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BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

SUMMONS TO ATTEND THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

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

Notice is hereby given that the monthly meeting of the Council will be held in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Belfast and remotely via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday, 4th October, 2023 at 6.00 pm, for the transaction of the following business:

1. Summons
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of the Council (Pages 1 - 12)
5. Official Announcements
6. Request to Address the Council

To consider a request from Mr. Ryan Williamson, a street preacher, regarding the proposed permit scheme for those who use a PA system in Belfast City Centre.

7. Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (Pages 13 - 58)
8. Minutes of People and Communities Committee (Pages 59 - 114)
9. Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee (Pages 115 - 134)
10. Minutes of Licensing Committee (Pages 135 - 164)
11. Minutes of Planning Committee (Pages 165 - 174)
12. Minutes of Climate and City Resilience Committee (Pages 175 - 180)
13. Minutes of Standards and Business Committee (Pages 181 - 182)
14. Motions
15. Pavement Parking (Pages 183 - 184)
16. Right to Food Campaign (Pages 185 - 186)

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Chief Executive

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and remotely, via Microsoft Teams, on Monday, 4th September, 2023 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy) (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan);
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers;
Councillors Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Hanvey, Kelly, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, F. McAteer, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, McCusker, McDowell, McKeown, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill, Smyth, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman McCoubrey and Councillor McDonough-Brown.

Declarations of Interest

Alderman Copeland and Councillors Beattie, Black, Canavan, Carson, M. Donnelly, Duffy, Gormley, McCabe, McCullough, Ó Néill and Verner declared an interest in agenda item “Department for Communities Letter of Officer Community Support Programme” within the People and Communities minutes, in that they were associated with or worked for an organisation which was in receipt of funding.

Councillors Beattie, Canavan and Verner declared an interest in agenda item “Social Supermarket Update” of the People and Communities Committee minutes in that they were associated with or worked for an organisation which was in receipt of funding and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in relation to the items “Shared City Partnership minutes” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes and “Notice of Motion - Playful Belfast City Streets”, “Department for Communities Letter of Officer Community Support Programme” and “Social Supermarket Update” within the People and Communities minutes in that she was employed by the Forward South Partnership who were

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

in receipt of funding and left the meeting whilst the item “Social Supermarket Update” was under consideration.

Councillor Nelson declared an interest in item “Consultation on the Department of Health’s Equality Impact Assessment of the 2023-24 Budget Outcome – Council Response” on the basis that he was employed by an organisation which received funding from the Department of Health.

Councillor Ferguson declared an interest in respect of agenda item “Update on the Physical Programme” under the Strategic Policy and Resources minutes, in so far as it related to the refurbishment of the Belfast Orange Hall under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, on the basis that he was a member of Duke of Schomberg LOL 486, which held meetings in the building and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Alderman Lawlor and Councillor R. Brooks declared an interest in relation to the following item under the Planning Committee minutes “LA04/2022/0118/F – The proposed erection of 46No.apartment units over three stories, with associated car parking site and landscaping works and the alteration of an existing vehicular access. 146 Parkgate Avenue, Strandtown”, in that they worked for Gavin Robinson MP, who had submitted correspondence in support of the application.

Councillor McDowell declared an interest in respect of agenda item “Update on the Physical Programme” under the Strategic Policy and Resources minutes, in so far as it related to the refurbishment of the Belfast Orange Hall under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, on the basis that he was a trustee and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillors Gormley, McCullough and I. McLaughlin, Nic Bhranair, declared an interest in respect of agenda item “Update on the Physical Programme” under the Strategic Policy and Resources minutes, in that the organisations they worked for was in receipt of the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest in relation to the item “Update on The MAC (Metropolitan Arts Centre)” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes as the Company he works for is a supplier for the MAC.

In relation to the Standards and Business Committee, Councilor Doherty declared an interest in that he was a Board Member for West Wellbeing – Suicide Awareness.

Councillors McCabe and Nic Bhranair declared an interest in item “Major Events Update” under the City Growth and Regeneration Minutes in that the organisations they worked for were associated or in receipt of funding.

Councillors Long, McKeown and Smyth declared an interest in respect of agenda item “Consultation on the Department of Health’s Equality Impact Assessment of the 2023-24 Budget Outcome” under the Strategic Policy and Resources minutes on the basis that they were employed by the Department of Health.

Councillor de Faoite declared an interest in item “Data Protection” under the Strategic Policy and Resources minutes, on the basis that the named individual referred to had made a

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

complaint against him to the Standards Commissioner, which was currently under review, having been decided.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy),
Seconded by Councillor Nic Bhranair and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the special meeting of 1st July and the monthly meeting of 3rd July be taken as read and signed as correct, subject to the minutes of 3rd July, under the heading 'Declarations of Interest', being amended to reflect that Alderman Rodgers is a shareholder of Glentoran Football Club and those of 1st July being amended to include Councillor P. Donnelly in the list of attendees.

Official Announcements

Committee and Council Agendas

Councillor Beattie raised concerns regarding the short timeframe in which Committee and Council agendas and reports were being received by Members and highlighted the importance of receiving Committee reports and agenda packs in a timely manner to allow full consideration before meetings. The Chief Executive advised the issue was being examined.

Congratulations

Councillor Verner congratulated the Shankill businesses on winning a silver award in the Retail NI High Street Awards. She also congratulated the Shankill Junior Football Club on winning the Foyle Cup in the 2012 age group final.

At the request of Councillor Murray, the Lord Mayor agreed to forward a letter of congratulations to both the organisations who implemented Belfast Pride and the Belfast Mela on the delivery of successful festivals.

Councillor Murray congratulated the New Santos Football Club on its recent win against St. James' Swifts Football Club.

Councillor McCullough congratulated the communities across Belfast who organised and promoted the events of 11th and 12th July commemorations.

At the request of Councillor Maghie, the Lord Mayor agreed to forward a letter of congratulations to the Ormiston Cricket Club on winning the All-Ireland T20 championship.

The Lord Mayor, together with Councillor Long congratulated Councillor Bower on the recent birth of her baby Erin.

Councillor R. Brooks congratulated the Lord Mayor on his recent marriage.

Councillor R. Brooks congratulated the Pride of the Raven Flute Band on their recent annual fundraising parade for Alzheimer's UK.

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

Councillor R. Brooks advised that the new Walkway Community Centre opens next week, and congratulated Ms. R. Davidson and the staff for their dedication and perseverance.

Councilor D. Douglas congratulated Bloomfield Ladies Football Club on their recent league and cup double success.

Events

Councillor P. Donnelly highlighted the Transpride Rally scheduled for 16th September in Writers Square and suggested that the Council showed its support for this.

Councillor Nelson stated that the North Belfast Foodbank had been in operation for ten years and would be recognising the hard work of its volunteers with an event on 17th October which the organisers welcomed the Lord Mayor and North Belfast elected representatives to join them.

Councillor Collins condemned the recent attack on Belfast Iqraa Mosque and highlighted the successful United Against Racism Rally which had taken place as a show of solidarity. The Lord Mayor advised he had attended the Mosque's recent celebration day and he would be extending an invitation to the Iqraa Mosque to visit the City Hall.

Councilor I. McLaughlin congratulated the work of those involved in the Shankill Safe Programme, funded by Communities in Transition, and highlighted the launch of the new mural at the bottom of the Shankill Road.

Condolences

The Lord Mayor offered his condolences to the family of Tom Orr, former Head of Digital Services, who died recently.

The Lord Mayor offered his condolences to Dominica Thornton, Legal Services, on the recent passing of her husband Kevin.

Request to address the Council

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Dr. C. Brennan, Director, Environmental Justice Network Ireland and Dr. B. McNeill, Lecturer in Land and Property Law, QUB, in relation to the Future Management Structures of Lough Neagh motion which was being proposed later in the meeting.

The Council acceded to the request and, accordingly, D. Brennan and Dr. McNeill, were welcomed to the meeting by the Lord Mayor.

Dr. Brennan explained that the EJNI were a platform to promote collaboration to undertake research and advocacy to...the route causes of environmental injustice.

She stated that Lough Neagh held enormous cultural and economic significance for the communities who lived and worked in and around the area and it was also recognised to have international significant ecological importance. However, the management of the Lough,

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

which was currently mainly in private ownership, had been problematic, and controversies stretching back decades had surrounded its declining environmental quality.

