previously, it was agreed that the target for 21/22 would be set at 11.07 (a 9.7% reduction on 12.26) in order to achieve a 10-day target by 22/23.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the 21/22 absence data therefore it would be unlikely that the target of 10 days by the end of 22/23 is now achievable, given the significant rise in absence levels in 21/22 and the likely continued impact of COVID related sickness. To meet a target of 10 days would require the sickness absence levels to drop 60.2%. It is therefore proposed that the Council sets a year end figure of 12.99 days.

4 Resource Implications

4.1 Directors are asked to ensure that:

- **Attendance management continues to be an item on DMT agendas and related matters discussed and appropriate actions taken forward; and**
- **Resources are in place to ensure that adequate monitoring and review is in place at department level.**

5 Equality and Good Relations Implications

5.1 Approximately 37.74% of absence (12454.4 days) is recorded as disability related. The use of discretion and reasonable adjustments are considered in such cases.

6 Recommendations

6.1 The Assurance Board / Audit & Risk Panel is asked to note the contents and agree the following:

- **Departments continue to exercise the use of discretion appropriately**
- **Departments to undertake to improve compliance, as discussed with Corporate HR**
- **Specific compliance issues to be reported and discussed at DMTs monthly**
- **Directors should review and agree departmental improvement plans before implementation**
- **Progress on improvement plans and absence information dashboard (KPIs) to be presented and discussed at DMTs monthly**
- **Departments to refocus on absence management, particularly in regard to prompt organisation of meetings."**

A Member queried whether Human Resources had seen an impact of Long Covid on the Council's workforce. The Head of Human Resources advised the Panel that only one case of Long Covid had been submitted on a sick line but that it was still early in terms of the impact on staffing sickness levels.

The Panel noted the update which had been provided and agreed that that the corporate target of the number of sick days per employee for 2022/23 should be 12.99 days.

Recruitment Update

The Head of Human Resources submitted for the Panel's consideration the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 At the Audit & Risk Panel (A&RP) meeting on 8 March 2022, the Panel requested a progress report on recruitment activity.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress being made to address the recruitment issues highlighted in the Recommendations Monitor 8 March 2022.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the Audit & Risk Panel notes the update on the progress on recruitment issues.

3.0 Main report

At their previous meeting the Panel considered the Recommendations Monitor report which outlined that

the implementation of a number of audit actions had been delayed due to specific staff resources issues. With this in mind, the Audit & Risk Panel requested a report on:

- **The progress that was being made to address the specific staff resource issues referred to on the Recommendations Monitor report and**
- **An update on the improvements that are being made to the recruitment process to allow posts to be filled quicker**

3.1 Update on Recruitment Activity

S76 Monitoring Officer post to progress audit actions in relation to Developer Contributions

Assistant Planning Officer (SO2): Post creation approved by CMT, 26 April 2022. Reserve list for post has now been exhausted and post will be publicly advertised.

Information Governance Unit to fully implement information management policy and compliance processes

IGU have requested a service review which has delayed a number of recruitments. Interim arrangements are being considered at present.

Temporary Route Optimiser post to progress a number of the domestic refuse collection audit actions.

Route Optimisation Project Officer (PO1) (Temporary project post for 2 years): Officer appointed and in post from 7 March 2022.

Occupational Road Risk Officer post to progress work related transport audit actions

Occupational Road Risk Officer (PO2) (Temporary project post for 12 months): Officer appointed and in post from 7 February 2022.

Temporary Contract Manager post for the Agency, Occupational Health and Employee Counselling contracts.

Human Resources Contract Manager (PO4) (Temporary project post for 12 months): Post creation approved by CMT, 26 April 2022. Post to be internally trawled and, if unfilled, publicly advertised.

3.3 Reviews

Building Control Review

The Building Control Review was approved by CMT 9 March 2021 and implementation of the structure commenced thereafter. There are still a number of vacancies to be recruited externally.

HR / Business Support reviews

The Corporate HR Review was approved by SP&R Committee in November 2021 and implementation of the new structure is almost completed, with a small number of posts to be filled. Departments are recruiting HR posts on a permanent basis which will provide greater stability.

The Business Support Review is being rescoped and it has been agreed that we would tender for external support with the initial planning and approach to the future design of our Business Support function. It is expected that this will go to market during June 2022.

In April 2022, consultancy support for the recruitment of skills testing and interview selection for Business Support Clerks was procured through a direct award from Crown Commercial Services. This will result in the permanent recruitment of 40 Business Support Clerks and the creation of a reserve list of up to 15 candidates for a period of 12/18 months. This exercise will commence in late June 2022 and will reduce the dependency on agency resources and provide stability for employees and the departments.

3.4 Improvements to the recruitment process.

From September 2021 we have provided a comprehensive programme of recruitment and selection training across the organisation to increase the number of suitably trained individuals available for panels and to ensure panels are representative from an equal opportunities' perspective. This has resulted in 314

officers being trained or receiving refresher training since September 2021.

From 1 April 2022, the Protocol to trawl permanent posts internally has ceased. All permanent posts are advertised externally in accordance with the Local Government Staff Commission's Code of Procedures on Recruitment & Selection.

In February 2022, we sought and secured a number of deviations from the Local Government Staff Commission Code of Procedure on Recruitment & Selection. As a result, panels for posts above SO2 (excluding Director/Chief Executive) have three departmental officers (with one of these not necessarily being an HR Officer); and for posts at Scale 1 to SO2 the panel will comprise a minimum of two and a maximum of three panel members which may not necessarily include an HR Officer. These deviations have eased some of the pressure in securing panellists for recruitment exercises at certain grades.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

4.1 £6520 for the provision of recruitment & section training to 314 employees.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None at present."

The Panel noted the update which had been provided.

Corporate Health and Safety Performance

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

The Panel was reminded that it was responsible for overseeing the Council's risk, control and governance arrangements for health and safety. In undertaking this function, the Panel provided independent scrutiny of the Council's health and safety performance, with reports being presented to it on a quarterly basis.

Accordingly, the Health and Safety Manager submitted for the Panel's consideration a report on corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending 31st March, 2022.

She provided, on a Departmental basis, information on the implementation of actions associated with the key performance indicators of health and safety and fire safety and pointed out that, at a corporate level, compliance rates had been 62% and 72% respectively.

In terms of accident/incident reporting, there had, in quarter four, been 22 employee accidents, 12 non-employee accidents, 16 RIDDOR accidents and 11 work related violence incidents, which represented a slight overall increase on the previous quarter.

Health and safety statutory agency enquiries correspondence had been received from the the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) and the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland, requesting internal investigation reports regarding a swimming pool fatality in Olympia Leisure Centre in September 2017.

In relation to Covid-19, the Corporate Health and Safety Unit continued to support the Council's Recovery Co-ordination Group and individual service managers to comply with evolving Government guidance and to ensure the health and safety of staff and others. The Corporate Health and Safety Manager stressed that the resource required from the Corporate Health and Safety Unit to support the Council continued to be provided at the expense of a reduction in routine health and safety activity. Recruitment was ongoing to fill gaps in the team and to provide an additional temporary project post.

The Members' attention was drawn to Appendix 4, which illustrated the length of time in which outstanding high priority actions had been open, as had been requested by a Member at a previous meeting.

A Member noted that it was comforting for the Council to know that the high priority actions were being dealt with.

In request to a further Member's request, the Corporate Health and Safety Manager stated that updates in relation to the outstanding high priority actions at Botanic Park, Malone House and Belfast Castle would be submitted to the next meeting.

The Panel noted the corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending 31st March, 2022.

Fraud and Whistleblowing / Raising Concerns – Annual Report & Policy Update

The Panel considered the Annual Report on the Fraud and Whistleblowing Policy and related arrangements, including the application of the policies during 2020/21.

The AGRS Manager provided an overview of the investigations into alleged fraud and or financial impropriety including new cases in 21/22 and cases carried forward from the previous year.

The AGRS Manager outlined that no new cases had been referred to the PSNI during the year and provided the Panel with a high level update on a case that had been considered for referral to the PSNI.

In terms of external fraud, the Panel was advised that there had been one bank mandate fraud attempt during 2021/2022 but which had been unsuccessful due to the vigilance and application of controls by Finance staff.

The AGRS Manager provided an overview of the investigations into concerns received under the Whistleblowing policy, including new concerns raised during 2021/2022 and cases carried forward from the previous year.

The AGRS Manager reminded the Panel that a detailed update report was presented to it in March 2022, setting out the work AGRS had undertaken with departments to review and update the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment during quarter four.

He outlined that, during the course of 22/23, where operational capacity allowed, they would continue to work with management to develop mitigation plans for the remaining five fraud risks. In addition, they would, where appropriate, ensure that planned audits would take account of the risk of fraud. That would include an evaluation of the controls to manage key fraud risks. Any significant issues emerging from their audits would be communicated in a timely manner to management so that the required action(s) could be taken. Where issues might impact upon the corporate fraud risk assessment, AGRS would consider those and update the assessment as necessary. Advice would also be provided to management across the Council on how best to use the fraud risk mitigation plans to promote fraud risk awareness in their teams and to improve associated control measures.

The Panel was reminded that AGRS was responsible for the Council's Fraud and Whistleblowing (Raising Concerns) policies and that it reviewed the policies annually to ensure that they reflected current legislation and best practice. In terms of best practice, the CIPFA Code of Practice for Counter Fraud remained unchanged. He explained that some minor amendments, in terms of updating job titles had been made to the Fraud and Bribery Policy but that no further substantive changes to the policy were needed.

During 2021/2022 AGRS had undertaken a comprehensive review of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements, following a self-assessment exercise against the NIAO Raising Concerns Good Practice Guide. Whilst the existing arrangements were found to be generally in line with the NIAO guide, several improvement actions were identified. The policy review was now substantively complete with a number of changes being proposed, including:

- amending the terminology from whistleblowing to raising concerns;
- ensuring that the new policy considered other policies such as Safeguarding and Complaints, Comments and Compliments
  providing guidance for members of the public on raising concerns;

- the provision of a dedicated raising concerns e-mail address, contact details for two Raising Concerns Champions; and
- improvements on how it oversaw how concerns were handled and addressed.

The Members were advised that AGRS had liaised with colleagues from Corporate HR and Legal Services and were in the process of arranging for the policy to go through the formal management and Trade Union consultation process to agree the changes to the policy. They aimed to be in a position to bring the revised policy to CMT, the Audit Assurance Board and the Audit and Risk Panel for approval in September 2022.

The Panel noted:

- the updates on fraud, whistleblowing and related cases handled in 2021/2022;
- the work in relation to the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment; and
- the annual review and update on work taking place in relation to the Council's Fraud and Whistleblowing (Raising Concerns) policies.

Corporate Risk Management

The Head of AGRS provided the Panel with an update on the key changes to the Corporate Risks following the risk review for quarter-end March 2022, which had been summarised in the Corporate Risk Management Dashboard

In particular the Head of AGRS drew the Panels attention to updates in relation to the corporate risks on the Customer Focus Programme (CFP), the Belfast Region City Deal, City and Community, Recovery Waste Management, the Brexit Implementation Programme for the Belfast Port, Health and Safety and Asset Management. The Head of AGRS also outlined that there was a need to ensure that the interim arrangements being agreed for Legal and Civic Services included the reallocation of ownership of the relevant corporate risks.

The Head of AGRS also highlighted the small number of mitigations actions that had been implemented in the period.

