

# City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 13th September, 2023

## HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nic Bhranair (Chairperson);  
Alderman Lawlor;  
Councillors Bunting, Canavan, Duffy, Flynn,  
Garrett, Gormley, Lyons, Maskey, McCabe,  
McCormick, McDonough-Brown, I. McLaughlin,  
McMullan, Murray and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;  
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration  
and Development;  
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager; and  
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor F. McAteer.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 9th and 23rd August were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th September. subject to the following amendment: That a report be submitted to a future Committee in relation to two previous successful regeneration schemes which had been undertaken, namely, Renewing the Routes Scheme and the Dereliction Scheme (Department of the Economy).

### Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

### Restricted Items

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

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

**Update on the Department for Infrastructure (DfI)  
funded projects: Active Travel Enablers and  
Grey to Green Demonstrator Project**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on the Council's Grey to Green and Active Travel Enablers projects funded by DfI as previously approved by the Committee in October 2022 and subsequent update at the August 2023.

During discussion, in response to requests for specific covered cycle stand locations to be prioritised, the Senior Development Manager advised that it was intended to work through all the locations, subject to funding and landowner agreements. One Member suggested that, if delivery at a location was unsuccessful, then every attempt should be made to locate a cycle stand as close as possible to the original location.

The Senior Development Manager also undertook to share the draft BMAP boundary of the City Centre as requested by a Member.

After discussion, the Committee:

- I. Approved the recommended Funding Agreement for the Grey to Green Demonstrator Project as outlined within the report;
- II. Subject to agreement with DfI, approved the redistribution of underspend within the previously approved projects under the Grey to Green and Active Travel Enablers business cases to ensure spend by the end of March 2024; and
- III. Approved the additional covered cycle parking locations as outlined in the report.

**Housing Led Regeneration Programme Update**

The Committee was provided with an update in relation to the work which had been undertaken in relation to various housing-led regeneration activities.

The Committee:

- i. Noted the update in respect of the Inner North West Development Brief, comprising of Council and Department for Communities lands at Little Donegal St, Library St and Kent St and the proposed reframing of the Brief. The Committee endorsed the revised approach as set out in the report, and noted a further report would be taken to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in September to seek approval to re-issue a reframed Development Brief to the Housing Associations;
- ii. Noted the update on the Regeneration Development Opportunity: Multi- Site Residential Led Regeneration Expression of Interest process for various Council (and other public sector) city centre sites, and, subject to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee endorsement, progressing a Competitive Dialogue procurement exercise. The Committee also noted that a further

report would be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 18th September seeking approval to progress with the Competitive Dialogue procurement; and

- iii. Noted the update in respect of Strategic Site Assessments for city wide sites and that further updates would be brought back on specific proposals as they were progressed.

### **Financial Reporting - Quarter 1 2023/24**

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack and that the request for simplified reporting information would be issued to the Finance Team.

### **Quarter 1 Performance Zoo Update**

The Committee noted the Zoo performance update report for the period April to June 2023 and that visitor benchmarking statistics would be included in future quarterly reports of the Zoo's performance.

### **Quarter 1 Performance Update on Belfast Bikes Scheme**

The Committee reviewed the report on the performance of the Belfast Bikes scheme in the first quarter (1st April, 2023- 30th June, 2023) for year eight of its operation.

### **Proposal**

Moved by Councillor Flynn,  
Seconded by Councillor Lyons,

In relation to the update on the motion from March 2020 to consider granting free access to young people to the Belfast Bikes Scheme, the Committee agrees that it would consider this as part of the rate setting process for 2024/25 and to write to the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Health to request investment in this proposal, to be delivered on an annual basis.

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

Accordingly, the Committee:

- Noted the update of the Belfast Bikes performance for Y8 Q1 (April-June 2023); financial year;
- Noted the update to the motion regarding free access for young people and agreed that the Committee would consider this as part of the rate setting process for 2024/25 and to write to the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Health to

request investment in this proposal, to be delivered on an annual basis;

- Noted the progress regarding phase one and phase two expansion;
- Noted the update that the tender would be prepared for a procurement of a new Public Bike Hire Scheme; and
- Noted that the statistics on instances of vandalism would be reported by area, where possible, in future Performance Update Reports.