She suggested that recent media reports about the condition of the lough had reignited calls for 'public ownership' and the need to address the catastrophic mismanagement.

Dr. McNeill provided an overview of the question of ownership and alternative ownership models that could produce better environmental, social and economic outcomes.

She highlighted one possible option would be a 'rights of nature' approach in which the Lough would, in law, own itself and would be closely intertwined with the rights of the community.

Dr. Brennan concluded that current management of Lough Neagh was unsustainable, and had led to significant damage to this culturally, socially, environmentally and economically significant resource. The question of ownership should be at the forefront of discussions about the lough's future because ownership dictated governance and management arrangements. She advised that a rights of nature approach might be used to inform the design of a better governance frameworks that would be capable of producing better outcomes for Lough Neagh.

The Lord Mayor thanked the representatives for their informative presentation, and they left the meeting.

The Council noted the information.

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Black,
Seconded by Beattie,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 29th June, 5th July and 18th August, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Update on the Physical Programme

At the request of Councillor Canavan, the Council agreed that a report be submitted to a future committee to provide an update on the inclusion of the independently managed community facilities in the Leisure Transformation Programme.

Festive Lighting Scheme/Future Christmas Programming

Standing Order 13(l)

The Lord Mayor, in consultation with the Chief Executive, ruled to enact Standing Order 13(l), insofar as that the Council could commit to expenditure not previously agreed through the Committee process in that the matter was one of emergency or of such urgency that it would be impractical to the Council's interests to require compliance.

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

Amendment

The Chief Executive suggested an amendment to the minute to allow funding to be sourced by the Director of Finance from budgetary underspends or specified reserves for the current city centre festive lighting scheme contract to be awarded.

The Council agreed to the amendment and, in accordance with Standing Order 48 (a) that the aforementioned decision would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that an unreasonable delay could result in a breach of a contractual duty.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 29th June, 5th July and 18th August, were approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

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

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 8th August, be approved and adopted.

Pitches Strategy Update

At the request of Councillor T. Brooks, the Council agreed that the minute under the heading "Pitches Strategy Update" be amended to reflect that a report was being undertaken by Council officers in relation to the use of micro plastics, which would include Health and Safety Risks, and the duties and obligations of the Council, in this regard.

In response to Councillor Ferguson's request for the Council to engage with Mr. R. Johnston, Chairman of South Belfast Youth League regarding the Pitches Strategy, the Chief Executive advised that this would be explored as part of the wider process.

The Bullring DFC/BSC Capital Project

At the request of Councillor Black, the Council agreed that a report be submitted to a future Committee meeting in relation to the operation of the Divis Back Path Facility and the reinstatement of the temporary facility management agreement that had previously been in place.

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

Amendment

Responsible Dog Ownership

Moved by Councillor Garrett,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the minute of the People and Communities Committee of 8th August, under the heading “Responsible Dog Ownership” be taken back to the Committee for further consideration, and to allow further information on the issue to be provided.

On a recorded vote, thirty-nine Members voted for the proposal and seventeen against and it was declared carried.

For 39	Against 17
The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy); Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers; Councillors Anglin, Beattie, Black, Bradley, R. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Collins, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett, Gormley, Kelly, Magee, Maskey, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, McCusker, McDowell, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill, Verner, Walsh	The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan); Councillors Bell, Bower, T. Brooks, de Faoite, Doherty, Flynn, Long, Lyons, Maghie, F. McAteer, McKeown, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Smyth, and Whyte.

Sustainable Period Product Scheme

At the request of Councillor McCabe and with the permission of the Council, the Chairperson (Councillor Murray) agreed that the minute under the heading “Sustainable Period Product Scheme” be taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Social Supermarket Fund – Update

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

That the minute of the People and Communities Committee of 8th August, under the heading “Social Supermarket Fund – Update” be rejected and, accordingly, the Council agrees to deliver the allocation of funding for the social supermarket through an open call process, with 25% of the budget to be set aside to support the establishment of new social supermarket provision.

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

On a recorded vote, eighteen Members voted for the proposal and thirty-three against and it was declared lost.

For 18	Against 33
Councillors Bell, Bower, T. Brooks, Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, Flynn, Long, Lyons, Maghie, F. McAteer, McCusker, McKeown, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Smyth, and Whyte.	The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy); Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor and Rodgers; Councillors Anglin, Black, Bradley, R. Brooks, Bunting, Carson, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett, Gormley, Kelly, Magee, Maskey, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, McDowell, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill and Walsh.

Street Sign Format

Amendment

Moved by Councillor R.M Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor O'Neill,

That the minute of the People and Communities Committee of 8th August, under the heading "Street Sign Format" be rejected and, accordingly, the Council agrees that the report, as noted in the minutes, would not be submitted to the Committee for consideration.

On a vote, thirty-seven Members voted for the proposal and twenty against and it was declared carried.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 8th August, were approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Nic Bhranair,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 9th and 23rd August be approved and adopted.

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

Renewed Ambition Partnership

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor McDowell,

That the minute of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 9th August, under the heading “Renewed Ambition Partnership” be rejected and, accordingly, the Council will not send representatives to attend MIPM or the New York real estate investment showcase and will not approve an investment fund of £80k to support the delivery of 23/24 programme. The Council will instead use this £80k to set up a pilot community vacant to vibrant scheme outside of the city centre, aimed at driving inclusive growth in communities and helping us deliver on our ambition for community and neighbourhood regeneration under the Belfast agenda.

On a recorded vote, nine Members voted for the proposal and forty-five against and it was declared lost.

For 9	Against 45
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan); Councillors Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, Flynn, Long, Lyons, McCusker, McKeown, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Smyth, and Whyte.	The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy); Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor and Rodgers; Councillors Anglin, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting, Carson, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett, Gormley, Kelly, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, F. McAteer, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, McDowell, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill and Walsh.

Future City Centre Programme - Vacant to Vibrant

At the request of Councillor Garrett, the Council agreed that a report be submitted to a future Committee meeting in relation to two previous successful regeneration schemes which had been undertaken, namely, Renewing the Routes Scheme and the Dereliction Scheme (Department of Economy).

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 9th and 23rd August, were approved and adopted.

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

Minutes of Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor McKeown,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 16th August, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Garrett,
Seconded by Councillor McCullough and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 1st and 15th August, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor R. Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 10th August be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Alderman Rodgers,
Seconded by Councillor McCullough and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 29th August, 2023, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Motion

Future Management Structures of Lough Neagh

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor Smyth proposed the following motion, including the amendment set out in bold:

“The Council recognises that the recent spread of toxic blue green algae on Lough Neagh is of major concern to the residents of Belfast. Over 50% of Belfast’s water comes from Neagh. Many people will have seen many recent reports that the Lough is dying. Lough Neagh is the largest lake in these islands and has been described as hyper- eutrophic - in other words the Lough suffers from nutrient enrichment mainly from human sewage and agricultural run-off both directly into the Lough and the wider water catchment.

**Meeting of Council,
Monday, 4th September, 2023**

This severe deterioration in water quality is the latest in a number of problems ranging from extractive industries, invasive species, and the depletion in the numbers of fish and birds. If Lough Neagh was a person, it would be described as having multiple organ failure. Over decades the current management and ownership structures have proven incapable of dealing with these complex problems

For such a strategic asset and its importance for drinking water, fishing, culture, recreation and biodiversity, Lough Neagh deserves a more effective form of ownership and a management structure that works in the public interest to deal with these multiple problems.

It is the Council's view that the public acquisition of Lough Neagh is sought from Lord Shaftesbury, including acquiring the bed of the Lough. Furthermore, the Council supports ***the exploration of*** a right of nature for Lough Neagh that guarantees a model of ownership that protects the rights of Lough Neagh to exist and evolve ***and supports the sustainability of activities on the Lough, vital to the surrounding communities, into the future.*** Finally, the Council recognises that public acquisition of Lough must involve in the future participation of the Lough Neagh communities in any future decision making for the Lough."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Flynn.