The Head of AGRS reminded the Panel that all Chief Officers and relevant senior managers completed an Annual Assurance Statement which allowed them to focus on outlining the significant governance issues facing the Council at the year-end. She updated that Panel that those statements had been completed by all relevant officers who had confirmed that all efforts had been made to manage key risks and maintain the Councils internal control systems during the pandemic response and recovery efforts.

In terms of Business Continuity Management (BCM) the Head of AGRS outlined that BCM plans were in place for all but one of the 17 critical services, with the development of the BCM plan for Property Maintenance being delayed due to resource constraints in the unit.

She went on to advise the Panel that work was underway to improve the Councils resilience to cyber-attack and that BCM plans for 13 of the critical services had been specifically updated for this scenario. Management of the three remaining critical services who had not yet updated their BCM plans, had been reminded of the need to do so.

The Panel agreed that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee should adopt the recommendations.

Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services Annual Assurance Statement

The Members were reminded that, each year, the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) prepared an annual assurance statement. The statement was a professional opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk, control and governance arrangements, and the opinion was one of the sources of assurance that the Council relied upon for its annual governance statement.

The Head of AGRS explained that, in keeping with the revised plan for 2020/2021, when developing the plan for 2021/2022 they had considered the Council's immediate assurance needs as the organisation continued to respond to and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. That helped ensure that the audit work was focussed on the areas where assurance was most valuable and was timed and conducted in a way that minimised interruption, while complying with government guidelines. She outlined that Member and management agreement of the revised plan, combined with the delivery of the majority of the plan, during a time when the organisation was going through a period of significant change, signified Members and managers recognition of the importance of receiving independent assurance over the Councils "new normal" risk, control and governance frameworks and provided her with sufficient evidence to support her assurance statement. As such, she advised that there was no limitation of scope on her assurance statement and that on the basis of work carried out, she could provide a reasonable assurance regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control.

The report reflected the findings which had arisen from audit work during 2021/2022 as reported to the Panel on a quarterly basis during the year. A summary of audit reports completed and progressed against the 2021/2022 plan was provided.

The Panel noted that some weaknesses and areas for improvement had been identified, which had been reported in detail to the Council's Audit Assurance Board and to the Audit and Risk Panel during 2021/2022 through quarterly progress reports.

The Panel noted the Head of AGRS' Annual Assurance Statement for 2021/2022.

AGRS Governance

The AGRS Manager presented the undernoted report to the Panel:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Audit & Risk Panel of the self-assessment of:

- **AGRS against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS)**
- **The Head of AGRS against the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit.**

1.2 We are required to declare compliance with these within the Annual Governance Statement.

1.3 The purpose of this paper is also to seek the Panel's approval of the terms of reference / 'charter' for Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS).

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Panel are asked to:

- **note the self-assessment against both the PSIAS and the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit.**
- **approve the terms of reference / 'charter' for Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS).**

3.0 Main report

PSIAS

3.1 The PSIAS require regular internal and external assessments to confirm that the internal audit service (AGRS) is operating to professional standards for internal auditing, thereby giving an assurance to key stakeholders that they can rely on the professionalism of the Service.

Internal Assessments

3.2 The PSIAS require 'periodic self-assessments…. to evaluate conformance with the Definition of Internal Auditing, the Code of Ethics and the Standards.' Our detailed self-assessment against the PSIAS is set out at appendix A (available on mod.gov). In summary, this self-assessment found that we are compliant with the PSIAS.

External Assessments

3.3 **The PSIAS also stipulate that 'external assessments must be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team from outside the organisation.' Our last external assessment was undertaken by On Board Training and Consultancy in 2017/18 which concluded that:**

- **AGRS conforms to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards**
- **There are a few areas which require action but they do not significantly impact on On Board's overall opinion**
- **There was strong evidence from their review of the value and contribution that AGRS makes to the Council's governance, risk management and control environment**

3.4 **On 7 December 2021, the Audit & Risk Panel approved the proposed scope of the external assessment of AGRS for 2022/23. Following a competitive quotation exercise, the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance & Resources approved the appointment of On Board Training to complete the 2022/23 external assessment. This will be completed in summer 2022, and the results will be communicated to the next meeting of the Audit & Risk Panel.**

CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit

3.5 **The CIPFA Statement (2019), outlines the principles the Head of Internal Audit should meet to be able to operate effectively and perform their duties, in addition to the personal skills and professional standards expected of the Head of Internal Audit. The Head of AGRS has undertaken this self-assessment, which indicates compliance with the statement and the detailed self-assessment may be found at appendix B (available on mod.gov).**

AGRS Terms of Reference / Charter

3.6 **International Standards for internal auditing and related UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards require that the internal audit function has clear, approved terms of reference (sometimes referred to as a 'charter'). This is to formally set out, in the context of the organisation, the purpose, authority, reporting arrangements, access and scope of the internal audit (AGRS) function so that all**

key stakeholders have a clear understanding of the role of the internal audit function, its powers and responsibilities.

3.7 Standards also require that this document is regularly reviewed and approved by senior management and the 'Board.' In light of this requirement, AGRS undertakes regular review of the document and submits it to the Audit & Risk Panel for approval. This year's review has resulted in only minor changes regarding pronouns. However, it is important that the Audit & Risk Panel reviews the document and confirms that they are satisfied that it meets organisational requirements. The terms of reference / charter are communicated in assignment terms of reference and AGRS presentations.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

4.1 None

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

5.1 None known at this time."

The Panel agreed that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee should adopt the recommendations.

Code of Governance Annual Review

The Panel considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 In line with best practice, the Council has developed a Code of Governance based on the seven core principles set out in the new CIPFA Solace Framework.

1.2 The results of the annual review and update of the Code informs the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement, which forms part of the published annual Financial Report for the Council.

1.3 This paper presents the updated Code to the Audit & Risk Panel for review and approval.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Panel are asked to review and approve the attached updated Code of Governance for Belfast City Council, which has been prepared in line with the CIPFA framework (2016 edition).

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

This section of the report is laid out as follows:

3.1 - Introduction
3.2 - AGRS review of arrangements
3.3 - Ongoing improvements planned for 22/23

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Governance is about how Belfast City Council ensures that it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.

3.1.2 Belfast City Council is committed to the core and supporting principles of good governance set out within the CIPFA Solace Framework, namely that good governance means:

- **Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**
- **Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement**
- **Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits**
- **Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes**
- **Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it**
- **Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management**
- **Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit, to deliver effective accountability**

3.2 AGRS review of arrangements

3.2.1 AGRS has facilitated the annual review and update of the Council's Code of Governance. The main purpose of this review was to confirm that the Council has arrangements in place to address the seven principles of good governance as set out in the Code and to ensure that the Code reflects new initiatives and changes. AGRS contacted various Council officers and was provided with information on the various systems, processes and documentation in place to demonstrate compliance the seven principles of good governance set out in the Code.

3.2.2 The main updates to the Code are:

a) Signing of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) in December 2021, with the BRCD representing a new way of working between central and local government and regional partners. The investment package of investment will support the delivery of inclusive economic growth that delivers more and better jobs, a positive impact on the most deprived communities and a balanced spread of benefits across the region.

b) Completion of the Climate Change Risk Assessment with work ongoing to develop both council and city climate mitigation and adaptation plans, to establish an internal Climate Plan Programme Board and governance arrangements for the £1 million Climate Fund.

c) Approval of the Social Value Policy; Social Value Procurement Framework; and guidance for officers and for suppliers, which is due to be implemented by 1st June 2022.

d) Launch of the new updated Conflict of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality Policies and processes to provide clearer guidance for officers and easier access to complete the various forms to improve overall compliance with the policy.

e) The Council was the first public sector organisation in Northern Ireland to be awarded the Silver Diversity Mark in recognition of the commitment to promoting equality and diversity within the workforce.

f) Completion of the review of the ICT Security Strategy with work ongoing to implement audit recommendations relating to security awareness training, governance of cloud, hardware and software management and project management.

3.2.3 The review and update confirms that arrangements were in place to address the principles of the Code and also identified areas where ongoing improvements are planned (see below). The facilitation of the review and update of the Code of Governance by AGRS has not sought to validate the quality and application of all of these arrangements (although some elements of the framework have been subject to audit during the year).

3.3 <u>Ongoing improvements planned for 2022/23</u>

3.3.1 A number of improvements are quite complex to implement and while work has been undertaken to progress these improvements, they remain ongoing. It is important that these actions, designed to improve our governance arrangements, are considered as part of the corporate delivery plan and prioritisation of programmes / projects:

- **Ongoing implementation of the strategic reviews of Finance and Human Resources.**
- **As Accountable Body for the Belfast Region City Deal, the BCC BRCD team are supporting the development of a range of workstreams relating to BRCD Funding and Governance, including the Contract for Funding, Implementation Plan and Financial Plan, Governance, Assurance and Programme Management Framework.**
- **Plans to develop an Asset Management Strategy and Plan to improve / maximise the management of BCC assets.**
- **Whistleblowing policy is currently under review to take account of NIAO good practice guidance on Raising Concerns.**
- **Following postponement of work due to the pandemic, the implementation of a Corporate Policy Management process and system resumed in September 2021. This piece of work aims to create an accessible policy register for key corporate policies and an accompanying process to ensure that policies are both up to date, fit-for-purpose and working effectively in practice. The initial focus is on policies within Legal and Civic Services and HR.**
- **Development of the 2023/24 Efficiency Programme and programmes for future years.**
- **Implementation of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.**

- **Ongoing work to support the City and Community Recovery along with recovery of council services.**
- **Ongoing implementation of the Council's proposed actions in response to the Coll Report recommendations.**

3.4 Equality or Good Relations Implications

3.4.1 Equality and good relations implications are integral to the Code of Governance."

The Panel approved the updated Code of Governance.

Draft Annual Governance Statement 2022

The Head of AGRS provided the Audit and Risk Panel with the Annual Governance Statement for the Council for 2021/2022, for its consideration and inclusion in the unaudited statement of accounts which would be certified by the Chief Financial Officer by 30th June, 2022, and then subject to NIAO audit.

The Members were advised that the Annual Governance Statement was an important document and that it was important that the Panel was fully aware of its contents. She explained that the disclosures in the statement were based upon consideration of the Council's corporate risks, significant events/issues and disclosures made by Chief Officers in their individual annual assurance statements. The Annual Governance Statement also incorporated a summary of the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement.

The Head of AGRS reported that, as required, the Statement for the year 2021/2022, had been prepared in line with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK 2021/2022 accounts and was consistent with the principles of the new CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' (2016 edition). The Annual Governance Statement explained how the Council had complied with requirements of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2015) in relation to the publication of an annual governance statement.

She advised the Panel that the Annual Government Statement set out:

- the scope of responsibility of the Council in relation to governance;
- the purpose of the governance framework;
- the governance framework in place;
- the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework;
- an update on the significant governance issues disclosed at year-end 2021; and
- the significant governance issues to be disclosed for year-end 2022 and the action proposed to address them.

In preparing the Annual Governance Statement AGRS had referred to the significant governance issues declared by senior management in their individual Annual Assurance Statements prepared in May 2022. The Annual Governance Statement would be incorporated into the unaudited statement of accounts and certified by the Chief Financial Officer by 30th June, 2022. It was subject to review by the LGA (NIAO) as part of its annual audit. Following the audit, the Statement, as part of the audited statement of accounts would be approved by the Chairperson of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the Chief Executive and the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources.