### **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**

#### **All Island Strategic Rail Review**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the draft report of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR) currently out for consultation and to agree the draft response to be submitted from Belfast City Council.**

##### **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- I. Note the content of this report in relation to the All-Island Strategic Rail Review that is currently out for consultation.**
- II. Approve the Council’s draft consultation response to the Department for Infrastructure (Dfi) and the Department of Transport’s on the AISRR and associated environmental documents as enclosed with this report in Appendix 2, noting that in line with the consultation closing date of 29 September, that this will be submitted as draft and will be subject to ratification by Council on 2 October and any further comments or amends at Council will be forwarded to the Department.**

**3.0 Main report**

**Background**

**3.1** The All-Island Strategic Rail Review (AISRR) (Appendix 1) was launched jointly in 2021 by the Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland and the Minister for Transport in Ireland. DfI, in conjunction with the DfT, are now seeking opinions on the Review's draft report, and on the reports accompanying the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process.

**3.2** The AISRR is the first All-Island Strategic Review of this nature. It will inform investment in the rail sector in both jurisdictions to 2050, with the aim of supporting de-carbonisation of the transport sector in line with both governments' net-zero commitments.

**3.3** This paper provides background on the report, its recommendations, and the outcomes for the island if the recommendations were all to be carried out. It also provides an overview of Council's draft consultation response (Appendix 2).

**3.4 Context**

The Review was launched in April 2021 by Eamon Ryan, Minister for Transport Ireland, and Nichola Mallon, then Minister at the Department for Infrastructure, Northern Ireland. It has now been published alongside the associated Strategic Environmental Assessment for consultation and is expected to be finalised by the end of this year.

**3.5** As part of the preparation of the AISRR, and in accordance with statutory requirements, it was necessary for the Departments to carry out a screening exercise to establish whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) process was applicable to the AISRR. The Screening Report determined that an environmental assessment was required to identify, describe and evaluate the likely significant effects on the environment of implementing the AISRR, and reasonable alternatives, taking account of the objectives and the geographical scope of the AISRR. Consultation on the AISRR and associated environmental documents opened on Tuesday 25 July and will run until Friday 29 September 2023.

**3.6** The Review sets out thirty recommendations for developing a rail network that could significantly benefit commuters, communities, businesses, the environment and economies,

both north and south. If the recommendations are implemented in full it could transform the rail system in the coming decades with electrification, faster speeds and greatly improved frequency, opening a number of new routes particularly across the West and North of the island, and widening accessibility and connectivity across the island.

3.7 The AISRR focuses on how the rail network across the island could contribute to the decarbonisation of its transport systems, promote sustainable connectivity into and between major cities, enhance regional accessibility and support balanced regional development. Thirty recommendations have been put forward to achieve these goals. To implement the recommendations of the AISRR, a range of projects/schemes would be required and each of these will be subject to appropriate feasibility, options, funding and environmental assessments at project level, where required.

3.8 The draft review was commissioned and overseen by both Departments and carried out by engineering firm Arup. Recommendations which are based around six goals (Contributing to decarbonisation, improving All-Ireland connectivity between major cities, enhancing regional and rural accessibility, encouraging sustainable mobility, fostering economic activity and achieving economic and financial feasibility), are proposed to be delivered over the coming 25 years, aligning with net-zero commitments in both jurisdictions. Among the key recommendations are:

3.9 Decarbonisation

- Decarbonise the rail network, including an electrified intercity network as well as hybrid, hydrogen and electric rolling stock.

3.10 Intercity Speed and Frequency

- Upgrade the core intercity railway network (Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford) to top speeds of 200km/h ensuring that train journeys are faster than the car.
- Upgrade the cross-country rail network to a dual-track railway (and four-track in places) and increase intercity service frequencies to hourly between the main city pairs.

### 3.11 New Regional Connections

- Increase regional and rural lines speeds to at least 120 km/h.
- Reinstate the Western Rail Corridor between Claremorris and Athenry.
- Extend the railway into Tyrone (from Portadown to Dungannon, Omagh, Strabane) Derry- Londonderry, and onto Donegal (Letterkenny)
- Reinstate the South Wexford Railway, connecting to Waterford
- Develop the railway to boost connectivity in the North Midlands, from Mullingar to Cavan, Monaghan, Armagh and Portadown

### 3.12 Sustainable Cities

- Connect Dublin, Belfast International and Shannon Airport to the railway and improve existing rail-airport connections.
- Segregate long-distance and fast services from stopping services, ensuring quicker times on city approaches

### 3.13 Transforming Freight

- Strengthen rail connectivity to the island's busiest ports and reduce Track Access Charges for freight.
- Develop first-mile-last-mile rail access for Dublin Port

### 3.14 Prioritising Customers

- Improve service quality, provide on-board catering, 'clock-face' timetable, better integration with other transport options, and cross-border structures to streamline travel north and south.