After discussion, the motion as amended was put to the meeting and passed.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson

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Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 22nd September, 2023

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Black (Chairperson);
Alderman McCoubrey; and
Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Cobain, de Faoite,
M. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Ferguson, Garrett, Hanvey,
Long, Maghie, Maskey, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin,
Nelson, Nic Bhranair, Smyth and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of
Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. D. Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 29th June, 5th July and 18th 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 omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Ferguson declared an interest in respect of item 6c - Update on Area Working Groups in so far as it related to the refurbishment of the Belfast Orange Hall under the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, on the basis that he was a member of Duke of Schomberg LOL 486, which held meetings in the building and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

Councillor Smyth declared an interest in item 4a - Appointment to Outside Bodies in so far as his wife worked for NILGA and left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion.

Request for Deputation

The Committee was advised that a request to receive a deputation had been received from West Wellbeing Suicide Prevention in relation to the motion which would be considered later in the meeting.

The Committee agreed to accede to the request and Eilish Craig, Gerard Mallon and Roisin Linden were admitted to the meeting.

The deputation advised that West Wellbeing had been founded in 2021 and provided care and support through counselling and outreach for children with poor mental health. They outlined the services provided such as one to one counselling, befriending, training, crises outreach and suicide prevention and intervention. The deputation stated that their services had now been cut due to lack of funding and the impact this had had on service users. They then outlined the statistics for suicides and how many other people were impacted directly or secondarily.

The deputation then outlined the number of hours of care and support delivered and the number of service users and the need to pause services due to the lack of funding and the cost to continue to deliver service.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the deputation for attending and they left the meeting.

Restricted Items

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following nine 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.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

**Revenue Estimates 2024-25 and
Medium-Term Financial Planning**

The Director of Finance submitted a report which provided an assessment of the key issues which would influence the rate setting process for 2024/25 and the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2024/25 and 2026/27.

The Committee noted the challenges to be taken into consideration as part of the annual and medium-term rate setting and that a further report on progress would be brought to the Committee in October.

Discretionary Payments

The Committee considered a report which provided details of the current framework for the management of discretionary payment requests which did not fall within existing Council funding schemes.

The Committee:

- i. Noted the Discretionary Payments Framework attached at Appendix 1 to the report: and
- ii. Agreed that the criteria be reviewed and revised.

Housing Led Regeneration Programme Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on various housing-led regeneration activities across the city.

The Committee:

- I. Noted the update in respect of the Inner North-West Development Brief, comprising Council and Department for Community owned lands at Little Donegall Street, Library Street and Kent Street and approved the re-issue of a reframed Development Brief to the Housing Associations, in line with the revised wording on the residential mix and the inclusion of a terminal deferred payment approach to the land value, as set out in the report. Noted that the revised wording had been endorsed by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 13 September 2023;
- II. Noted the update on the Regeneration Development Opportunity: Multi-Site Residential Led Regeneration Expressions of Interest process for various Council (and other public sector) lands, as noted by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 13 September 2023. Approved the commencement of the Competitive Dialogue Procurement to seek an Investment / Development Partner as set out in the report and further detailed in the City Growth and Development

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

Committee report at Appendix 1. Noted that, following completion of this process, a further report would be brought back to this Committee to seek approval to the recommendation for an investor/development partner;

- III. Noted the update in respect of Phase 2 City Wide Strategic Site Assessments and that a further detailed report and recommendations on the next steps would be brought back in respect of the various Council lands identified through this process and, as appropriate, wider public sector assets identified as part of the ongoing work of the Housing Led Regeneration Group (via Community Planning structures);
- IV. Agreed that a report on the possible options for the vesting of the Tribeca site be submitted to a future meeting; and
- V. Agreed that a report be submitted to the Committee on the process and proposed timelines on the next steps in relation to the city-wide Strategic Site Assessments, with regular reports on these strategic sites being submitted to the Area Working Groups.

**Shared Island Funding – Belfast City
Council Project Updates**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the ongoing work in relation to a number of project proposals which were being developed under the Shared Island Initiative. The report also outlined other projects being developed in partnership between the Council and partner councils in the Republic of Ireland for funding to develop agreed programmes of work.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update provided in relation to work underway to bring forward projects under the Shared Island Initiative;
- ii. noted the update in relation to other partnership work being undertaken with partner councils in the Republic of Ireland to realise funding opportunities; and
- iii. noted that officers were planning engagement with elected members in developing a wider Funding Framework for the Council, which would reflect current projects being developed under the Shared Island Initiative and other available funding streams.

Update on Internal Agency Feasibility Study

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the progress on the work to carry out a feasibility study on the establishment of a Belfast City Council in-house employment agency.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

The Committee noted the content of the report and agreed that a report on the split of the costs of agency staff, that is, the amount paid to the agency and the amount paid to staff be submitted to a future meeting.

**Appointment of Director of Communications,
Marketing and External Affairs**

The Committee noted the appointment of Eunan McConville to the post of Director of Communications, Marketing and External Affairs.

**Organisational Reviews - Democratic Services/
Equality and Diversity Units**

The Committee noted that the report would be submitted to the October meeting.

It was agreed also that a report on the processes for conducting service reviews be submitted to a future meeting.

Cost-of-Living and Energy Hardship

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on a recent request which had been received from the National Energy Action (NEA) seeking the support of the Council for an open letter that the NEA, along with a range of partners, would be sending to the Prime Minister. The proposed letter called on the government to issue a consultation on targeted support for energy bills and, in particular, on a social tariff for energy.

The Committee:

- i. approved the request received from the NEA to support the submission of an open letter to the Prime Minister calling on the government to issue a consultation on targeted support for energy bills and, in particular, a social tariff for energy;
- ii. agreed that the Council adds its signature as support to the open letter at organisation level. The NEA has asked that partners confirm their support by Friday 22nd September 2023; and
- iii. agreed that this decision should not be subject to call-in because it would mean that the Council's support could be attached to the open letter given the timescales set.

Use of City Hall - Filming in October

The Committee was reminded that requests for the use of City Hall were normally dealt with under the authority delegated by the Committee to the Director of Legal and Civic Services using criteria agreed for this purpose. Occasionally, however, it was

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the request for the filming of a programme in October fell into that category.

The Committee approved the request from the Hole in the Wall production company to film the Christmas special of Give My Head Peace in the City Hall Courtyard and interior areas.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Motion - Save West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness

The Committee considered the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor McCusker, and which had been referred to it by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 29th August:

“Since opening its doors in 2021, the West Wellbeing Suicide Prevention Centre has provided 21,000 hours of Counselling and support for people affected by poor mental health.

Its staff and volunteers offer one-to-one therapy, family support, home visits and a wide range of services for people across a range of high risk and complex situations.

The lack of funding for mental health services means this charity is now threatened with closure, and it has been forced to drastically reduce the hours it can provide toward counselling for clients in recent weeks.

West Wellbeing, which normally offers sessions for up to 200 people per week, has had to reduce this number by 60%, due to a lack of financial support. It is also having to reduce its opening hours from 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. to 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. This is leaving many falling through the cracks and going without support at a time when they are struggling.

This Council recognises the urgent need for investment into mental health services in communities. The Council also recognises that working class communities are adversely impacted due to higher levels of poverty and the legacy of trauma caused by conflict.

The Council supports this service and agrees to explore all options to fund the West Well Being Suicide Prevention Centre, including using reserve funds, if necessary, to source up to £50,000 so the organisation can continue to deliver its full range of services for the remainder of 2023.

This Council commits this financial support to ensure West Wellbeing can continue to operate for the remainder of 2023, without having to reduce its services.”

The Committee agreed that the request be considered as part of the Quarter 2 Financial Report.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

Motion - Clean Indoor Air

The Committee was informed that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 29th August, had referred the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Maghie and seconded by Councillor Smyth, to this Committee for consideration:

“Having learned lessons of the importance of ventilation and clean indoor air for health and productivity during the Covid pandemic; and seeking to take all reasonable steps to enable use of all Council facilities by all citizens, including the most vulnerable and so further inclusion; and seeking to care for the health and wellbeing of Council employees, this Council will commit to signing and implementing The COVID Safety Pledge; to report on steps already taken to prioritise clean indoor air in Belfast City Hall and other Council owned and occupied premises, and on what further or additional steps could be taken to improve indoor air quality and information about indoor air quality for employees and service users; and to develop and promote advice that can be followed to provide clean indoor air at events supported by Belfast City Council.”