A Member stated that it would be worth highlighting that Port Health relied upon professionally qualified specialist staff to carry out its functions. The Head of AGRS agreed to add that into the draft Statement.

The Panel reviewed the draft Annual Governance Statement for the Council for 2021/2022 and approved the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained within it.

AGRS Progress Report May 2022

The AGRS Manager provided the Panel with information on the key findings from the eight assurance audits and reviews which had been finalised during the period March – May 2022. He explained that one audit relating to an audit of the risk action plan in place for the corporate risk on the strength of relationship between Members and officers had received an assurance opinion of substantial; that four audits relating to Grants, Event Safety, Corporate Risk Review – Organisational & Operational Recovery and Economic Development, had resulted in an assurance opinion of some improvement required and; he provided more detail on the three audits relating to Fleet Management, Developer contributions and Income / Accounts Receivable that had received an assurance opinion of major improvement required. .He explained that management had accepted the recommendations made by AGRS and had provided action officers and implementation dates. The Members were advised that the implementation of the agreed actions would be tracked through the AGRS Recommendations Monitoring process.

The Panel was provided with an update on the assurance and advisory work that had been undertaken regarding key corporate systems and programmes, including the new accounting system and an update regarding the Belfast Region City Deal.

He explained that audits of the following were currently in progress:

- Absence Management (draft report prepared)
- Treasury Management (draft report prepared)
- Corporate Risk Review – City and Community Recovery (draft report prepared)
- Corporate Risk Review – Information Governance (draft report prepared)
- Corporate Risk Review – Financial Position of the Council (fieldwork)
- City Regeneration & Development (fieldwork)
- Continuous Improvement 22/23 (planning / fieldwork)

- Waste Management Operations 22/23 (fieldwork)
- Visit Belfast (fieldwork)

He advised the Members that AGRS continued to provide advisory and consultancy services to management on a variety of matters including general advice on the key areas that management should consider when designing grant programmes that were not being processed through the Council's Central Grants Unit (CGU) such as funding criteria, assessment processes, eligibility and due diligence and monitoring and evaluation.

At the request of a Member, the Panel agreed that the Directors with responsibility for those areas deemed "major improvement needed" be requested to attend the next meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel in order to outline the actions that they were taking to address the concerns which had been raised in the internal audits.

In response to a further Member's query regarding grant funding provided to support communities and businesses during disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the AGRS Manager explained that he would liaise with the Directors in City and Neighbourhood Services in order to seek an update on the monitoring and verification work and provide an update at the Panel's next meeting.

A further Member stated that the biggest risk to the Council, in respect of the Income/Accounts Receivable audit, would be reputational damage and asked that the relevant manager is mindful of this when implementing the audit recommendation.

The Panel noted the update which had been provided.

Update on the Coll Report Recommendations

The Panel noted the contents of a report providing a quarterly update on the progress of the agreed actions arising from the recommendations contained within Section 6 of Mr. Peter Coll QC's independent investigation into events at Roselawn Cemetery on 30th June, 2020.

Update on the Policy Compliance Project / Conflict of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality Policy

The Policy, Research and Compliance Officer, presented the Panel with the undernoted report.

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is update the Audit & Risk Panel on progress in respect of:

1) **the Policy Compliance review**
2) **the new combined Conflict of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality Policy**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Audit & Risk Panel notes:

- **progress to date in respect of both items**
- **the next steps in respect of both items**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Policy Compliance - Update

An update on the policy compliance project was brought to Audit & Risk Panel in March 2022. The project was split into two phases, Phase 1 consisted of a broad benchmarking exercise, the creation of a register of key council policies and the creation of a policy to manage compliance.

Phase 2 had been paused during the pandemic but recommenced late last year and is comprised of an initial review of our corporate policies to ensure that they are both fit for purpose and include arrangements to help us monitor compliance with our obligations.

Agreed approach to policy review and compliance

Review - Senior officers will be responsible for reviewing their respective corporate policies according to an agreed timetable which will be dependent on the policy being reviewed. The period between reviews will be dependent on the specific policy with some policies perhaps requiring an annual review whilst others may require less frequent reviews, or will be reviewed as and when dictated by external factors such as changes to legislation.

Compliance - The senior officer responsible (usually a Chief Officer/Director) for each corporate policy will sign off an annual compliance statement. The compliance statements are prepared after consultation between the Policy, Research and Compliance Officer and the relevant officers within the policy area and will take into account oversight by external bodies of the council's compliance.

The compliance statements are designed to provide assurance that our corporate policies are fit-for-purpose

and provide the necessary framework for the council to comply with our legal and statutory obligations.

The Policy, Research and Compliance Officers will co-ordinate the compilation of these compliance statements and provide a challenge function to the content.

The table below shows the updated implementation plan for Phase 2.

As of May 2022, compliance statements have been prepared for 28 of the estimated 43 policies. Legal and Civic Services (16 policies), Corporate HR (8 policies) and AGRS (4 policies). The next stage in the implementation will be to seek completion of compliance statements for the remaining 15 policies.

Actions	**Target implementation date**
Re-engage with departments on any additional policies to be added to the register	End Nov 2021 **DONE**
Re-commence work with relevant officers on the review of their respective policies – starting with Legal and Civic Services and HR (to be completed by end November 2021)	End Nov 2021 **DONE**
Bring a quarterly assurance report to the Audit Assurance Board on the review status of the policies	3 Mar 2022 **DONE**
Engage with relevant officers and secure completion of compliance statements for the remaining 15 policies	End Sep 2022
Work with internal communications on the roll-out of the policy register on Interlink	End Sep 2022

Bring an annual assurance report to the Audit Assurance Board based on the annual compliance statements	End Sep 2022

3.2 Conflict of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality Policy - Update

The internal audit exercise indicated that significant improvements were required to ensure that there is a satisfactory level of compliance with respect to both policies and the procedures required to be followed when registering a conflict of interest or recording acceptance or provision of gifts and/or hospitality. It was proposed that a single, simplified policy will make it easier for staff to make declarations with respect to both potential conflicts of interest and in the acceptance or provision of gifts and hospitality. An update on the new policy was brought to Audit & Risk Panel in March 2022.

Update on actions taken to date

The audit report highlighted a number of issues which the roll out of the new policy will seek to address. A version of the new policy was brought for consultation to JNCC Management Side on 16 June 2021, was updated following consideration of comments from both Management Side and AGRS colleagues and was then brought back to full JNCC on 23 August for further consultation. The Trade Union Group (TUG) then considered the draft policy and made a number of recommendations which were considered and the policy revised where appropriate. TU side indicated that had no issues with the policy as revised and that no further consultation is required. The final policy was approved at Full JNCC and by CMT in December 2021.

The new policy officially went live on 1 April 2022. This provided a clear cut off date for staff to switch from using the old policies and forms to using the new one. AGRS recommended this date as it coincides with the start of the financial year.

Training on the new policy took place with Nominated Officers within each Department during March 2022 in advance of the policy going live on 1 April. The new policy was also communicated to all staff via Interlink in

March along with links to the policy and all of the associated forms.

The attached appendix 1 provides an outline of each agreed audit action, the timeframe for implementation and a short update on the progress made to date to implement each of the actions.

3.3 Next steps

Policy Compliance

The Policy, Research and Compliance Officers are currently engaging with relevant officers on the review of their respective policies. A quarterly assurance report will be brought to Audit & Risk Panel in September 2022 outlining the status of this review (including the number of policies which have been reviewed and for which compliance statements have been signed off).

Conflict of Interest and Gifts and Hospitality Policy

The majority of council departments plan to run their first six monthly compliance exercise in April/May following the introduction of the new policy on 1 April 2022. The Governance and Compliance unit will carry out a review of the six monthly compliance exercises across all departments during June /July with a view to addressing any issues which arise accordingly.

Further update reports will be brought to CMT and the Audit & Risk Panel on a 6 monthly basis in line with the COIGH departmental reporting timetable.

3.4 Financial & Resource Implications

No financial implications

3.5 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications

Any good relations or equality implications will be identified as part of the Council's screening process."

The Panel noted the progress which had been made to date and the proposed next steps in respect of both items.

Performance Improvement Update

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources presented the Panel with the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to:

- **present to the Panel the year-end corporate Performance Assessment for 2021-22**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Panel is asked to:

- **Review and approve the year-end corporate Performance Assessment 2021-22.**
- **Note the actions to address NIAO 2020-21 findings**

3.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main issues

Background

3.1 Part 12 of the 2014 Local Government (NI) Act and the associated guidance requires that we:

- **produce a *forward looking* Annual Improvement Plan by 30th June (i.e. Corporate Plan) to take effect from April each financial year which reflects the Council's contribution to the Community Plan (Belfast Agenda).**
- **produce a *retrospective* Performance Improvement Assessment by September 30th detailing progress against the Improvement Objectives, examples of other forms of continuous improvement and any performance indicators included within the previous year's Corporate Plan.**

3.2 Year End Corporate Performance Assessment

As required, the Performance Unit within the Finance and Resources Directorate has now produced a Year End Operational Update for 2021-22 (available at Appendix 1 on mod.gov).

Progress against all the objectives is in the most part on target with only a few milestones that have been slightly

delayed, ragged amber or red, with the explanations contained within the report. These activities will be reviewed and considered as part of plans for 2022-23.

3.3 Following June SP&R Committee the content of the Year End Operational Update will be used to compile the year end Corporate Performance Assessment report for 2021-22 which, at this stage, is still required to be published by 30 September 2020.

3.4 <u>NIAO audit and assessment 2020-21</u>

At the March A&RP the Panel were asked to approve the 2020- 1 NIAO Performance Assessment report. The Auditor certified the improvement audit and assessment for the Council with a standard, unqualified opinion. The progress to the 2020-21 NIAO proposals improvement table can be found at Appendix 2 on mod.gov.

3.5 <u>Performance Improvement Plan 2022-23</u>

Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act requires Councils to agree improvement objectives on an annual basis and publish these in the form of an Improvement Plan. We have a statutory duty to agree improvement objectives and produce an annual improvement plan by 30th June each year. The Panel were provided with an update on the next steps on the development of the 2022-23 plan at their meeting in March 2022. Work is progressing on finalising our Improvement Plan 2022/23 and this will be brought to the June meeting of the SP&R Committee for consideration and approval.

3.6 <u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>

None associated with this report

3.7 <u>Equality and Good Relations Implications</u>

None associated with this report."

The Panel adopted the recommendations.