3.15 If the review's recommendations are implemented in full across the coming decades, the capital cost is estimated to be €36.8bn / £30.7bn based on 2023 cost estimates. If all the recommendations in this Review were delivered it is envisioned that:

- The rail network would be decarbonised
- 700,000 more people would live within 5km of a railway station
- Rail journey times between some major cities could be halved

- Services on busiest intercity routes could run every 30 minutes in some cases
- Rail passenger numbers could double
- 90% of aviation passengers could travel to the airport by rail
- Two thirds of freight tonnage would pass through ports served by rail
- The island's economy could be boosted by €20 billion

3.16 The Review's recommendations provide policy makers and Ministers in both jurisdictions with an evidence-based framework to inform future investment decisions. More detailed work will be needed to test the feasibility and affordability of many of the recommendations to inform decision making.

3.17 **Belfast City Council Draft Consultation Response**

Members are asked to consider and provide comment on the Council's draft consultation response prior to approving submission to the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Transport's consultants on the AISRR and associated environmental documents, enclosed with this report at Appendix 2. Members will note that in line with the consultation closing date of 29 September, that this will be submitted as draft and will be subject to ratification by Council on 2 October and any further comments or amends at Council will be forwarded to the Department.

3.18 The draft response sets out the Council's general support for the ambitions and recommendations made in the AISRR. It notes that the AISRR will make a contribution to meeting the targets set out for the city in the NI Climate Action Plan 2022, the Belfast Agenda, Local Development Plan (LDP), Bolder Vision and the Net Zero Carbon Roadmap. Whilst the response is supportive, it outlines that consideration should be given to ensure any development is in line with the requirements set out within DfI's new Eastern Transport Plan, the LDP and should align with the ambitions of A Bolder Vision. Specifically, it notes that the implementation of future rail infrastructure should ensure that it does not create physical barriers between communities but instead improve the connectivity between each other and the city centre.

3.19 In recognition of a potential future population of between 8.5-10 million people on the island by 2050 there is a need to develop and connect urban areas and provide infrastructure fit to serve a growing and diverse population. Consideration of the costs and delivery of enabling infrastructure requirements such as bridges, tunnels, additional tracks, Overhead Line Equipment and hydrogen production and



storage locations as well as building in sustainable multi-modal options for first and last mile journeys such as active travel routes should be considered at this early stage.

- 3.20 Taking a Transit Oriented Development approach could provide population densification in strategic locations and contribute to economic, social and environmental benefits, not least the increase of housing in these areas and corridors and support the potential clustering of employment opportunities. Efficient rail links between urban centres will bring added benefits in terms of spreading economic and population growth, support additional FDI and support indigenous investment and new supply chains to emerge, drive tourism and leisure opportunities and ultimately support sustainability goals and reduced emissions.
- 3.21 It is perhaps somewhat disappointing that the potential contribution of rail freight has largely been discounted when it comes to the Port of Belfast. Despite being the second largest port\* on the island the review considers that any options to improve linkages to the Port of Belfast would be very costly and disruptive and would encourage freight traffic to use parts of the railway that are already quite congested.
- 3.22 This approach would seem contradict Recommendation 23 of the report which looks to ‘strengthen rail connectivity to the island’s busiest ports’ and misses an opportunity to contribute towards the decarbonisation of the island’s transport system as well as reducing congestion both locally and regionally (Some [sources](#) suggest that one freight train can remove up to 76 HGVs from the road).
- 3.23 With a current baseline of having no regular rail freight operations it would seem that with the necessary governments’ commitment and investment there are clear economic and environmental benefits that could be delivered through improved rail freight linkages beyond what is currently proposed in the draft Report.
- 3.24 Additionally, it is felt that the AISRR should increase its ambitions in terms of journey times which will bring added advantages and enhance the quality of life for residents which brings benefits in terms of health and well-being, access to public services, reduced congestion, and connectivity to leisure opportunities including the unrivalled natural heritage of the island. Such an approach creates the conditions that could also support ‘returners’ to the island and drive inward migration and support sustainable lifestyles in line with the Net Zero targets.