The Committee agreed to adopt the motion, with a report to be submitted to a future meeting outlining how it could be managed, resourced, and facilitated.

Governance

Appointments to Outside Bodies

NILGA Strategic Policy Network

The Committee was advised that a letter has been received from NILGA seeking a nominee to the Strategic Policy Network.

The Committee was reminded that the Council had 10 representatives on NILGA and 1 Member on the NILGA – Elected Member Development Network. It had now formed a new Strategic Policy Network and was seeking the nomination of a Councillor to sit on the group.

NI Assembly All-Party Working Group on Universal Basic Income

Correspondence had also been received from the Chair of the NI Assembly All-Party Working Group on UBI seeking Council representation on the Group.

Officers and Councillors had previously worked informally on the development of the study on UBI through the Anti-Poverty Working Group. However, the working group had now evolved into a NI Assembly All Party Working Group and they had asked the Council to nominate 2 Members to attend the Group.

If the Committee was minded to accept the invitations, then it was suggested that the nominations be added to the Council's list of appointments to Outside Bodies.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

The Committee was reminded that, in accordance with the decision of the Committee of 26th June, should any other requests be received for Council representation on Outside Bodies during the Council Term, the party or parties who would have had the next available choice(s) under the Sainte Lague table would be asked to nominate a representative(s).

Therefore, the choice to nominate to the NILGA Strategic Policy Network would be offered in the first instance to the DUP, with the positions on the UBI Working Group being offered to the Alliance Party and the SDLP.

**Greater Shankill Partnership Board/
West Belfast Partnership Board**

A Member pointed out the Council still had to make appointments to the Greater Shankill and West Belfast Partnership Boards and suggested the appointments be made based on the Sainte Lague order of choices.

In response, the Senior Democratic Services Officer reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 26th June, it had noted that the overall allocation of 14 Members across the two Boards was: 9 SF, 2 DUP, 1 PBPA, 1 SDLP and 1 Independent. As in previous years, it had been agreed that the Party Leaders concerned meet to reach a compromise position for the allocation of seats on both Partnerships. However, as this had not yet been done, selection using Sainte Lague would be a fair and equitable way of appointing Members. He pointed out also that the selection of places to the Lower Falls and the Lower Shankill and Brown Square Building Successful Communities Forums, that is, 2 DUP, 1 SF and 1 TUV, across the 2 Forums, had also not been agreed and suggested also that the Committee considering use the Sainte Lague method to fill the seats.

The Committee:

- agreed to appoint a Member to the NILGA Strategic Policy Network;
- accepted the invitation to appoint 2 Members to the NI Assembly All-Party Working Group on UBI;
- agreed that they be added to the list of appointments to outside bodies;
- noted the order of choices for appointment in accordance with Committee's decision of 26th June; and
- agreed that the appointments to the West Belfast Partnership Board and the Greater Shankill Partnership; and the to the Lower Shankill and Brown Square and Lower Falls Building Successful Communities Forum be made based on the St. Lague order of choices.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Elected Member Development

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 elected members on existing processes and resources to support elected member development.
- seek agreement to participate in a reassessment process against the NILGA Elected Member Development Charter and re-establish the Elected Member Development Working Group on a task and finish basis to lead a review of elected member development support, and input into the Charter reassessment process.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- note the contents of this report, agree to the Council’s participation in Charter Plus reassessment and the establishment of the Elected Member Development Working Group on a task and finish basis.

3.0 Main report

Elected Member Development Framework

3.1 The council has in place a Member Development Framework to support member development. Its core elements are as follows:

- a set of bespoke elected member role profiles - these set out the role(s), and responsibilities that elected members undertake as both a local representative and as a civic leader.
- a bespoke Knowledge and Skills Framework - this sets out the knowledge, skills, qualities and behaviours elected members must demonstrate, in order to enact the role(s) of elected member effectively.
- a personal development planning (PDP) process and individual PDP budget currently £730 per member per financial year; and

- an assistance to study scheme
- 3.2 This framework was developed in 2016 by an Elected Member Development Working Group (EMDWG), comprising elected members and officers. The working group was established as a task and finish project group to:
- develop appropriate processes and activities to ensure Members (at individual, party and council level) are supported and equipped to carry out their roles effectively in line with the Council's Corporate Plan and the emerging themes from the Belfast Agenda.
 - ensure that Member development processes and practices continue to reflect best practice in line with the requirements of the Elected Member Development Charter framework.
 - To report to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on the key recommendations of the Working Group.
- 3.3 Following finalisation of a Member Development Framework, the EMDWG was stood down and it was agreed that any member development issue arising thereafter, be considered directly by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee until the framework was due for review.

Elected Member Development Charter

- 3.4 Belfast City Council was the first Council in Northern Ireland to be awarded the Northern Ireland Charter for Elected Member Development in 2011, in recognition of excellence in elected member development. In 2015 the council gained re- accreditation of Charter status (level one) and was reassessed successfully again in 2018 for Charter Plus status.
- 3.5 The Charter and Charter Plus helps councils to support councillor development and recognises councils that have built an effective approach. Intrinsic to gaining this accreditation is the Council demonstrating that members are developed in such a way that they are able to work strategically with partners and stakeholders, engage and lead local communities and deliver tangible, sustainable and beneficial outcomes for the citizens of the city. Charter Plus level requires evidence that the Council has continued with, and improved, its strategies for member development and that this work has clear links to the aims of the Belfast Agenda and outcomes which directly impact and deliver benefits for local communities.

3.6 An interim progress review discussion by NILGA in 2020, was delayed until May 21 because of the Covid pandemic. Following the interim review, it was agreed that, should the council wish to continue to participate in this accreditation, the full Charter Plus reassessment should take place early in 2024, allowing the new 2023 Council mandate to be embedded, and facilitate:

- Delivery of a modular induction programme for new and returning elected members
- Involvement of elected members in Charter Plus reassessment
- The development of a comprehensive elected member development plan
- a review of the Elected Member Development framework
- take up of Personal Development Plans by elected members.

3.7 It is proposed the Council proceeds with the Charter Plus assessment and that work to prepare for the assessment should start as soon as possible. Integral to this work will be a review of the Elected Member Framework to ensure that it is still fit for purpose and meets the needs of elected members.

Proposed arrangements.

3.8 It is imperative that this work is elected member led with support and coordination provided by Corporate Human Resources and Democratic Services. It is therefore proposed that an Elected Member Development Working Group is re- established on a task and finish basis to review the elected member development framework and input into preparation for the Charter Plus reassessment process. The policy agreed by SP&R is that representation on workings groups is a representative from each party with 2 or more members. The working group will be supported by officers from the Corporate HR Development Team and Democratic Services and follow the usual process for working group nominations and electing a chair. Draft terms of reference will be agreed at the first meeting of the working group. Those Members who are nominated to the Working Group would be tasked with championing Member development within their own party and on a Council-wide basis.

Elected Member PDP arrangements for 2023/2024

3.9 All members will be contacted shortly about the PDP process and what they need to do to avail of the personal development

budget, including the completion of a self-assessment against the Councillor roles and responsibilities and knowledge and skills frameworks. There is also the opportunity to undertake a one-to-one PDP meeting with an experienced facilitator to create a development plan. The feedback from these PDPs will inform the development programme with the Corporate HR development team and other officers working to support members to carry out their roles more effectively.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 There are no additional financial or human resource implications in this report.

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

- 3.11 There are no equality, rural needs or good relations implications in this report.”

The Committee noted the contents of the report, agreed to the Council's participation in Charter Plus reassessment and agreed not to re-constitute the Elected Member Development Working Group but instead that reports on progress and any options on elected member development support be submitted to the Committee on a regular basis.

Belfast Region City Deal – update

The Committee considered the following report:

“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).

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the update on project development and delivery across the pillars of investment.
- To approve the pre-contract procurement of the Augment the City connectivity service ahead of the formal receipt of the contract for funding in October 2023.
- Note the update in respect of programme communication and the BRCD Council Panel

3.0 Main report

- 3.1** As previously reported to the Committee, the BRCD Programme is now well into delivery with significant progress made to date. A total of 13 Outline Business Cases (OBC) are now approved, and 3 more are at advanced stages of the approval process with seven Contracts for Funding signed and the first claims for BRCD funding processed at the end of the 2022/23 financial year.