<u>Annual report from Audit and Risk Panel to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee</u>

The Head of AGRS advised the Panel of the following key issues that it had considered and discussed during the 2021/22 financial year, the assurances

received and the areas requiring attention, which the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee would be asked to note at its next meeting:

"3.0 <u>Summary of the work of the Audit and Risk Panel in 2021/22</u>

3.1 In March 2021 the Panel approved the internal audit strategy and plan for the 2021/22 year. The plan was designed to allow AGRS to provide independent assurance over the councils changed risk, control and governance frameworks, which is of particular importance during the pandemic response and recovery. The plan covered:

- **Key financial systems / income generating activity**
- **Key programmes / projects**
- **Management of key corporate risks**
- **Meeting external grant funding requirements**
- **Governance arrangements**

3.2 During 2021/22, the Panel met four times over MS Teams. At these meetings the Panel considered progress reports on delivery of audit plans and issues arising from audit activity, including the findings, assurance levels and recommendations arising from audit work and the progress being made to implement audit recommendations. It also received regular updates on:

- **the Council's financial position, as set out in its financial statements**
- **reports from the Council's external auditors**
- **risk management**
- **business continuity**
- **fraud, financial irregularity and whistleblowing / raising concerns investigations**
- **governance related matters**
- **financial control**
- **health and safety**
- **performance management**
- **staff attendance.**

3.3 The key assurances that the Panel received are as follows:

- **the Council's financial statements and annual governance statement, as prepared by the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance**

and Resources and their team; this provided a management assurance on the Council's financial position

- **the audited accounts and the associated external audit annual letters for 2020/21 (providing an opinion on the accounts) and report to those charged with governance (setting out control issues arising from the annual external audit), as prepared and presented by the Northern Ireland Audit Office. This provided an external assurance on the Council's financial position for 2020/21. (The accounts for 2021/22 are to be prepared by the end of June 2022)**
- **the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Service's annual assurance statement on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's risk management, control and governance arrangements, based on the findings of audit work completed throughout the year.**

3.4 The Panel received assurance from the NIAO regarding their performance improvement audit and assessment for the Council which resulted in a standard, unqualified opinion. The Panel also received regular reports on the development of the Improvement Plan in line with Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act.

3.5 Where areas for improvement have been identified, these have been reported and implementation of agreed recommendations is actively monitored and reported back to the Panel. The Panel has, on occasions, raised issues where either audit reports have identified significant issues or progress against recommendations has not been satisfactory, with Directors asked, where necessary, to attend the Panel and provide further explanation. The key areas considered during 2021/22 include:

- **internal audits of key areas such as Accounts Payable, Payroll, Procurement and Contract Management, Externally Funded Projects, Grants, Fleet Management, Event Safety, Income and Accounts Receivable and Developer Contributions**
- **audits of the management of corporate risks such as Waste Management, City Regeneration and Development, Safeguarding and Organisational and Operational Recovery**

- **assurance and advisory work over key programmes including the project to replace the Accounting System, the Belfast Region City Deal programme, the new HR system, the Planning Portal and the Customer Focus Programme**

3.6 The Audit and Risk Panel have also received updates during the year on the Council's risk management arrangements, including reports on the management of the Council's key corporate risks.

Financial & Resource Implications

None

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None."

A Member stated that it should be highlighted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that if the Audit and Risk Panel made recommendations that it was vital that the actions be implemented.

With that addition, the Panel agreed that the summary should be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Date of next meeting

The Panel noted that it had agreed that it would next meet on Tuesday, 13th September, 2022. It was also noted that the Members of the Panel would meet, without officers present, 15 minutes before the meeting.

Chairperson

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STRATEGIC POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Diversity Action Plans
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Christine Sheridan, Head of Human Resources

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**
1.1	To agree the budget and appropriate resources for the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and LGBT+ Action Plan Year 2 activities.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to • Agree the proposed diversity action plans and associated year 2 costs.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	Our Equality and Diversity Framework outlines how we will tackle inequalities and promote diversity in our city. It is built around four key priorities: A. Leadership, partnership and organisational commitment B. Understanding our communities through data and consultation C. Delivering services accessible to all

	D. Developing a skilled and diverse workforce
3.2	The Framework includes a series of actions to be delivered to help achieve these priorities and under Priority A, Leadership, Partnership and Organisational Commitment, the Council has committed to developing and delivering a Gender Action Plan, LGBT+ Action Plan and a Race Action Plan.
3.3	At its meeting on 10 May 2021, Women's Steering Group agreed a three-year GAP for delivery between April 2021 to March 2024. Year 2 of the current GAP has been costed and is being presented to Committee for approval. In addition, HR has developed a three-year LGBT+ Action Plan for 2021-24, in collaboration with the LGBT+ staff network and this is also being presented, with costs for year 2, for approval.
	Gender Action Plan (GAP)
3.4	Gender inequalities are deeply embedded in our social, economic and cultural systems. There is overwhelming evidence that women disproportionately experience disadvantage and discrimination, a reflection of historical unaddressed inequality, but also that inequalities have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reform and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics affirm the persistence of gendered inequalities, which continue to inhibit women's life opportunities in Northern Ireland. Men will benefit from gender equality as they too face gender-specific issues such as lower life expectancy, bad health, lower education levels and are impacted negatively by rigid gender norms.
3.5	The GAP (21-24) was agreed by the Council in July 21 following consultation with Women's Steering Group (WSG) the Women's Network and the wider group of staff that attended a Gender Inequalities workshop in January 2021.
3.6	Year 1 achievements / projects delivered include: • Delivering of various virtual development and awareness raising events and workshops to mark and celebrate International Women's Day • Funding provided for external International Women's Day event in city centre • Participation in the NI Gender Diversity Charter assessment- first public sector organisation in NI to achieve Silver level accreditation • Gender Identity and Expression Guidance developed and implemented

	• Developed a Menopause Policy and Guidance • Onus Domestic Violence Charter (employer award) – retained Platinum level • Onus Safe City Accreditation - retained • Ongoing support for the Raise Your Voice Project to help address misogyny, sexual harassment and violence
3.7	Our joint elected member and senior officer Women Leaders' Programme is also due to commence in June, continuing to October 2022.
	LGBT+ Action Plan
3.8	The LGBT+ Action Plan (21-24) was agreed by the Council in July 21 following consultation with the Proud Staff Network and senior LGBT+ champions. The plan for year 2 (attached at Appendix Two) sets out our proposed activity and costs. It has been developed to ensure that our organisational culture and working environment allows staff to feel comfortable to be their whole selves at work and that policies and practices empower talent development at all levels and the removal of any form of discrimination. It also aims to increase the understanding of the wider workforce of issues facing the LGBT+ communities.
3.9	Year 1 achievements / projects delivered include: • LGBT+ inclusion and awareness training • Specific LGBT+ awareness training for senior leaders • Trans awareness training • Bi identity awareness training • Mental Health First Aid for Proud network members • Development and implementation of Gender Identity and Expression Guidance • Continued promotion, visibility and growth of staff network • New senior champion identified– profiled on staff intranet • Staff and family Pride Walk • The display of Rainbow and Trans flags and lighting up of City Hall. • Achieved Gold Award in Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index

	Disability Action Plan
3.10	CMT should also note that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 ("DDA") Section 49 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons, and to the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life. The Equality and Diversity Unit is in the process of reviewing and revising the Disability Action Plan.
	Race Action Plan
3.11	It was recently agreed to appoint the Director of City & Organisational Strategy as a Race Champion to lead a Race Equality and Diversity Action Group and oversee the development of a Race Action Plan. This work will review how we deliver our services and actions that we can take as an employer to create a more diverse workforce, and as a city leader, to influence and bring about change.
3.12	It has also been agreed that the Council signs up to the Business in the Community initiative "Race at Work Charter" to learn from best practice and gain support in developing our approach, agreeing actions and setting achievable goals and targets. The first meeting of the Race Equality and Diversity Action Group will take place in the coming weeks.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.13	The cost of delivery of the proposed Gender Action Plan year 2 activities is estimated at £48 000. Please note this includes previously approved activity carried over from 2021/22 which could not be progressed because of the pandemic. The cost of delivery of the LGBT+ Action Plan year 2 is estimated at £9700. Both plans will be met from the existing Organisational Development budget.
3.14	The plan also identifies the role that individual business units and departments have in delivery of the plan.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
3.15	The delivery of the Gender and the LGBT+ Action Plans will result in positive outcomes. The promotion of equality and diversity entails more than the elimination of discrimination, it requires proactive action. The actions contained within both plans will not only impact on

	internal operations but also have a positive impact externally on women and men and the LGBT+ community in our city.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix One - Gender Action Plan 21-24 - Year 2 Appendix Two - LGBT+ Action Plan 21-24 - Year 2

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Appendix One

GENDER ACTION PLAN 2021 - 2024
Year 2 - DRAFT

Gender inequalities are deeply embedded in our social, economic and cultural systems. There is overwhelming evidence that women disproportionately experience disadvantage and discrimination, a reflection of historical unaddressed inequality, but also that inequalities have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reform and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the twenty years since the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement's commitment to the 'full and equal participation of women in public life', statistics affirm the persistence of gendered inequalities, which continue to inhibit women's life opportunities in Northern Ireland. Men will benefit from gender equality as they too face gender-specific issues such as lower life expectancy, bad health, lower education levels and are impacted negatively by rigid gender norms.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COUNCIL -to ensure that BCC organisational culture, policies and practices empower talent development at all levels, for elected members and officers and remove any form of discrimination			
Action	**Year**	**Who**	**Cost**
Review Terms of reference / structure for Women's Network Group and develop a programme of events and activity.	2	WNG	£3000
Hold annual IWD event / celebrations for staff	2, 3		£6000
Deliver a mentoring programme for staff of all genders	2	HR	Corporate OD Budget
Develop guidance for managers to welcome staff back from periods of extended leave, maternity, parental leave etc	2	HR	Staff resources
Encourage all staff to work together to understand and champion gender issues through joint events, communications, workshops, outreach programmes etc	2 3,	HR Depts	Staff resources
Review and delivery Women's Leadership Programme for members and officers to include a focus on resilience and in particular around social media.	2	HR	£13000
Participate in NI Gender Diversity Charter assessment work towards attaining Silver level accreditation	2	HR	£2500 pa

Review “on boarding “ for senior staff and all staff to include leadership responsibilities around equality, diversity and inclusion and responsibilities of all staff	2	HR	Staff resources
Explore and challenge existing culture / perceptions around “presenteeism” , flexible working at a senior level, long hours culture etc. and develop actions to help address / change culture	2	HR WSG CMT	Staff resources
Ensure effective promotion of BCC as an employer that values and supports equality and diversity (external website, job info to potential applicants, press releases, City Matters article etc.)	Ongoing	HR MarComms Staff networks	Staff resources
Develop and agree Menopause guidance for staff	2	HR Women’s Network Group	Staff resources
Review frontline job opportunities including apprenticeships, and associated working arrangements and facilities, to make these opportunities more attractive to female applicant and promoting BCC role models deliver targeted employability outreach to get more women into work	Ongoing	CNS HR Place and Economy	Staff Resources
Retain ‘ platinum level’ status of the Onus Domestic Violence charter by continuing to raise awareness of domestic violence and abuse issues, support staff experiencing domestic violence and abuse and ensure employees know what support is available	2, 3	HR	£2000
Review, update and communicate maternity, paternity, and other parental / caring related guidance for staff and managers , including flexible working, as part of the review of the Work Life Balance Handbook	3	HR Depts	Staff resources
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COMMUNITY -with the purpose of increasing the representation of women in leadership positions throughout communities across Belfast by ensuring that processes are in place to increase women’s involvement in decision making in communities			
Fund annual external IWD event.	2, 3	Equality Unit	£6500
Recognise Transgender Remembrance Day and Transgender Day of Visibility	2, 3	HR Proud Staff network	LGBT+ Action plan
Increase awareness and understanding of the gender spectrum including “non binary”	2	HR HR Proud Staff network	LGBT + action plan