**3.25 Next Steps**

Subject to approval at this committee, Belfast City Council will formally submit its draft response (Appendix 2) to Arup as the agent for the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Transport's consideration. Officers will highlight that in line with the consultation closing date of 29 September, that the submission is a draft response which will be subject to ratification by Council on 2 October and any further comments or amends at Council will be forwarded to the Department.

**3.26** Following the consultation period, the Minister for Transport and Government in Ireland as well as Minister for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland, will be asked to approve the final Review incorporating any changes as a result of the SEA consultation process. It is anticipated, subject to those approvals, that the final Review will be published in the Winter of 2023. Should there continue to be an absence of Ministers in the NI Executive, approval will be considered taking into account the relevant legislation in place at the time.

**3.27 Financial and Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

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

The implications of the Equality or Goods Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessments will need to be undertaken by the Department for Infrastructure and the Department for Transport in line with their own policy positions and prior to undertaking implementation.”

The Committee:

- I. Noted the contents of the report in relation to the All-Island Strategic Rail Review that was currently out for consultation; and
- II. Approved the Council's draft consultation response to the Department for Infrastructure and the Department of Transport's on the AISRR and associated environmental documents as enclosed with the report in Appendix 2, noting that in line with the consultation closing date of 29th September, that this would be submitted as a draft response and would be subject to ratification by Council on 2nd October and any further comments or amendments at Council would be forwarded to the Department.

**Response from Department for  
Communities on Rent Controls**

The Committee 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 on the response received from the Department for Communities in relation to correspondence issued from the CG&R Committee regarding Rent Controls.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to note;**

- the correspondence received from the Department for Communities in response to a letter from the Committee regarding rent controls;
- that the Department for Communities commissioned a report, undertaken by the Chartered Institute for Housing, to research and consult on the implications of a rent freeze or rent decrease and that this report was laid to the Assembly and published on the Departments website;
- that the Department for Communities state that *‘any further action on these issues is subject to a decision by an incoming Minister’*, and *‘that bringing any rent controls into effect would require further secondary legislation and therefore a functioning Assembly’*

**3.0 Background**

**3.1 At the special meeting of the CG&R Committee in February 2023, it was agreed that a letter was sent to the Permanent Secretary for the Department for Communities, and the Head of the Civil Service to engage with the Council and other key stakeholders concerning rent controls in Belfast; and to support local community organisations and advocacy groups in their efforts to campaign for the introduction of rent controls and to ensure that the voices of renters and those affected by the housing affordability crisis were heard.**

**4.0 Main Report**

**Key Issues**

- 4.1** A letter was sent to the Permanent Secretary of the Department Communities and the Head of the Civil Service on 24th March 2023 outlining the concerns raised by the members of the Committee at its special meeting in February 2023 (attached as appendix 1).
- 4.2** The letter outlined that the cost of privately renting a home in Belfast has risen significantly in recent years, making it increasingly unaffordable for many people, particularly those on low incomes and young families. The letter further commented that the Committee would like to see costs for renters reduced; Members recognise that legislation is required to protect renters from unfair rents, improve housing standards and end unfair letting fees; Members further recognise the introduction of rent controls is one way to help renters. Furthermore, the Executive needs to be back up and running and a Minister in place to progress this.
- 4.3** A response has been received from Mr. David Polley, Director of Housing Supply Policy (attached as appendix 2). In his correspondence the Director advises that Section 7 of the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 placed a duty on the Department to research and consult on the implications of a rent freeze or rent decrease and to lay a report before the Assembly.
- 4.4** The Director further commented that the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) was subsequently commissioned by the Department to research and consult on these implications and the ensuing Report was laid in the Assembly and published on the Department's website. While a summary of the key findings of the CIH report is included within this Committee report, Members should note that the report is multi-faceted covering a number of complex issues and findings. A copy of the full report for Members review can be found at the link below:  
<https://www.cih.org/media/n50no3ps/dfc-rent-regulation-in-the-private-sector-in-northern-ireland.pdf>
- 4.5** Finally, the Director stated that, as already noted by the Committee, any further action on these issues is subject to a decision by an incoming Minister. Moreover, bringing any rent controls into effect would require further secondary legislation and therefore a functioning Assembly.