Progress across BRCD Pillars since previous report

Innovation

- 3.2** As reported at the previous meeting the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC) has received planning approval for the Factory of the Future site at Global Point in Newtownabbey and work is significantly underway in relation to its Full Business Case, which includes the detailed development of a commercial operating model. Site acquisition is also expected to be completed in the coming months.
- 3.3** Construction work on Studio Ulster continues but the competitive dialogue process has been concluded with no suitable operators identified. Ulster University and the Project Board have now agreed to initiate a new tender process for the appointment of a supplier for the design, development, supply & installation of equipment for Studio Ulster which will be operated by Ulster University, via Studio Ulster Ltd. The revised approach will result in a short delay in relation to the completion of the Full Business Case.
- 3.4** Following the commitment of additional funding from Queen's University Belfast (QUB) for iREACH Health, the project has continued to progress and is finalising RIBA Stage 3 with plans in place to commence Stage 4, detailed design. QUB are finalising the Invitation to Tender documentation for its works contractor under the Early Contractor Involvement approach. QUB have also submitted its planning application for the Lisburn Road site and are progressing work around site acquisition.
- 3.5** Work also continues on Global Innovation Institute following the commitment of additional funding from QUB and Ulster University's Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology OBC2 has been submitted to Government partners for approval.

Digital

- 3.6 The Digital Venture Fund OBC has had its Strategic & Economic Cases reviewed by Government economists, with a Value for Money statement completed. Work will now move to review in detail the Commercial, Financial and Management Cases and this review will inform next steps with partners. Engagement will be scheduled with partners in the coming months to focus on deliverability before the business case is brought for BRCD approvals.
- 3.7 Initial work is also underway to engage with Government and BRCD partners and develop high-level proposals for an R&D Grants programme.

Augment the City

- 3.8 In October 2022, Members approved the development of 'Augment the City', an R&D competition, designed by the Council's City Innovation Office, aimed at digital creative SMEs. Support for the development and now delivery of the project is provided by the Office's Smart District Broker, which is funded through the City Deal reserve.
- 3.9 With £928,373 funding from Belfast Region City Deal, Augment the City will provide R&D grant funding to ten companies who will work directly with the city's tourism partners to develop products that will harness cutting-edge immersive technologies such as Virtual and Augmented Reality. The competition will also help tourism partners to better understand the future potential of these technologies for future investments such as Belfast Stories.
- 3.10 The Department for Economy has now approved the business case for Augment the City and are working with Council to finalise the Contract for Funding which is expected in late October. As Members will be aware, a key element of Augment the City is a small-cell wireless environment set up in three locations in City Hall. This will provide the necessary connectivity for the SMEs to develop and trial their immersive experiences.
- 3.11 This is already costed within the approved business case and a price of £174,911.69 has been determined using the Northern Ireland Public Sector Shared Network procurement framework. However, given the delay in receiving the completed contract from DfE, there is a risk that the service may no longer be available at this price by late October. With this risk in mind,

Members are asked to approve the procurement of the connectivity service ahead of the formal receipt of the contract. DfE are aware of this proposal and have confirmed that there will be no divergence in the contract from the approved business case.

Tourism and Regeneration

- 3.12 As reported previously, OBC approvals and Contracts for Funding are in place for all three regeneration projects.
- 3.13 Following introduction of the Subsidy Control Act 2022 and subsequent legal advice to the relevant government departments in relation to the need for subsidy assessments to be completed before signing of the Contract for Funding (CfF), significant work has been undertaken on the development of subsidy assessments and engagement has taken place with Subsidy Advice Unit from the Competition and Markets Authority, in parallel with the drafting of contracts for the tourism projects. This has impacted on the timeframes for signing of the contracts for tourism projects.
- 3.14 Progress in relation to procurement continues across all projects with the development of procurement documentation for Integrated Consultancy Teams (ICTs) and Integrated Supply Teams (ISTs):
- Belfast Stories have completed their procurement process for their ICT and Design Assurance teams and subject to no challenges, hope to award both contracts in October.
 - The ITT returns for the Carrickfergus ICT are due on the 18th September and it is hoped that the ICT will be appointed in November.
 - The Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) returns for the Gobbins Phase 2 ICT are currently being assessed, with ITT documentation to be issued in October
 - The IST PQQ returns for the Theatre and Conference for Newry Regen are currently being assessed and the documentation for the Civic Hub is being finalised.
 - Bangor Waterfront published the ICT PQQ documentation for Ballyholme Yacht Club in August, with the ICT PQQ for Pickie Park to follow in September.
 - The Procurement Strategy for Destination Royal Hillsborough is being finalised, which will allow ICT procurement to progress.

- 3.15 Carrickfergus Regeneration have also set up a Working Group and have appointed Excellence in Work to develop the preferred Operating Model. Bangor Waterfront have engaged external support to assist in the procurement of the Operator for the Marina and Pickie Fun Park, so that Operators are in place to input into the design development process for both projects.

Infrastructure

- 3.16 As previously reported feasibility studies are being completed and the OBC is being updated by Department for Infrastructure for Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2. A peer review exercise, similar to a Gateway 2, review has been undertaken for Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge in preparation for procurement of a design and build contractor. Following confirmation from DfI that its preferred option for the bridge on the Newry Southern Relief Road is a non-opening 50m fixed bridge, preparation of statutory orders has commenced.

Employability and Skills (E&S)

- 3.17 Our skills assessment process, now being conducted on a cross-deal basis to understand the labour and skills implications of the city deal investment projects is continuing to progress, but timeframes have been impacted by the vacancy in the E&S Programme Manager post- this issue is currently under consideration by BRCD College partners which fund this post. As reported previously two further skills assessments, aligned to Advanced Manufacturing and Creative Industries sectors, are already now well developed utilising this approach. An Advanced Manufacturing Assessment has been completed with AMIC and will be shared with partners over the coming weeks with a view to submission for approval in the late Autumn. The Creative Industries (Virtual Production) assessment is refining its emerging recommendations, with the aim of a report to the Task and Finish Group this month.
- 3.18 A detailed update was provided on the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund project at the June meeting. In parallel with the final stages of the OBC approval Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, on behalf of the partners, has been making preparations for the launch of the fund, including by working with Council colleagues to ensure alignment with the new Enterprise Support Service, and are now aiming to launch in Oct 23.

Communications and Engagement

- 3.19 Communication and engagement continues to be a priority both at a project and programme level. Now that the programme has moved into delivery stage specialist support has been commissioned to support strategic engagement to include the development of a Strategic Engagement Plan with an initial focus on local businesses and industry. Further plans will also be developed to engage with elected members across the region to update on progress and identify further priorities and areas of future investment.
- 3.20 The first BRCD Annual Report, as considered at the previous meeting of the Committee, was received positively by senior officials from across NI and UK Government Departments and provided the basis for discussions with the BRCD partners on priorities for the year ahead and tackling key challenges that the BRCD partners continue to face.
- 3.21 As previously reported to Members a dedicated website has been developed which provides details of the deal and press releases and articles in relation to project specific announcements, including key appointments, progress and tender opportunities.

BRCD Council Panel

- 3.22 The next meeting of the Council Panel will be held on 27th September 2023, hosted by Ards and North Down Borough Council. Invitations have been sent to all Panel members and given this is the first meeting of the new Panel we have asked, where possible, that members attend in person. At the meeting members will be provided with an overview of the programme, a presentation on the first BRCD annual report, which will be launched following the meeting and an update on Bangor Waterfront Regeneration project. Following the meeting there will be an opportunity to take a tour of Bangor Waterfront.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.23 All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets.

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

- 3.24 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.’”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service update

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee’s consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the new Northern Ireland Enterprise Support Service (NIESS) – the regional initiative to support business start-up and growth that will be led by Belfast City Council on behalf of the 11 councils.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note that the MoU for the NIESS has now been signed by the Chief Executive, enabling commissioning of service delivery and project mobilisation
- Note the planned go-live date for the new intervention
- Note that further updates on progress will be presented to members in due course.