Working with BCC staff networks and external groups, hold a workshop to explore and identify "intersectionality issues" where women experience multiple barriers and identify actions to address	2	HR WSG	£1000
Hold an event for WSG to engage with the Youth Forum and to identify opportunities for future collaboration gender issues	3	HR WSG CNS / YF	£1000
Input into / support the Young Leadership Programme for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic and Other Communities - e.g. via mentoring, hosting meetings, briefings etc.	2	WSG	£2000
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ECONOMY -to ensure all council policies and strategies influence and facilitate the active and fair participation of both women and men in the economy			
Identify opportunities for targeted employability outreach, ring fencing, employment academies etc. for women furthest removed from the labour market including City Deal opportunities	2,3	HR/ED Depts	Staff resources / Employment Academies
Working in partnership with Women In Business NI Belfast City Council have put in place a series of bootcamps and networking events for female entrepreneurs in 2022/23. The purpose of these activities are to engage female entrepreneurs in business start up activity, helping them to develop ideas, and create networks to support them to start a businesses. This will also include support for Women in Businesses annual conference.	2	Economic Development	£12,000
Enterprise and Employability support for underrepresented groups – Belfast City Council programme of support to enable underrepresented groups (including females) to overcome the barriers to starting a business or accessing employment opportunities.	2, 3	Economic Development	£90,000

Establish link with Area Partnership Boards where relevant, and other stakeholder groups to consider particular needs of women wishing to start their own business.	2. 3	Economic Development	Staff resources
Work with city partners to deliver a STEM employability event for girls.	3	HR ED External partners	£3000
PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN THE CITY -to ensure that the needs of women across the city are identified and used to influence and impact upon the regeneration of the city including social infrastructure design and community facilities provision			
As part of the ongoing baseline audit of all Council assets determine if Council assets are 'fit for purpose' in terms of the needs of all genders and that gender needs are looked at as part of the development of any new council asset. In particular link in with the Clean, Green and Safe survey.	2, 3	Capital programmes Department C&NS Place & Economy Dept	Staff resources Potential cost if additional works required
Support and raise awareness of the Raise your Voice Project to help address misogyny, sexual harassment and violence, in particular consider engagement with all stakeholders in particular, males.	2	HR External partners	£3000
As part of the ongoing area working /place shaping work and the Physical Investment Programme look at opportunities of how the needs of women can be better met across the city	2, 3	Capital programmes Place and Economy C&NS Strategic Hub External stakeholders	Staff resources Potential associated costs for future GAP
Work with City Partners to retain Onus Safe City status by funding training and awareness raising across the city. Explore the Safe Haven initiative and its potential link to Safe City activity.	2, 3	HR CNS ONUS and other external partners	£3000 + PCSP Resource

Deliver a pilot to provide free period products for staff Deliver a pilot to provide free period products for the public in Council buildings and facilities Evaluate both pilots and assess costs for future provision	2	CLS Dept CNS	Staff Resources / existing budgets
Fund a pilot to make available reusable period products for staff	2	HR /CNS	£2000
Develop an Anti-Harassment Policy for all Council facilities and Council-run events (linking in with Safeguarding Policy and relevant training)	Year 2	HR CNS P&E	Staff Resources

TOTAL APPROXIMATE COSTS Year 2 - £48 000 (excl ED funded initiatives)

N.B. Where ongoing COVID 19 restrictions limit planned activity, online / remote delivery will be explored and used where possible.

Appendix Two

Belfast City Council – LGBT+ Action Plan 2021-2024

Year 2

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	*Training and Development*	**-Source and deliver LGBT+ inclusion and awareness training.** **Include a specific session designed for senior leaders every year.** **Source and deliver specific training in relation to Corp Procurement Team.**	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	HR/ Network Chair	£1000
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	*Training and Development*	**Source and deliver awareness training sessions focused specifically on non binary identities**	✓	✓	HR/Network chair	£350

Belfast City Council

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
Increased awareness specifically around Trans and Bi identities.	*Training and Development*	**Source and deliver awareness training sessions focused specifically on Trans and Bi identities.**	✓	✓	HR/ Network Chair	£650
Explicit commitment to LGBT+ inclusion.	*Training and development.*	**Review corporate induction process – explicit statements to LGBT+ inclusion through a presentation from SMT including the referencing of Pride etc**	✓	✓	HR	Staff Resource
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	*Training and Development*	**Develop Peer Mentoring and Reverse mentoring – Senior champion, Kate Bentley**	✓	✓	HR/Senior Champion	Staff Resource
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	*Training and Development*	**Review Senior Management appraisal process to recognise Diversity and Inclusion leadership activity**	✓	✓	HR	Staff Resource

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
Increased awareness of LGBT+ issues including bias and its impact on staff and service delivery.	*Training and Development*	**Revise E&D training to ensure awareness of the impact or potential sanction of inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour on service users**	✓	✓	HR	Staff Resource
Better mental health awareness.	*Training and Development*	**Allocate 5 places each year on Mental Health First Aider course to Proud members and offer spaces to the wider organisation.** **Participate in LGBT+ Awareness Week each year**	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	HR HR	Need to check cost £300
Reducing any perceived/realised bias experienced my LGBT+ individuals	*Training and development*	**Source and offer unconscious bias training to relevant staff e.g. HR chairs/recruiters/Customer Hub**	✓	✓	HR	£1000
Inclusive policies with appropriate language.	*Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours*	**Review any relevant existing policies in terms of language, terminology and gender neutrality and inclusion including an effective consultation mechanism for all staff**	✓	✓	HR	Staff resource

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
Inclusive policies with appropriate language.	*Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours*	**Revise TOR. Make explicit openness to <u>all</u> LGBT groups especially the most marginalised**	✓	✓	HR	Staff resource
Guidance for employees and managers around Trans issues and identities. Increased awareness and understanding of issues affecting Trans individuals and service users. Better service delivery	*Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours*	**Produce FAQ document to supplement Gender Identity Guidance**	✓	✓	HR	Staff Resource
Increase Proud Membership Improve awareness and accessibility to Network Senior leaders engaged in promoting equality and participation	*Visibility and Network Growth*	**Continue to use online and Intranet as channels to promote Proud activities and membership.** **Provide promotional materials e.g. pens, lanyards and reusable water bottles for example.**	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	Network Chair All	Staff Resource £200
Awareness of BCC as an inclusive employer to potential new	*Visibility and Network Growth*	**Distribute relevant posts and revised application info to NI LGBT+ organisations for wider**	✓	✓	HR	Staff Resource

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
applicants at the application stage. Attract a wide and diverse range of applicants.		**circulation and dissemination.**				
Collaborate with other Diversity Networks in BCC to promote the wider Diversity and Inclusion message	*Visibility and inclusive growth of all Networks*	**Joint event (online or physical) addressing a cross-sectional issue or event e.g. Disability or Race issues**	✓	✓	Network Chairs	£300
Fully participate in Belfast Pride demonstrating BCC as an inclusive service provider and employer in the community	*Community engagement and visibility*	**Participate in Belfast Pride including BCC vehicles and staff as part of the official parade. Internal comms and Interlink article to promote. Flying of LGBT+ flag on City Hall.**	✓	✓	ALL	£1000
	Community engagement and visibility	**Build participation with Network members and wider workforce.**	✓	✓	ALL	
Visible and practical support for local LGBT+ charity/organisation. Communication of positive impacts		**Hold a fundraiser internally to support LGBT+ organisations bake sale or sponsored event. Internal comms and Interlink piece to promote. Social media platforms. Feedback from charitable cause on how the**	✓	✓	Network Chair	

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
		fundraising is used to improve LGBT+ lives. **Organise networks own Pride celebration i.e. family walk**	✓	✓	Network chair/HR	
Increased awareness of issues specifically affecting Transgender community. Celebration of LGBT+ contributions. Visible and tangible support for Trans community.	*Community engagement and visibility*	**Continue hosting the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance event in November each year. Use of City Hall for the event. Flying Trans flag to demonstrate support.** **Celebrate and promote Transgender Awareness Week internally and using external BCC social media to promote relevant local events and programmes.** **Celebrate Transgender Day of Visibility Light City Hall on Transgender Day of Visibility in March each year including flying the Trans flag. Internal comms and external social media.**	✓ ✓ ✓	✓ ✓ ✓	HR/Network Chair Network Network	£600 Staff Resource £600 + Staff Resource
Explore option for expansion of gender neutral	*Visible inclusivity in the workplace and as a service provider.*	**Determine if feasible to expand existing provision.**	✓		HR/Facilities/F&R	Existing PMU budgets

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
facilities in BCC buildings.		**Comms around APUs around Belfast as they are gender neutral and designed for users with disabilities (could cross with Disability Network)**				
Improved visibility, networking and learning.	*Social Networking and community engagement.*	**Contribute to an event facilitated by local LGBT+ service providers and other Networks across NI**	✓	✓	Network Chair	£600
Improved knowledge of workforce mobility and demographics	*Monitoring/Organisational analysis*	**Carry out a voluntary monitoring exercise for all staff when feasible.**	✓	✓	HR	Staff Resource/ Comms
Attracting talent and diversity	*Diversity and Inclusion*	**Ensure relevant information on benefits of working for Belfast City Council communicated effectively using appropriate channels.**	✓ ✓	✓ ✓	HR	Employee Resourcing
Attracting talent and diversity	*Diversity and Inclusion*	**Include non binary option in BCC application forms**	✓		HR	Employee Resourcing
Understand reasons employees (including LGBT+) depart the organisation	*Monitoring/Organisational analysis*	**Develop an exit interview process**		✓	HR	Staff Resource
Position in national benchmarking			✓	✓	HR/Chair/BCC Project Team	£2500/

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
exercise with peers which provide a framework for continuous improvement	*Organisational analysis/Continuous Improvement*	**Annual Membership in Stonewall Diversity Champions Programme** **Stonewall Equality Index - prepare for submission in Sept each year and participate in Stonewall Staff Survey using previous feedback to make improvements across each area**	✓	✓		Staff Resource to complete and document submission and staff survey.
Better engagement and visibility with LGBT+ and allies	*Community Engagement/Communications*	**Explore feasibility of a Proud Instagram page to share relevant info/events/messages**	✓	✓	Corp Comms/Network Chair	Staff Resource
Better engagement and visibility with LGBT+ and allies	*Community Engagement/Communications*	**Ensure regular communications on Allies, how important they are, how to become an ally etc**	✓	✓	Corp Comms/Network Chair	Staff Resource
Understanding needs of LGBT+ community and service users.	*Clients, customers and service provision.*	**Explore opportunities for collaboration with suppliers on Employability and Diversity issues i.e. Matrix, Bryson, OH/EC**	✓	✓	HR	Staff Resource
Understanding needs of LGBT+ community and service users.	*Clients, customers and service provision.*	**New Customer Hub – main customer interface. Provide both general awareness and specific and relevant training in relation to bias.**	✓ ✓	✓	Network Chair/HR Network/Chair	£600

Expected Outcomes	Theme	Actions	2022/23	2023/24	Activity Lead	Indicative cost (year 2)
		Engage with hub in relation to monitoring service use and customer satisfaction and Service User Journey. **Use BCC social media more to promote BCC as an inclusive service provider. E.g. Pride/TDOR/TDOV/LGBT+ History month (profile local LGBT+ Champion).**	✓	✓	Corp Comms/Network Chair	Staff Resource Staff Resource
					Total	£9700

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STRATEGIC POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Request made by Councillor McMullan at Council Meeting on 1 June 2021 – Sign Language
Date:	17 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, City Solicitor
Contact Officer:	Michael Johnston, Language Officer

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of report or summary of main issues**
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update report related to Sign Language as requested by Councillor McMullan at Council meeting in June 2021.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Note this report.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	Background At the request of Councillor McMullan, the Council on 1 June 2020 agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to provide an update on the potential to

	work with deaf people and the Department for Communities, to promote and roll out classes or training to local community and voluntary. Due to an administrative error, this was only passed to the Equality & Diversity Unit in December.
3.2	The Council launched its Language Strategy in April 2018. The Strategy commits to establishing a transparent set of principles for promoting, protecting and enhancing the linguistic diversity of the city. There are five language strands within the Strategy including Sign Languages. We also have a Disability Action Plan (2019-2022) which consists of action measures related to Sign Languages.
	Key Issues Work to date in relation to Sign Languages
3.3	**British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language Charter** In March 2019, the Council signed up to the British Deaf Association's British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language Charter and one of the pledges made was to ensure council staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively using British Sign Language and/or Irish Sign Language.
3.4	**Sign Language Users' Forum** A Sign Language Users' Forum consisting of local Sign Language users was established in June 2019 and meets twice a year to advise, guide and support the Council to respond better to the needs of Sign Language Users in Belfast.
3.5	**Staff training** In the current Language Strategy Action Plan and the Disability Action Plan, a number of action measures are listed to support Sign Language users including the delivery of Sign Language courses for council staff and providing guidance on how to communicate with a Sign Language user.
3.6	A pilot Sign Language course for a pool of front-line council staff was completed in October 2019. Additional courses were put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic and feedback indicated that the course was best delivered in a face-to-face setting.