**4.6** The final research report from the Chartered Institute of Housing for the Department for Communities as referenced in the response from DfC highlights:

- what existing evidence tells us about rent regulation
- a baseline of current rent affordability and trends; plus the potential impact of rent control/regulation in Northern Ireland, and
- the consultation feedback from landlords and tenants, their representative groups and district councils.
- The report refers to research on the topology of rent control and that there are currently three ‘generations’ of rent control:
- first generation rent regulation measures seek to impose a control on existing rent levels; they are typically called ‘hard rent controls’ or ‘rent freezes’
- second generation regulation governs rent increases within and between tenancies; an example is setting the very first rent at market levels with subsequent increases and rents for new tenancies being controlled, and
- third generation measures refer to restricting the increase of rent within the tenancy e.g. restricting the amount or frequency of increases for a current tenant.

**4.7** The report concludes that the rent control approach contained under Section 7 of the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 gives the Department the power to freeze or cut rents by up to ten per cent for a period of up to four years. These rent controls are argued to;

- improve initial affordability of rents
- reduce real rents if rents cannot be adjusted to account for increased landlord costs
- develop incentives for landlords to sell properties and leave the sector, especially at times of high house prices and strong property markets
- reduce incentives for landlords to repair and renovate properties, and
- incentivise ‘shadow’ or illegal rental markets or incentivise renters to stay in the property even if their needs change.

**4.8** The report found that the rent control powers contained within Section 7 if enacted could have the following implications:

**4.9 Improve affordability for some tenants**

The report highlights that affordability issues for low-income households have been driven less by rent inflation, and more through punitive aspects of the social security system, such as freezes in local housing allowance rates and the use of the shared-accommodation rate for younger single people in one-bedroom homes.

**4.10** The report comments that freezing and reducing rents to protect those in the lowest incomes is a very unpredictable and inefficient policy tool.

**4.11** The report goes on to say that overall a rent freeze or reduction would largely benefit existing tenants who remain in their homes and whose landlords do not sell or repurpose their properties. However, because such a freeze or reduction would also reduce the size of the sector, other tenants would be evicted. Prospective tenants and people looking for new private rented accommodation would be faced with a further shortage of suitable housing options in an already tight housing market.

**4.12 Between 41% and 60% of landlords would seek to exit the private rental market**

Over half of landlord respondents reported that they would seek to decrease the number of properties they let out across the sector and the report research indicates that between 41% and 60% of landlords would seek to exit the private rental market.. Some of these properties may be sold to landlords, keeping the property within the sector, However, some landlords may seek to withdraw and provide the property on the short-term holiday let / Airbnb market, where they are able to attract substantially higher rents.

**4.13** Concern was raised about the impact of rent cuts on buy-to-let mortgages and the resulting supply of private rented accommodation. A decrease in rent levels would make more of these mortgages unaffordable for prospective landlords. Higher interest rates are already placing pressure on mortgage affordability and high inflation is increasing the cost of property maintenance and upkeep.

**4.14 Other issues for consideration within the report**

For tenants who have their rent covered in full by local housing allowance, a rent cut would not improve the tenant's affordability but would instead result in a reduction in annually managed expenditure on welfare. However, there

could be increased public expenditure elsewhere on rising homelessness levels resulting from the change. There is also risk of further adverse impact on homelessness through diminished ability to discharge the homelessness duty into the Private Rented Sector, in the context of rising levels of unmet need for social housing. There would also need to be a step-change in resourcing councils for effective enforcement of the policy.

Alternative approaches to improve affordability were included in the conclusion of the report as outlined below.

**4.15 Welfare control**

The report noted that a simpler and accurately targeted way to improve housing affordability is topping up Local Housing Allowance (LHA) claimants with a shortfall to the real 30th percentile rent through discretionary housing payments (DHPs) or welfare supplementary payments. Cuts to the LHA rates for tenants and adverse changes to the tax system for landlords have adversely affected the Private Rental Sector. The report notes that fiscal measures are an important tool to incentivise property improvements, which is crucial for progressing housing quality and for de-carbonising housing stock.

**4.16 Enhancing rent control**

The report highlights that Northern Ireland now has a new system of third generation rent control that limits the frequency of rent increases to once a year and which has the broad support of stakeholders tested through consultation; it would make sense to monitor and evaluate this new law as part of the normal policy making process

If greater rent control is desirable, an additional option within the third generation is limiting increases during a tenancy to CPI or a similar indexing measure and allowing rents to reset to market levels at the end of a tenancy. Limiting increases during a tenancy in this way would seek to address the substantially large increases that occur in a minority of the NI market. Allowing rents to reset to market levels at the end of a tenancy would provide landlords with some assurance that increases in costs would be accommodated in rental prices.