3.0 Main Report

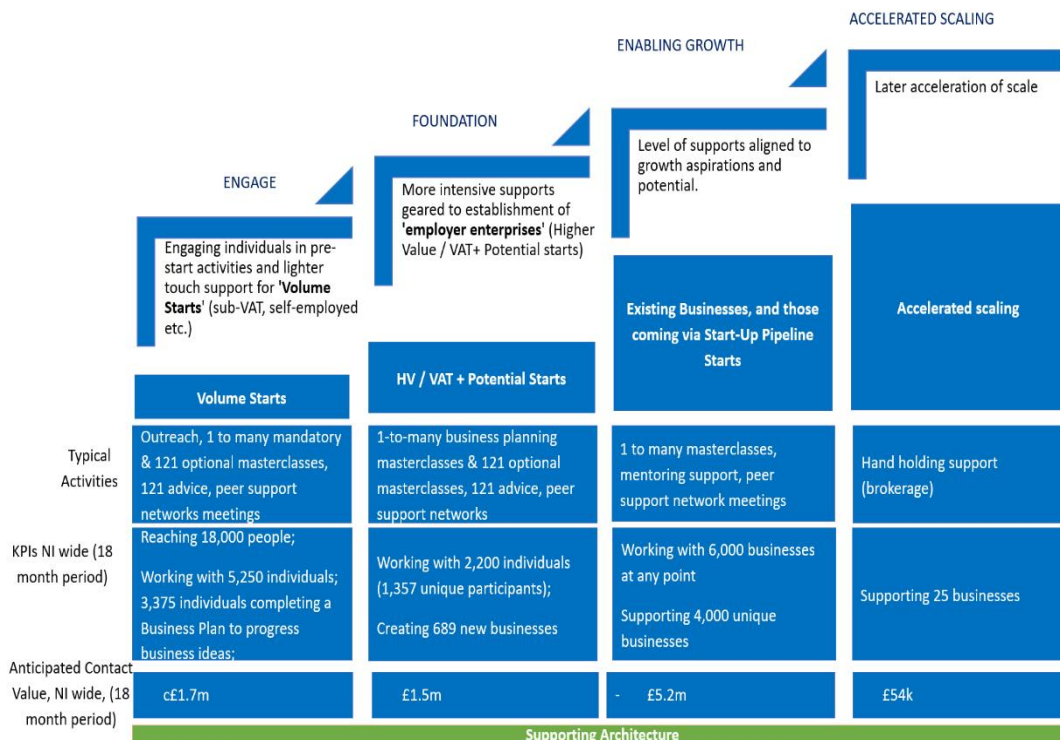
- 3.1 At the 17 February meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, members agreed that Belfast City Council should lead on the submission of the application to UKSPF (Shared Prosperity Fund) for the 11-council Enterprise Support Service (ESS) model. They also agreed that the council should lead on the future development and delivery of

the service, subject to additional due diligence and risk management work being undertaken.

- 3.6 A further update was presented to the August 2023 meeting of the Committee, providing additional detail on progress to date on the procurement process and the funding drawdown and identifying an emerging risk due to delays in issuing the funding agreement/MoU by DLUHC (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). In early September 2023, officers received the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) setting out the terms and conditions of the funding offer and this was signed by the Chief Executive.
- 3.3 Having received the MoU, officers were able to proceed with the appointment of the contractors for the delivery of services to businesses, as well as the provision of support services such as marketing and communications and call handling. Following contractual standstill periods, initiation meetings are being scheduled with delivery partners in w/c 25 September 2023. It is expected that the 'go live' date for the service will be 1 October 2023. However, given the necessary preparatory work required to mobilise a new service of this scale, it is likely that the more 'formal' launch will not take place until early November.
- 3.4 As part of the funding application to DLUHC, resources were secured for a number of staff roles in order to support programme delivery and provide appropriate management and oversight for funders and all council partners. Recruitment for these roles is currently under way and staff should be in position for November/December 2023 (subject to notice periods).
- 3.5 In the interim, the development and mobilisation work is being led by existing resources within the Enterprise and Business Growth Team. The team has been supported by colleagues from across the council including Digital Services, Procurement, Finance, Legal Services, Information Governance Unit, Human Resources and Continuous Improvement and Audit, Governance and Risk.
- 3.6 During the early development work, staff from AGRS facilitated a risk workshop involving all support services across the council (as set out above) involved in this phase of the programme. It is our intention to repeat this exercise in the coming weeks as we move towards the mobilisation phase and the risks change. This will provide elected members and senior management with the appropriate levels of assurance around programme delivery. In line with previous commitments, regular progress reports will be brought back to Committee. Wider governance structures are also being

established and these will include regular meetings with the contractors as well as quarterly oversight reporting through to the SOLACE Economic Development Group (comprising senior directors across all 11 councils) and to SOLACE as required.

- 3.7 As a recap, the service is being funded through the new Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). This is the DLUHC fund that was established as a replacement for EU funding (ERDF and ESF). One strand of funding focused on 'Supporting Local Business'. The Investment Plan for UKSPF in Northern Ireland was launched in December 2022. At that time, the Plan proposed that a central component of the Supporting Local Business strand would be the 11 council Enterprise Support Service. An indicative financial allocation of £17million - £12 million programme delivery and £5million for small grants – was set aside for the service. UKSPF funding is available to March 2025 so the initial programme period will run from Autumn 2023 to March 2025. The service overview is detailed below:



Business Grants – available for foundation and growth businesses – up to £4k/70% project value

- 3.8 The new service represents the ambition of all local authorities to deliver on our statutory responsibility around business start-up in a way that will make a real change over time, by working to address cultural attitudes towards entrepreneurship and helping more businesses to start, grow and scale across the region. It can directly support our Belfast Agenda targets for job creation and economic growth and can also provide an important engagement mechanism to enhance business interaction with key investments, including those supported through City Deal.
- 3.9 Given delays in issuing the MoU, officers are working with contractors to identify how we can maximise the delivery of the service while acknowledging that not all support services and resources are yet fully functional.

3.10 **Financial and Resource Implications**

Belfast City Council will act as the lead council on behalf of the 11 councils for delivery of the service. To do so, we will establish a delivery and management team which will be fully resourced through the DLUHC funding.

- 3.11 The final budget is subject to completion of the relevant procurement exercises detailed above. The overall indicative SPF budget is in the region of £5million revenue in year 1 and £7million revenue in year 2, with around £5million available across the funding period for grant support.

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

An equality impact assessment for the service has been completed. Local targets for delivery in each council area have been established and will be part of the contractual commitments with delivery partners.”

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Asset Management

(Having received advice from the Chief Executive, Councillors Ferguson, Garrett, Hanvey, Maskey, Nic Bhranair and Whyte, who were members of the Planning Committee, left the meeting before the following item had been introduced, on the basis that there could potentially be planning considerations moving forward.)

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

The Committee:

i) C.S Lewis Square – Land swap with EastSide Partnership

- Approved a land swap between the Council and EastSide Partnership in respect of land situated at C.S Lewis Square and noted that the terms of the land swap and the net disposal would be agreed with the Council's Estates and Legal Services.

ii) Deed of Release – Springhill Millennium Park

- Approved the Council entering into a Deed of Release with the Big Lottery Fund which would remove the Council from all restrictive conditions/covenants presently held on the Springhill Millennium Park lands under a Deed of Dedication dated 8th August 1997.

iii) Sunningdale Community Centre – Lease to Sunningdale Community Association

- Approved the terms of a new 50-year lease to Sunningdale Community Association.

Physical Programme Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Council's Physical Programme currently includes over 400 capital projects via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council's Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report includes stage movement requests relating to the Capital Programme.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to consider the following items on the Capital Programme:**

- **IT Programme – In Cab Technology and Routing System**
- Agree that this project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and agree that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of

most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

- **Cremated Remains Burial Plots project** – Agree that this project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow an OBC to be developed.
- **Shankill Memorial Garden** – to note the request from the organising committee of the Shankill Bomb Memorial Project and that tree planting will be carried out at Shankill Memorial Garden.