3.7	**Department for Communities** DfC provides funding to a number of Deaf organisations who are members of their Sign Language Partnership Group to deliver Sign Language projects including classes and courses for local communities. Further information on this can be found at Sign language | Department for Communities (communities-ni.gov.uk).
3.8	Council officers recently met with the Head of Sign Language Policy at Department for Communities' (DfC) Language Branch. The Language Branch is currently reviewing membership of its Sign Language Partnership Group and a new sub-group consisting of public authorities including local Councils is being considered. This would enable Belfast City Council and the Department for Communities to potentially work together to identify initiatives including funding to support voluntary groups and businesses to provide Sign Language courses. Any related actions will be considered by the Language Strategy Working Group and members will be kept updated.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.9	None associated with this report.
	Equality, good relations or rural needs implications
3.10	None associated with this report.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 - Special Council Meeting minutes; 1st June 2021.

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Council

SPECIAL MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held Remotely via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, 1st June, 2021
at 7.45 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor;
(Councillor Nicholl) (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, (Alderman Haire);
The High Sheriff (Councillor Long);
Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Kingston, McCoubrey, Rodgers and Sandford; and Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Bradley, Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, Corr, De Faoite, Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Groogan, Hanvey, Heading, Howard, Hussey, Hutchinson, M. Kelly, T. Kelly, Kyle, Lyons, Magee, Magennis, Maskey, McAllister, McAteer, McCabe, McCusker, McDonough-Brown, McKeown, McLaughlin, McMullan, McReynolds, Mulholland, Murphy, Newton, O'Hara, Pankhurst, Smyth, Spratt, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

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

Declarations of Interest

The Deputy Lord Mayor, Alderman Haire, declared an interest in relation to item 4. b), Chief Executive's Decisions taken under Delegated Authority for the People and Communities Committee, under the heading Request for use of premises - Barnett Demesne, in that he was a Trustee of the County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast.

Request to Address the Council

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Ms. Sue Pentel and Mr. Mohammed Samaana in relation to the motion on the UK and Irish Governments' expulsion of Israeli Ambassadors which would be proposed by Councillor Ferguson later in the meeting.

The Council acceded to the request and, accordingly, Ms. Pentel and Mr. Samaana joined the meeting via Microsoft Teams and were welcomed by the Lord Mayor.

Mr. Samaana explained to the Members that he was born and raised in Palestine and that, during that period he lived in Jerusalem working as a nurse. He

reported that, whilst in Jerusalem, he witnessed ethnic cleansing of Palestinians by the Israeli Council by means of denial of planning permission for housing, denial of spousal residency for Palestinians and the removal of residential status resulting in Palestinians living in a disused buildings with no doors, windows or hygiene facilities.

He pointed out that continuous attacks, intimidation, and denial of attendance at places of worship were all used as means of persecution and that most of the attacks were on civilian areas.

He concluded by adding that it was important to support the motion as boycott and sanctions were non-violent means of resistance and change and that it was important that the world take action only for the sake of peace

Ms. Pentel thanked Mr. Samaana for his contribution and explained that she was a representative of Jewish Voice for Just Peace and the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign. She informed the Council that she was part of a diverse group of Jews living in Ireland who support the Palestinian struggle for human rights and justice, a struggle that resonated with the Irish journey towards peace.

She reported that antisemitism was increasing and that the fight against it should be joined with racism and xenophobia.

She stated that she felt strongly that it should oppose the actions of Israeli Government and called for support for the motion

The Lord Mayor thanked the representatives for their attendance, and they retired from the meeting.

The Council noted the information which had been provided and that Members would, later in the meeting, have an opportunity to discuss the matter.

Decisions of the Chief Executive taken under Delegated Authority

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie, and

Resolved – That, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, and the minute of the meeting of the Members of the Committee of 21st May, be approved and adopted.

At the request of Councillor McMullan, the Council agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee, to provide an update on the potential to work with deaf people and the Department for Communities, to promote and roll out classes or training to local community and voluntary groups and businesses, to train staff in basic sign language.

People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Cobain,
Seconded by Councillor Pankhurst,

That, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the People and Communities Committee and the minute of the meeting of the Members of the Committee, of 11th May be approved and adopted.

Amendment

**Resources and Fleet Update –
(Waste Collections and Management)**

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

Resolved – "That the minute of the meeting of the Members of the People and Communities Committee of 11th May, under the heading "Resources and Fleet Update –(Waste Collections and Management)" be amended to reflect that Belfast City Council supports the implementation of a full bottle deposit return scheme as opposed to an "on the go" scheme."

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendment, the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the People and Communities Committee and the minutes of the meeting of the Members of the People and Communities Committee of 11th May, were approved and adopted.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor Maskey,

That, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, the minute of the meeting of the Members of the Committee of 12th May, and the minute of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 28th April, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Sustainable Travel - Notice of Motion Update

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor Kyle,

That the decision of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, under the heading "Sustainable Travel – Notice of Motion Update" be rejected and, the associated minute of the meeting of the Members of the Committee of 12th May, be amended to reflect that:

"This Council agrees to write to the Minister of Infrastructure to state that the Experimental Traffic Control Scheme Permitted (Taxis in Bus Lanes), which was proposed by her Department, no longer has this Council's support and to urge her to not progress this further. Instead we will outline our commitment to sustainable transport modes given the dangerous levels of air pollution and congestion across the city and in the context of our climate emergency, focusing efforts on further measures to enhance the provision of public transport, safe and segregated cycle infrastructure, pedestrian priority and a package of measures to support taxi drivers to transition to electric vehicles, in line with the principles of a just transition.'

On a recorded vote, twenty-four Members voted for the amendment and thirty-two against, with three no votes, and it was declared lost.

For 24	Against 32	No Vote 3
The Lord Mayor (Councillor Nicholl); and The High Sheriff (Councillor Long); and Aldermen Copeland and Rodgers; and Councillors de Faoite, Flynn, Groogan, Hanvey, Heading, Howard, Hutchinson, M. Kelly, Kyle, Lyons, McAllister, McCusker, McDonough-Brown, McKeown, McMullan, McReynolds, Mulholland, O'Hara, Smyth and Whyte.	The Deputy Lord Mayor (Alderman Haire); and Aldermen Dorrian, Kingston, McCoubrey and Sandford; and Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Bradley, Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Corr, Donnelly, Garrett, Gormley, Hussey, T. Kelly, Magee, Magennis, Maskey, McCabe, McAteer, McLaughlin, Murphy, Newton, Pankhurst, Spratt, Verner and Walsh.	Councillors Matt Collins, Michael Collins and Ferguson.

Adoption of Minutes

The decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the minutes of the meeting of the Members of the Committee of 11th May, were approved and adopted.

Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor McCabe, and

Resolved – That, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the Licensing Committee and the minutes of the meeting of the Members of the Licensing Committee of 19th May, be approved and adopted.

Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Carson,
Seconded by Councillor Maskey and

Resolved - That, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the Planning Committee and the minutes of the meeting of the Members of the Planning Committee of 18th and 20th May, be approved and adopted.

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Stakeholders' Committee

Moved by Councillor McCabe,
Seconded by The Deputy Lord Mayor (Alderman Haire) and

Resolved - That, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee and the minutes of the meeting of the Members of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee of 17th May, be approved and adopted.

Brexit Committee

Moved by Councillor Baker,
Seconded by Councillor McCabe and

Resolved - That, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the decisions of the Chief Executive, taken under delegated authority for the Brexit Committee and the minutes of the meeting of the Members of the Brexit Committee of 13th May, be approved and adopted.

Motions

Private Members Bill to provide Safe Access Zones around all facilities providing sexual and reproductive health care services and information

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor Groogan proposed:

"This Council notes the increasing occurrence of harassment outside healthcare facilities in Belfast, Newry and across Northern Ireland at healthcare premises that offer reproductive and family planning services. This often includes the display of traumatising graphic anti-choice imagery, which this Council has already undertaken to seek to regulate, and attempt to interfere with the ability of patients and staff to access healthcare.

This Council condemns all forms of harassment and intimidation directed at patients and staff within our Health Service.

This Council reaffirms its belief in the right of all individuals to have safe access to healthcare, free from attempts to harass, frighten and intimidate and supports Clare Bailey MLA's Private Members Bill to introduce safe access zones around all facilities providing sexual and reproductive health care services and information."

The motion was seconded by Alderman Copeland.

After discussion, the motion was put to the meeting and passed.

The Employment Rights (NI) Order 1996

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor Lyons proposed:

"That this Council notes with alarm the growing number of employers, especially in the retail, hospitality and aviation sectors, who are making employees redundant before re-employing them on less-favourable terms and conditions; believes that these employers should instead be focused on supporting their employees through this pandemic; agrees with Unite the union and others that this fire-and-rehire practice makes a mockery of workers' rights.

This Council therefore calls on the Department for Economy to close this legal loophole as a matter of urgency, for example by amending The Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 to specify that such redundancies should automatically be regarded as unfair dismissals."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Heading.

After discussion, the motion was put to the meeting and passed.

Request to the Irish Government and the UK Government to expel from office Israeli Ambassadors

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor Ferguson proposed:

"The Council notes:

That Palestinians have endured the longest ongoing refugee crisis in the world, and respects the right of return as enshrined in international law;

That the current escalation of violence was instigated by the attempt to evict 28 Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah area of Jerusalem as part of an ongoing and systematic campaign of illegal Israeli settlements and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their land;

That Israel's military operation in Gaza amounts to the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and illegal settlement expansion, represents flagrant breaches of international law;

That a growing list of human rights organisations have determined that Israel's action amount to apartheid, including the latest report by Human Rights Watch;

That normal co-operation with the Israeli state is therefore untenable in these circumstances.

The Council recognises the rich history of solidarity and activism in this city from all communities for Palestine, including very recently when a huge demonstration called for an end to Israeli mistreatment of the Palestinians; and that such solidarity on the part of our citizens can be an important tool in dismantling support for Israel's actions.