**4.17 Supply**

The report highlights that the best way of relieving pressure on prices is by having enough housing supply. A variety of housing tenures and products are needed to meet people's diverse requirements. Social housing, co-ownership, intermediate rent, private rent including from institutional investors, and owner-occupation all have a role to play in providing a home that is appropriate for people's needs. There is a shortage of private rented accommodation at present; data from PropertyPal shows that the average stock of properties for rent on the website during June 2022 was 1,647 – a 57 per cent decrease from June 2019. At the same time there is increased demand for it, as the economic consequences of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis has made saving for a deposit more difficult, placing home ownership out of reach for more people. Another long-standing factor driving the demand of private rented accommodation is the shortage of social housing. The report acknowledges existing work through the Housing Supply Strategy that aims to boost social housebuilding and address the deep rooted barriers to increasing supply, including infrastructure, funding, skills and capacity constraints.

**4.18** Committee should note that as yet a response has not been received from the Head of the Civil Service.

**4.19 Financial and Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

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

None associated with this report.”

The Committee:

- Noted the correspondence received from the Department for Communities in response to a letter from the Committee regarding rent controls;
- Noted that the Department for Communities commissioned a report, undertaken by the Chartered Institute for Housing, to research and consult on the implications of a rent freeze or rent decrease and that this report was laid to the Assembly and published on the Departments website; and



- Noted that the Department for Communities stated that ‘any further action on these issues is subject to a decision by an incoming Minister’, and ‘that bringing any rent controls into effect would require further secondary legislation and therefore a functioning Assembly’

### **Positioning the City to Compete**

#### **Update on Music Strategy - NI Music Prize**

The Committee was reminded that the Northern Ireland Music Prize honoured and celebrated the very best of new, established and emerging Northern Irish music and was a key music event for the city of Belfast and its UNESCO City of Music status. It was an annual awards night organised by the Oh Yeah Music Centre and took place in the Ulster Hall during the Sound of Belfast Festival every year.

The prize was a high-profile celebration of music from Northern Ireland. Five main awards were available, namely:

- PPL Album of The Year;
- Single of The Year;
- BBC ATL Artist of The Year (BBC Introducing award);
- Live Act of The Year; and
- YouTube Video of The Year.

There was also two special awards, namely:

- Outstanding Contribution to Music presented by PRS; and
- Oh Yeah Legend Award.

The Director of Economic Development advised that over 100 music industry professionals were invited to take part in the nomination process of the awards. The general public were invited to vote for the winner of Single, Live and BBC Introducing Award, whilst an invited industry panel selected the winning video and the winning album. He stated that all genres were eligible and a diverse mix of acts were invited to perform each year to showcase the wealth and variety of music Belfast has to offer, including Trad, Folk, Indie, Rock, Electronica, Punk, Singer Songwriters, Pop, Hip Hop, Soul and R&B. He highlighted that supporters of the Prize included the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, PPL, PRS Foundation, Help Musicians, BBC Introducing, Arts and Business, Music Venues Trust, IMRO, Shine, Music Video Marketplace and Destination CQ.

He informed the Committee that the 2023 Music Prize would host an audience of 1,000 people, including music industry guests from all over the UK and Ireland, Europe and the USA, as well as musicians, artists and music fans. He pointed out that the event would be broadcast live on BBC Radio Ulster and filmed by a production company for YouTube. He advised that many key industry professionals that attended were also involved in presenting and running panels at the Sound of Belfast conference earlier that day, including 200 young emerging artists who attend these panels which are streamed live on YouTube.

The Director of Economic Development reported that this was an important event for music in Belfast and to complement and strengthen the initiatives and ambitions laid out in the UNESCO City of Music. It would be an investment in our world class and strong emerging diverse talent and was also an opportunity to showcase our local talent through extensive online reach and would demonstrate that the Council was committed to supporting and investing in music.

The Director of Economic Development advised that the Sound of Belfast was a festival that showcased the Belfast music scene and sector with gigs, panels, talks, workshops, discussions, exhibitions, showcases and special events at various venues across Belfast. He described the event as a unique offering in the cultural landscape, with a sole focus of turning up the spotlight on our world-class talent by promoting Belfast as music city by celebrating the artists, venues, promoters, studios, performances spaces and record stores of the city. He stated that 2023 would be the tenth year of the festival and the plan was to host a 10th Anniversary festival in 2024 to align with Belfast 2024.