3.0 **Main report**

Capital Programme

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme which includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. The Council also delivers externally focused funding streams such as Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Local Investment Fund (LIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF), as well as numerous capital programmes that we deliver for central government. Our funding partners include National Lottery Heritage Fund, SEUPB Peace IV, the Executive Office, DfC, DfI via the Blue Green Infrastructure Fund and Living with Water Programme, DAERA, Ulster Garden Villages, Levelling Up Fund (LUF) and others. When appropriate, the Physical Programmes Department is happy to arrange site visits to any projects that have been completed.
- 3.2 Members agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme:

Project	Overview	Stage movement
IT Programme – In-Cab Technology and Routing System	Replacement of two current systems: Masternaut fleet tracking and Webaspx route optimisation software with one integrated system.	Move to Stage 3 - Committed

Cremated Remains Burial Plots	Development of cremated remains plots at Roselawn.	Move to Stage 2 - Uncommitted
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Proposed stage movement – IT Programme – In Cab Technology and Routing System

- 3.3 Members will recall that in March 2022 this project was moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* under the IT Programme which forms part of the overall Capital Programme. This project involves the replacement of two current systems Masternaut fleet tracking and Webaspx route optimisation software with one integrated system - a digital system that integrates frontline operations, operational control and the customer hub. The Outline Business Case has now been prepared.

Members are asked to recommend that the In Cab Technology and Routing System project now progresses to Stage 3 – Committed and that it is held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return. An update will be brought back to Committee at this stage along with the final budget allocation and confirmation that this is within the affordability limits of the Council. Members are asked to agree that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with contract to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

Proposed stage movement – Cremated Remains Burial Plots

- 3.4 Members will recall that in June 2023 this project was added to the Capital Programme as a *Stage 1 – Emerging* project to allow the project and costs to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course. The project is for the development of 622 cremated remains burial plots to utilise shallow land within Roselawn cemetery unsuitable for full earth burials. The number of cremated remains burials has more than doubled since 2015. To provide for this increased demand and make efficient use of existing burial land at Roselawn it is proposed to develop a cremated remains only section. With the increase in cremations and the development of the Crematorium at Roselawn, the potential to use a portion of land for the creation of additional cremated remains only burial plots fits with the councils’ objective to adequately meet future needs and demands. A package of necessary survey work is now identified to inform the design

as outlined in the Pre Application Discussion with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.

Members are asked to recommend that the Cremated Remains Burial Plots project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted on the Capital Programme*. An Outline Business Case will now be worked up on the proposal with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

Shankill Memorial Garden

- 3.5 Members are asked to note that further to a request from the organising committee of the Shankill Bomb Memorial Project, tree planting will be carried out at Shankill Memorial Garden to mark the upcoming 30th anniversary on 23 October 2023.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.6 *Financial* – Shankill Memorial Garden tree planting to be met within existing budgets

Resources – Officer time to deliver as required

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

- 3.7 All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Forth Meadow Community Greenway

The Interim Director of Legal Services advised the Committee that a decision was still required to be taken in relation to the erection of dual language signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway.

She reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 24th March 2023, it had decided that the Beacons, Information Panels and the Directional Finger Post Signs located in the Gaeltacht Quarter area (that is Section 3 – Fall Park, Section 4 – Bog Meadows, Section 5- Westlink to City Centre and Springfield Park/Dam) would all be in English and Irish.

That decision was successfully called in on the basis that it had not been equality screened. It had since been screened and the screening concluded that an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) would be required. This would mean a 12-week consultation process and the Council would be unable to draw down the funding for the signage (circa £160k) before the funding deadline of December 2023.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

There were therefore 3 potential options available to the Committee, which were as follows:

- a) Proceed with an EQIA in respect of the March 2023 decision;
- b) Erect dual language signage in Sections 3,4 and 5 of the Greenway, excluding Springfield Park/Dam which would only have signage in English. This had been screened out so would not require an EQIA;
- c) Erect dual language signage in Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the Greenway, excluding Springfield Park/Dam which would be subject to a separate EQIA and associated consultation process in relation to dual language signage.

After a lengthy discussion during which Members expressed concerns in relation to the timeliness of the issuing of the information and the lack of progress in the matter, it was:

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

That the Committee agrees that:

- I. an equality screening be undertaken by an external organisation with experience in minority languages in relation to the decision to erect dual language signage at the Forth Meadow Community Greenway;
- II. a further legal opinion be obtained on the issues raised from an appropriately qualified person in relation to minority language rights; and
- III. all the information, including the legal opinion, be subject to full disclosure.

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

The Committee noted that, on the advice of the Chief Executive, the disclosure of the legal opinion would be subject to the agreement of the author of the report.

The Committee agreed further that a special meeting be held to consider all the issues and information in relation to the signage.

Update on Area Working Groups

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the South Area Working Group of 21 August, North Area Working Group of 22 August, West Area Working Group of 24 August and East Area Working Group of 7 September 2023, including the following recommendations:

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

South Area Working Group

- Belfast Investment Fund - the South Belfast AWG recommended to the Committee that the Coffee Culture (BIF46) and Arts and Digital Hub (BIF48) projects be moved to BIF Stage 3- Committed.

North Area Working Group

- Belfast Investment Fund - the North Belfast AWG recommended to the Committee that:
 - £900,000 which had previously been allocated to support the Basement Youth Club/Elim Church, be withdrawn and reallocated to the Malgrove project, and
 - Cavehill Tennis Club (BIF49) be moved to BIF Stage 3- Committed.

In response to a question from a Member in relation to the decision of the East Area Working Group regarding releasing £8,000 of the agreed funding to expedite the new toilet facilities at the Creagh Wanderers container, the Interim Director of Legal Services advised that she had not yet been able to confirm if there were any legal issues but if the Committee was content then the matter could be progressed, subject to any legal issues.

The Committee agreed to this course of action.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Belfast City Council Statement of Accounts 2022-23

The Director of Finance submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the Statement of Accounts of the Council, including the Annual Governance Statement, for the period ending 31st March 2023.**
- 1.2 The Statement of Accounts are an important element of the council's overall corporate governance framework as they provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position.**
- 1.3 The Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2023, as attached, have been prepared in line with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022/23 based on International Financial Reporting Standards**

and the Department for Communities Accounts Direction, Circular LG 07/23 dated 31st January 2023 and 10th February 2023.

- 1.4 The Chief Executive in his role as Chief Financial Officer can confirm that the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2023 has been prepared in the form directed by the Department for Communities and in his opinion the Statement of Accounts give a true and fair view of the income and expenditure and cash flows for the financial year and the financial position as at the end of the financial year.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. approve the Council's Statement of Accounts and incorporated Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31st March 2023, and
- ii. agree that this paper should not be subject to call-in (as indicated above) because it would cause an unreasonable delay which would be prejudicial to the Council's and the public's interests given that the statement of accounts must be published by 30th September 2023.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Normal Approval Process

- 3.1 The Committee will be aware that the normal approval process allows for the Statement of Accounts to be presented to the Audit and Risk Panel to allow them to review the annual statement of accounts. Specifically, to consider whether appropriate accounting policies have been followed and whether there are concerns arising from the financial statements or from the audit that need to be brought to the attention of the council prior to this report going to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
- 3.2 The Audit and Risk Panel was presented with the Statement of Accounts at the meeting on 12th September and a verbal update on the status of the audit and the draft Report to those charged with Governance (RTTCWG) for 2022/23 was provided

at this meeting by Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO). The draft RTTCWG will be circulated to the Audit and Risk panel members for consideration when issued by NIAO. NIAO have indicated that there are currently no issues, however the audit is still ongoing.

The Panel reviewed the annual Statement of Accounts and, subject to receipt of the RTTCWG, did not identify any concerns arising from the Statement of Accounts that needed to be brought to the attention of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Audit Opinion

3.2 It is the Local government Auditors' opinion that:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with relevant legal and statutory requirements and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2022-23, of the financial position of Belfast City Council as at 31 March 2023 and its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
- the statement of accounts have been properly prepared in accordance with the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Department for Communities directions issued thereunder; and
- the part of the Remuneration Report to be audited has been properly prepared in accordance with the Department for Communities directions made under the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015; and
- the information given in the Narrative Report for the financial year ended 31 March 2023 is consistent with the financial statements.