The Council therefore condemns the actions of the Israeli state, as listed above, and agrees to write to the Irish Government and the UK Government, urging them to expel from office Israeli ambassadors, with immediate effect."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Matt Collins.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor McAllister,
Seconded by Councillor Mulholland,

That the motion standing in the name of Councillor Ferguson and seconded by Councillor Matt Collins be amended as follows:

To delete the concluding paragraph from: "The Council therefore condemns the actions of the Israeli state, as listed above, and agrees to write to the Irish Government and the UK Government, urging them to expel from office Israeli ambassadors, with immediate effect" and replace it with the following: ***"This Council calls on the UK and Irish governments to make clear to their Israeli counterpart that relations cannot continue as normal while Israel persists with its illegal settlement policy and disproportionate use of force, and stresses that both governments must consider all economic and diplomatic measures to ensure Israel upholds international law."***

The motion, as amended, therefore read:

"The Council notes:

That Palestinians have endured the longest ongoing refugee crisis in the world, and respects the right of return as enshrined in international law;

That the current escalation of violence was instigated by the attempt to evict 28 Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah area of Jerusalem as part of an ongoing and systematic campaign of illegal Israeli settlements and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from their land;

That Israel's military operation in Gaza amounts to the ongoing ethnic cleansing of Palestinians, and illegal settlement expansion, represents flagrant breaches of international law;

That a growing list of human rights organisations have determined that Israel's action amount to apartheid, including the latest report by Human Rights Watch;

That normal co-operation with the Israeli state is therefore untenable in these circumstances.

The Council recognises the rich history of solidarity and activism in this city from all communities for Palestine, including very recently when a huge demonstration called for an end to Israeli mistreatment of the Palestinians; and that such solidarity on the part of our citizens can be an important tool in dismantling support for Israel's actions.

This Council calls on the UK and Irish governments to make clear to their Israeli counterpart that relations cannot continue as normal while Israel persists with its illegal settlement policy and disproportionate use of force, and stresses that both governments must consider all economic and diplomatic measures to ensure Israel upholds international law."

On a recorded vote, ten Members voted for the proposal, as amended, and forty-nine against, and it was declared lost.

For 10	**Against 49**
The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Nicholl); and The High Sheriff (Councillor Long); and Councillors Hanvey, Howard, M. Kelly, McAllister, McDonough-Brown, McMullan, McReynolds and Mulholland	The Deputy Lord Mayor, (Alderman Haire); and Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Kingston, McCoubrey, Rodgers and Sandford; and Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Bradley, Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, Corr, De Faoite, Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Groogan, Heading, Hussey, Hutchinson, T. Kelly, Kyle, Lyons, Magee, Magennis, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCusker, McKeown, McLaughlin, Murphy, Newton, O'Hara, Pankhurst, Smyth, Spratt, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

The original motion, as proposed by Councillor Ferguson and seconded by Councillor Matt Collins, was thereupon put to the meeting and, on a recorded vote, thirty-one Members voted for the motion and twenty-eight against and it was declared carried.

For 31	**Against 28**
Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Bradley, Canavan, Carson, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, Corr, De Faoite, Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Groogan, Heading, Lyons, Magee, Magennis, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCusker, McKeown, McLaughlin, Murphy O'Hara, Smyth, Walsh and Whyte.	The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Nicholl); and The High Sheriff (Councillor Long); and The Deputy Lord Mayor, (Alderman Haire); and Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Kingston, McCoubrey, Rodgers and Sandford; and Councillors Brooks, Bunting, Cobain, Hanvey, Howard, Hussey, Hutchinson, M. Kelly, T. Kelly, Kyle, McAllister, McDonough-Brown, McMullan, McReynolds, Mulholland, Newton, Pankhurst, Spratt, and Verner.

Ballymurphy Massacre

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor Corr proposed:

"That this Council commends the Ballymurphy families on their long campaign to vindicate the memory of their loved ones murdered by the British Army in 1971; welcomes the findings of the Coroner that all deceased were entirely innocent of any wrongdoing and acknowledges

her criticism of the British State's shocking and abject failing to investigate what happened as further evidence of its ongoing attempts to frustrate truth and justice for bereaved families; reaffirms the Council's support for the full and immediate implementation of the Stormont House Agreement legacy mechanisms in a human rights compliant manner; and rejects any attempt by the British Government to introduce an amnesty or statute of limitations in relation to the conflict."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Donnelly.

Amendment

Moved by Alderman Kingston,
Seconded by Councillor Pankhurst,

That the motion standing in the name of Councillor Corr and seconded by Councillor Donnelly be amended as follows:

"That this Council commends the Ballymurphy families on their long campaign to vindicate the memory of their loved ones killed by the British Army in 1971; welcomes the findings of the Coroner that all deceased were entirely innocent of any wrongdoing and rejects any attempt by the Government to advance proposals without the agreement of the Northern Ireland political parties."

The Council agreed to vote on the amended motion, when fifteen Members voted for the motion and forty-one against, with two no votes, and it was declared lost.

The original motion, as proposed by Councillor Corr and seconded by Councillor Donnelly, was thereupon put to the meeting and passed.

Local Government Pension Scheme – Responsible Investment Strategy

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor Murphy proposed:

"This council notes that recent weeks have seen the most serious escalation of violence in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territory since 2014, with a tragic impact on innocent civilians and loss of life, including the deaths of over 60 children. Condemns the indiscriminate targeting of civilian populations and infrastructure, and the disproportionate impact this has had, particularly in the Gaza strip.

This council recognises that the displacement of Palestinian communities in East Jerusalem and across the West Bank, and the expansion of illegal Israeli settlements, undermines the prospect of peace – not just in recent weeks but over decades – and represents a flagrant violation of international law.

Therefore, this council will write to the Local Government Pension Scheme to seek as part of its responsible investment strategy that it will begin the process of divesting from any Israeli Sate owned company or private company involved in the occupation and the violation of Palestinian human rights. This will include any companies listed by the United Nations as operating in these illegal Israeli settlements within the occupied Palestinian territories.

We will also ask that NILGOSC carry out its own due diligence into any other companies which are not included on this list but are known to be involved in or with these illegal settlements.

Finally, this council will ask that the divestment process is time bound to a period of 12 months from when NILGOSC makes those companies involved first aware of the complaint and intention to divest."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Walsh.

The Council agreed to vote on the motion, when forty-one Members voted for the motion and sixteen against, and it was declared carried.

End Child Poverty

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor Heading proposed:

"This Council notes the recent report commissioned by the End Child Poverty coalition into levels of child poverty.

This Council further notes from the report one in four children are growing up in poverty with two thirds growing up in families were parents are in work.

The Council therefore calls on the NI Executive to adopt the following:

1. To expedite the recommendations on child poverty by an expert panel to the Department of Communities

2. Strengthen the welfare mitigations and drop the two child limit within Universal Credit

3. Support the £20 uplift in Tax Credits and Universal Credit by lobbying the Chancellor to continue this increase beyond September 2021."

The motion was seconded by Councillor McCusker.

The motion was put to the meeting and passed.

PEACE IV to PEACE PLUS Programmes

In accordance with notice on the agenda Councillor Kyle proposed:

"This Council calls for and supports the seamless transition of the current PEACE 4 to PEACE Plus programmes, currently administered under SEUPB. In particular, in light of the projected gap in funding of 18 months, it calls for the continuation of the vital youth provision within Belfast under the peace4youth STRIVE Programme.

The Council will write to the Executive Office and SEUPB asking that the necessary funds are made available to ensure the transition is, as promised, seamless."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Heading.

The motion was put to the meeting and passed.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson

Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum
Thursday 9th June 2022

Attendance

Members:
Councillor Billy Hutchinson
Councillor Michael Long
Alderman George Dorrian
Councillor Mal O'Hara
Councillor Donal Lyons
Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown

Apologies: Councillor Fiona Ferguson, Councillor Ciaran Beattie and Alderman Sonia Copeland

Officers:
John Walsh, Chief Executive
Ronan Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources
Nicola Lane, Good Relations Manager (for Item 3)
Lisa Caldwell, Head of Marketing & Corporate Communications (for Item 3)
Eimear Henry, Strategic Lead, Belfast Stories (for Item 5)
Sandra Robinson, Protocol and Public Affairs Manager (for Item 5)

1. Finance Update

The Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Finance & Resources presented the year end financial outturn for 2021/22 and outlined the implications for both the general and covid reserves. He outlined the proposals for consideration following Party Group Briefings for the reallocation of the year end surplus. Members discussed in detail the proposals being considered and raised a number of queries and discussed some further proposals. In relation to the queries raised he advised that year end reallocations were for non-recurrent funding only and explained the financing processes for any proposed or potential recurrent reallocations. Members to further consider in advance of a report being presented to SP&R committee in June in the context of non-recurrent proposals aligned to the Council's priorities.

As part of the discussion Members discussed the ongoing issues in relation to cleansing services and waste management across the City and also particular issues within the City Centre. The Chief Executive to follow up with the Director Resources and Fleet.

2. Update on City Region Growth Deal

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources updated Members on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal. He outlined the key decisions required in relation to the Funding & Governance arrangements for Belfast City Council as the Lead Authority and Accountable Body for the next phase of the Deal. Members noted the update on the Financial Agreement, Contract for Funding so funding can flow directly to projects and a Memorandum of Understanding that has been drawn up with partners. The Chief Executive advised that work continues with partners to formalise permanent structures and resources for the delivery of the deal to allow the council to carry out its role. A report on the progress to date will be brought to June SP&R Committee.

3. Day of Reflection

The Good Relations Manager provided a briefing for the Forum on the upcoming Annual Day of Reflection to be held on 21 June 2022. She advised that it was agreed by SP&R Committee at their meeting in March that the Council event would take place within City Hall and that officers would engage and consult with Healing Through Remembering. She outlined the format for the event on the day, and it was noted as previously agreed the event would not be led by any civic dignitary but supported by all of the parties. The Head of Marketing and Corporate communications discussed with Members a draft media release for the upcoming event, a copy of which will be circulated to Party Group leaders for their consideration before it is issued.

4. Planning Update

The Chief Executive updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in June. In relation to a number of issues discussed the Chief Executive to follow up with the Director of Planning & Building Control in relation to the feasibility of scheduling additional planning committee meetings if required.

5. AOB

Illumination Request

The Chief Executive advised he had received a request from a Member to light up City Hall for Deafblind Awareness Week June 2022. He advised that the proposed date for illumination was Wednesday 22nd June. Members noted that this request would be agreed under the Chief Executive's delegated authority.

Councillor O'Hara requested to light up City Hall for Clean Air Day 2022 on Thursday 16th June subject to availability. It was noted that this request would be agreed also under the Chief Executive's delegated authority

arc 21

The Chief Executive provided an update for Members on legal considerations following the recent planning permission decision made by the Infrastructure Minister. He also discussed a number of areas of concern and advised that he would continue to brief Party Group Leaders as this progresses.

Round 2 UK Levelling Up Fund

The Chief Executive provided an update in relation to Round 2 of the UK Levelling Up Fund discussed at May SP&R Committee. He advised that clarity from DLUHC is pending on the role of councils if they choose to support any community or private sector applications and what this might entail. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources provided an update on the applications currently seeking support and advised a report will be brought to June SP&R Committee once the advice from DLUHC was received. In relation to a query raised by a Member should other organisations wish to seek support the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Resources highlighted the challenges involved in relation to both the timescale and the requirements for applications.

Independent Review of Invest Northern Ireland

The Chief Executive provided an update on the Independent Review of Invest Northern Ireland (NI) which was announced by the Minister for the Economy in January 2022. He advised that the review panel is being led by Sir Michael Lyons, who as part of the review will be seeking input from a range of stakeholders across Northern Ireland including local government. Members noted the proposed engagement and agreed to attend the session or send a nominee. The Chief Executive to circulate the details discussed to Party Group Leaders.