He pointed out that the programme included a community focus that would encourage people from all backgrounds to enjoy the music of the city. So far 26 venues were on board for Sound of Belfast with around 50 events – showcasing the capability of places and spaces of the city for live music across the grassroots venues, arts centres, pubs and cafes as well as the palm house, the Titanic distillery, a library, cinema, church and hotel. The event would feature venues in every part of the City – North, South, East and West.

He described the programme of events, which would also feature a series of storytelling events called “Echoes of a Music City”, involving people with stories to tell in each community on different genres and scenes that made an impact on Belfast. They would take place all over the city and cover everything from Trad to Electronica – across cafes, in shops, arts centres and other key spaces.

The Director of Economic Development explained that the Council had supported the NI Music Prize since its formation, with funding ranging from £15,000 to £30,000. The loss of Tourism NI National Events Fund had had a detrimental impact on the delivery of both the Sound of Belfast programme and the headline event, the NI Music Prize.

He highlighted that, to ensure success of these events in 2023 and to build towards 2024, it was proposed to allocate £30,000 toward the NI Music Prize/Sound of Belfast for the November 2023 programme.

In relation to the Strategic Review and Roadmap for Development, the Director of Economic Development explained that the NI Music Prize had been supported annually via Committee approval due to their wider impact on the music industry and the city. However, there was a desire amongst organisers and Council officers to explore longer-term approaches to ensure that this event could continue to grow and achieve its full potential.

He emphasised that, with the continuing implementation of recommendations from the Music Strategy, these events had the potential to play a central role in the

delivery of objectives within the music strategy. Similar to Belfast City Council's support of the Output Conference, which took place in the springtime, it was hoped that the development of both Sound of Belfast and the NI Music Prize would provide a key touchpoint in the year for wider music initiatives and opportunities.

He informed the Committee that, with a view to maximising the impact of the event, it was proposed to conduct an independent review of the NI Music Prize and Sound of Belfast. This independent review would consider alignment to music strategy and the role that it could play in achieving objectives through a longer-term strategic partnership and the value that it would take to achieve this. It would involve consultation with peers, including benchmarking against similar events both nationally and internationally and produce a series of 'recommendations' or 'next steps' as part of a roadmap for development.

The Committee:

- Agreed the allocation of £30,000 to the NI Music Prize; and
- Agreed the allocation of £15,000 for an independent Strategic Review and Roadmap for Development for the NI Music Prize/Sound of Belfast.

### **Strategic and Operational Issues**

#### **Committee Plan 2023-24 and End of Year Report (22-23)**

It was reported that the 2022-23 Committee Plan End of Year Report (EOYR) and draft Committee Plan for 2023-24 were originally presented and had been agreed by the Committee in April. However, due to a procedural error, they were referred back to Committee for further consideration and approval. The procedural error related to the roles and responsibilities of the Committee included within the introduction of the draft plan (attached at appendix 1). The functions had been updated to ensure they were consistent with the Standing Orders of the Council's Constitution.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development explained that the 2022-23 Committee Plan End of Year Report (EOYR) and draft Committee Plan for 2023-24 had been developed in the context of the Council's Corporate Plan 2023-24 and the draft refreshed Belfast Agenda. Consequently, the new Committee Plan contained the commitments within the Corporate Delivery Plan, as agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in August, and were incorporated under the duties of this Committee, together with the deliverables that had been agreed by the Committee throughout the 22/23 period and were relevant to the Standing Orders. The Plan sets out the main priorities and programmes of work that the Committee was overseeing to maximise the Council's contribution to the Belfast Agenda.

She pointed out that, following agreement of the draft Committee Plan, officers would submit a six-monthly progress report against all commitments in the Committee Plan in November 2023 and a further end of year report in April 2024.

In relation to the New Corporate Plan 2024-28, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting in August, had approved the proposed approach and timeline for the development of the 2024 –28 Corporate Plan and accompanying Committee and Departmental Plans for 2024-25. The proposed timeline identified that committee planning workshops should be held in October 2023, with a view to producing a draft plan by February 2024.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the end of year report;
- Approved the City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan for 2023-24; and
- Agreed to hold a committee workshop as part of the development of a new Corporate Plan 2024-28 during October 2023.

Chairperson