Freedom of the City

Members noted that Council had agreed to award the Freedom of the City to healthcare workers and all those who had worked tirelessly on the frontline to care for vulnerable citizens during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Strategic Lead, Belfast Stories provided an update on the programme previously agreed by SP&R Committee which included city-wide engagement, a reflective exhibition, documentary and a broadcast music event themed on people's stories and experiences of the pandemic. She outlined the proposals for the

official Freedom of the City ceremony to Honour the contribution of the city's frontline workers and communities.

The Protocol and Public Affairs Manager updated Members on the ongoing engagement both internally and externally in relation to the format and proposed attendance at the event and advised that a report will be brought to June SP&R Committee outlining the proposals discussed.

Belfast City Council

Subject:	Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality
Date:	6 June 2022
Reporting Officer:	John Walsh, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Christopher Burns, Functions and Exhibition Officer

Restricted Reports				
Is this report restricted?	**Yes**		**No**	X
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?				
After Committee Decision				
After Council Decision				
Some time in the future				
Never				

Call-in				
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	**Yes**	X	**No**	

1.0	**Purpose of Report**
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 3 June 2022 which appear to the Function Management Unit to comply with the criteria previously established by the Committee and are recommended for approval.
2.0	**Recommendations**
2.1	The Committee is asked to: • Approve the recommendations made in respect of applications received up to 3 June 2022 as set out in the attached appendix.
3.0	**Main report**
3.1	<u>Background Information</u> Members will be aware that the Committee, at its meeting of 6th January 2017, agreed to

	modify the criteria governing access to the City Hall function rooms for external organisations.
3.2	The Committee also agreed to the implementation of room-hire charges for some categories of function, and also revised the approach to the provision of civic hospitality for functions on foot of the agreed efficiency programme. Some further modifications to this approach were agreed at the Committee's meetings of 24th March 2017, 23rd June 2017, 23rd June 2019 and 25th October 2019.
	Key Issues
3.3	The existing revised criteria and scale of charges have been applied to the various requests received and the recommendations herein are offered to the Committee on this basis for approval.
3.4	The schedule attached at Appendix 1 covers 3 applications for functions, scheduled for 2022 and 2023.
3.5	Financial & Resource Implications The implementation of charging for external functions has commenced, in line with the Committee's decisions in the matter.
3.6	Equality and Good Relations / Rural Needs Implications There are no direct good relations, equality or rural needs implications arising from this report.
4.0	**Appendices – Documents Attached**
	Appendix 1 - Schedule of function requests received up to 3 June 2022

JUNE 2022 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2022 EVENTS						
British Council	16 Nov 2022	**Mock COP27 –** The debate engages students (aged 16-18) from approx. 30 schools in Northern Ireland to debate live and topical COP27 issues through a climate negotiation simulation. Numbers attending; 130	D	No (Reg. Charity)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
2023 EVENTS						
JoinHer Network CIC	3 March 2023	International Women's Day 2023 Dinner Event – A event to encourage women to celebrate diversity, inclusion, equity and equality in a safe environment to share and support, network and raise awareness of topical issues. Numbers attending; 80	D	No (Not For Profit)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
British Dental Association NI Branch	7 October 2023	**British Dental Association NI Branch Centenary Dinner –** Gala Dinner with speeches and after dinner entertainment. Numbers attending; 300	C	No (Not For Profit)	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No charge Wine Reception *or £500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on tables*

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ACTIVE BELFAST LIMITED BOARD

Monday, 6th June, 2022

SPECIAL MEETING OF ACTIVE BELFAST LIMITED BOARD

(Held remotely via Microsoft Teams)

Attendees

Directors: Mr. J. McGuigan (Chairperson)
Councillor Corr
Councillor Newton and
Mrs. K. McCullough.

Officers: Mrs. R. Crozier, Programme Director, Customer Focus;
Mr. N. Munnis, Partnership Manager;
Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor;
Ms. K. Gilliland, Neighbourhood Services Manager; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors McCann and McLaughlin.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 11th April were approved. It was reported that those minutes had been noted by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 15th April.

Matters Arising

The Board noted that there were no matters arising which required further discussion.

Director Attendance Statement

The Chairperson advised that, owing to the dissolution of the Company, reports in regard to the Director Attendance Statement was no longer required.

Proposals for Future Board Meeting Agenda Items

The Chairperson advised that, owing to the dissolution of the Company, proposals in regard to future Board meeting agenda items were not required.

Dissolution of ABL – Process and Timeframe

The Board considered the following report which had been prepared by the Partnership Manager:

"1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To present the board with the process and timeframe required for the dissolution of Active Belfast Limited.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That the board notes the information provided below and in particular the company dissolution process and timeframe together with the understanding that the board will cease to function with immediate effect.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Members are reminded that following the decision taken by the SP&R committee on 24th March and ratified by full Council on 4th April 2022, the board voted by majority decision on 11th April to a voluntary and solvent 'winding up' the company.

3.2 It was further agreed that a special board meeting would be convened to present details of the winding up process and relevant timeframes. Having experienced difficulties in securing an available date in May it was subsequently agreed that the prescheduled date for the 6th June board meeting was the most suitable option.

3.3 Before the company can apply to the Registrar of Companies to be struck off, a three month dormancy period must be observed during which time there can be no company/board activity and no transactions through the company bank account. During this period any expenditure will be paid directly by BCC.

3.4 At the end of the three month dormancy period, the Company through a majority of its Directors can make formal application to Companies House to be struck off the Companies Register. Companies House publicise the intention to dissolve the company and invite any objections to the winding up request. This period remains open for a further two months at the end of which, subject to no objections being received, the dissolution becomes final and ABL will be removed from the companies register. A copy of the Application for Striking Off has to be served on certain specified persons.

3.5 The total time required to dissolve the company is five months. On the understanding that the application will be lodged as soon as the three month dormancy period is completed, ABL would cease to be a registered company by mid November 2022.

3.6 In the interim period BCC will arrange to directly manage all contract compliance and performance monitoring activities currently undertaken by ABL. The internal mechanisms required for direct Council management will take some time to finalise and proposals will be subject to Council approval. An initial report including an outline timeframe will be presented to the SP&R committee on 17th June.

3.7 Until the new reporting processes are agreed, all performance monitoring data and contract compliance information, currently gathered for ABL, will continue to be collated by the Partnership Manager.

3.8 Colin Campbell (BCC Divisional Solicitor) will be in attendance respond to any queries.

4.0 <u>Decision(s) Required</u>

4.1 That the board notes the information provided above and in particular the company dissolution process and timeframe together with the understanding that the board will cease to function with immediate effect.

5.0 <u>Appendices – Documents attached</u>

None."

The Divisional Solicitor provided the Board with an update on the legal position relating to the company's dissolution. He stated that the Board would be required to remain dormant for a period of three months, with immediate effect, and that the only work which the Board would be permitted to undertake was in relation to the strike-off application. The Divisional Solicitor confirmed that, after the three-month period of dormancy, the Directors of the Board were required to formally request, with Company's House, that ABL be struck-off from the Company's Register.

The Board Members were informed that the Company's Registry was required to publish the strike-off request to allow for any objections to that request and that any Board Members, who had not been signatories to the Strike-off request, were required to be informed of that decision, including any creditors and employees, if applicable.

In response to a question from the Partnership Manager, the Divisional Solicitor stated that the most effective way for the Board to register the strike-off request was for the Company accountant (Advanced Accounting) to do so electronically. He confirmed that a majority of the Directors would be required to be signatories to the strike-off application.

In response to the non-publication of the independent governance review report, the Partnership Manager informed the Board members that the report, which had been commissioned by the Council and written by an external consultant, was commercially confidential and, for that reason, it had not been possible to publish the report as requested. He confirmed, however, that the paper, presented to the board on 11th April 2022, had included all the key outcomes and conclusions and that the information presented included significant extracts taken directly from the final review report.

The Chairperson and a Director voiced their disappointment at the Council's decision to dissolve the company, expressing their view that an opportunity had been missed to re-purpose the board to function as it had originally been envisaged, at the start of the tri-partite arrangement.

The Board thanked the Chairperson, Partnership Manager and the Board members, past and present, for the work undertaken, by the Board, particularly in regard to the leisure transformation programme, and recognised the challenges faced by the Board in its formative years. The Partnership Manager stated that, in recognition of the Board, its successes and the relationships formed, he would undertake to arrange an informal gathering of the Board members and relevant support personnel to say goodbye, prior to the final dissolution of the Company.

Other Business

No additional items of business were raised.

Chairperson

City Hall/City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group

Tuesday, 31st May, 2022

THE CITY HALL/CITY HALL GROUNDS INSTALLATIONS
WORKING GROUP MINUTES

HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Aldermen Rodgers;
Councillors Beattie, Lyons and O'Hara.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Ms. K. Mullen, Project Sponsor;
Mr. M. Doherty, Project Manager, Physical Programmes;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Ms. V. Smyth, Democratic Services Officer.

Chairing of Meeting

Councillor Beattie in the Chair.

Apologies

There were no apologies received.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th April were agreed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Artist brief - City Hall statues

The Project Sponsor reminded the Members of the Working Group about the presentations delivered by Paula Reynolds on the life and times of Mary Ann McCracken, and by Ruth Taillon on the life of Winifred Carney and provided an overview of the draft artist's brief which was circulated to the Members in advance. She highlighted the two statue locations in the City Hall grounds for the Members consideration and advised that the new statue designs would be cognisant and sympathetic to the current statues.

The Project Sponsor and Project Manager provided the Members with details of the commissioning and tender process. The Project Manager advised that the two-stage procurement process was tried and tested in the market.

There was discussion around the promotion of the project to attract artists. The Project Manager gave the Members of the Working Group assurance that the project would be given sufficient publicity and advertising through e-sourcing and all social media channels.

The Project Sponsor provided the Members with historical facts about the surrounding statues in terms of agreeing where the two new statues should be located. The Working Group re-iterated their agreement for the previously agreed locations (as marked as Location 1 and 2 on the map which had been circulated to the Group).

In relation to timescales, the Project Sponsor updated that it was envisaged that the brief would go out to procurement in the Summer. In the interim further discussions would be held with HED.

There was further discussion about whether the statues should be at ground level or on a plinth. The Members agreed to leave it open to artist interpretation and the Director of Physical Programmes stated that that this would be included in the artist's brief.

The Director of Physical Programmes provided the Members of the Working Group with an update on the Frederick Douglas statue which would be brought to the June Steering Group meeting in relation to the design brief. The Chairperson asked that this be brought back to the next City Hall Installations Working Group for an update.

The Working Group noted the information which would be provided.

Carson stone - Verbal Update

The Project Sponsor reminded the Working Group of the Carson Stone design concept and provided an update on the project. She referred to her meeting with Redhead consultants in relation to the removal of four marble tiles in City Hall which would require HED guidance as to whether limestone could be used for the replacement tiles or if the tiles would need to be replaced 'like for like' using marble which would have a financial impact.

The Project Sponsor agreed to circulate the design concept to Party Leaders by way of a reminder.

Noted.

Date for the tour of City Hall/Walking Tour

The Working Group agreed the first week of August to undertake a tour of City Hall and the wider walking tour and that the Director of Physical Programmes would confirm the date in due course.

Chairperson