Reserves

3.3 General Fund

The credit balance on the General Fund has decreased to £58.8m (of which £44.8m relates to specified reserves). The movement on the reserves balance is summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of Reserves Position

<u>Opening Balance</u>	£62.2m
In year movement in reserves	<u>£3.4 m</u>
<u>Closing Balance</u>	£58.8m
Specified Reserves at year end	<u>£44.8m</u>
<u>Balance Available</u>	<u>£14 m</u>

3.4 Capital Fund £15,096,990

The Capital Fund is made up of:

- **Belfast Investment Fund (£4,638,532)** -created to support key partnership projects to regenerate Belfast and help lever substantial funds from other sources
- **Local Investment Fund (£579,545)** to fund smaller local regeneration projects
- **City Centre Investment Fund (£8,237,263)** to support the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Plans
- **Social Outcomes Fund (£1,641,650)** to support City Centre projects which might not generate a direct financial return but would enhance the overall City Centre offer and support the attraction of investment.

3.5 Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund £10,000,000

This fund is to support neighbourhood regeneration and tourism projects in local neighbourhoods.

3.6 Leisure Mobilisation Fund £611,877

This fund is to support the Leisure Transformation Programme and will cover programme level costs including communications, engagement and procurement costs.

3.7 Capital Receipts Reserve £642,458

These are capital receipts which have originated primarily from the sale of assets and which have not yet been used to finance capital expenditure.

3.8 Other Fund Balances and Reserves £2,620,360

This relates to the Election Reserve (£913,390) which has been set up to smooth the cost of running council elections, the BWUH Subvention Fund (£909,283) to support national and international organisations in bringing their conferences to Belfast and the BWUH Sinking Fund (£797,687) to support planned maintenance and future capital works at the new exhibition centre.

3.9 Debt

The overall level of trade debtors had decreased this year from £7.1m at 31 March 2022 to £4.3m at 31 March 2023, mainly due to resuming debt management activity to pre-pandemic levels. An analysis of trade debtors, inclusive of VAT, for the last two years is shown below:

Table 2: Analysis of Trade Debtors

	<u>31 March 2023</u>	<u>31 March 2022</u>
Less than three months	£3,129,548	£5,450,710
Three to one year	£482,337	£1,070,718
More than one year	£720,939	£553,310
<u>Total</u>	<u>£4,332,824</u>	<u>£7,074,738</u>

3.10 Creditors

The Department for Communities has set councils a target of paying invoices within 30 days. During the year the council paid 86,459 invoices totalling £180,029,594.

The average time taken to pay creditor invoices was 17 days for the year ended 31 March 2023. The Council paid 70,303 invoices within 10 days, 79,378 invoices within 30 days, and 7,081 invoices outside of 30 days. The council endeavours to process invoices as quickly as possible and has an improvement plan to support this process.

3.11 Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

The Statement of Accounts include the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year 2022/23, which has been prepared in line with the Accounts Directive provided by the Department for Communities, NIAO guidance and is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good

Governance in Local Government’. Specifically the AGS sets out:

- **scope of responsibility**
- **the purpose of the governance framework**
- **the governance framework in place**
- **review of effectiveness**
- **update on the significant governance issues declared last year**
- **significant governance issues for current year**

3.12 The AGS is approved by the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources committee and the Chief Executive. It is subject to review by the LGA (NIAO) as part of their annual audit.

3.13 Financial and Resource Implications

None.

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

None.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Contracts Update

The Committee:

- **Approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1)**
- **Approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2)**
- **Approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3)**
- **Noted the award of retrospective STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 4)**
- **Noted the award of contracts by Arc 21 on behalf the council (Table 5).**

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Estimated Total Contract Value	SRO/ Delegated Officer	Short description of goods / services
Provision of telecommunications equipment to deliver the 5G Innovation Regions bid on behalf of Belfast City Region	Up to 17 months	Up to £3,800,000	M McCann	A successful bid for the DSIT 5G Innovation Regions funding will provide capital funding for BCC to deliver an economic development programme for SMEs in key industries focused on utilising advanced wireless
Provision of telecommunications services to deliver the 5G Innovation Regions bid on behalf of Belfast City Region	Up to 17 months	Up to £3,800,000	M McCann	A successful bid for the DSIT 5G Innovation Regions funding will provide capital funding for BCC to deliver an economic development programme for SMEs in key industries focused on utilising advanced wireless
Supply and installation of summer plants and containers	Up to 3 years	Up to £240,000	D Sales	The provision of summer plants and containers for Belfast in Bloom initiative
Requirement of an Industrial Technical Expert to support the delivery of the Digital Pillar within the BRCD Programme	Up to 2 years	Up to £60,000	M McCann	BCC does not have in-house resources and expertise to provide the right level of governance and assurances to meet the programme board's expectations or a BRCD Programme Audit
Young tree maintenance, tree	Up to 5 years	Up to £2,000,000	S Toland	Tender required to support in house operations in

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

planting and minor horticultural works				delivering grounds maintenance and horticultural work in BCC Parks and Open Spaces.
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Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Total Value	SRO/ Delegated Officer	Description	Supplier
Supply, delivery & commissioning of replacement illuminate lighting fittings & ancillary equipment as part of the PPM maintenance programme	Up to 3 years	Up to £60,000	S Grimes	The City Hall Illuminate system is wholly proprietary to Philips lighting. The system is installed throughout the City Hall utilising a specialist technology, that is a closed protocol, and will only operate with the family of Phillips products. Signify (Phillips) do not supply to clients direct, as they use approved wholesalers. Due to our partnership in the 2013 EU project, we have a wholesale account directly with them.	Signify Commercial Ireland Ltd
Replacement of existing flue at Tropical Ravine Botanic Gardens	Up to 1 month	Up to £45,000	S Grimes	In July 2023 the existing boiler house flue fell from its supporting	John J Doyle Ltd

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

				brackets and dropped directly into the tropical ravine building. Specialist contractor John J Doyle have carried out the temporary repairs following the collapse. They have also carried extensive reporting, intrusive surveys, flue tests and flue design calculations.	
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Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Duration	Modification	SRO/ Delegated Officer	Description	Supplier
T1872 - Provision of animal healthcare services at Belfast Zoo	Up to 5 years	Additional 4 months & £55,000	J Greer	Additional time is required to finalise the Specification and associated tender documents. Work is underway to complete this review during Aug 23 and to advertise the tender but an additional 4-months is required to ensure continuity of service whilst	Jubilee Veterinary Centre

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

				tender process is completed	
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Table 4: Retrospective Single Tender Actions

Title of Contract	Duration	Value	SRO/ Delegated Officer	Description	Supplier
Installation of new ACV and associated works in plant room at Kennedy Way Civic Amenity Site	Up to 2 months	Up to £60,000	S Grimes	Failure of the existing boilers. Due to the urgency of the works the Councils Mechanical MTC Contractor has been appointed to carry out the works, consequently this STA is retrospective. Using existing contractor provides assurance that the works will be fairly priced and carried out to a good standard	WJM Building Services Ltd
Installation of new ACV and associated works in plant room at North Queen Street Community Centre	Up to 2 months	Up to £38,000	S Grimes	Failure of the existing boilers. Due to the urgency of the works the Councils Mechanical MTC Contractor has been appointed to carry out the works, consequently this STA is retrospective. Using existing contractor provides assurance that the works will be fairly priced and carried	WJM Building Services Ltd

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

				out to a good standard	
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Table 5: Contracts awarded by Arc 21 on behalf of the Council

Title of Contract	Duration	Value	SRO/ Delegated Officer	Description	Supplier
Bring Site Service Contract- Mixed Glass (Lot 1), Textiles (Lot 2) Mixed Paper (Lot 3) and Mixed Cans (Lot 4)	Up to 8 years	Up to £3,034,294	C Matthews	Contract for the collection, transportation, sorting and recycling of material from bring sites.	Contract managed by Arc 21

Commercial and Procurement Services
Social Value Working Group update

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update on the delivery of the social value outcomes via the Council's tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Council's Social Value Procurement Policy,

Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes
of meeting of 12th September 2023

The Committee noted the key issues arising at the meeting and approved and adopted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel of 12th September 2023.

Henry Jones Playing Fields

The Committee was reminded that, in March 2023, it had approved the reconfiguration of the Henry Jones Playing Fields site, which was to retain one soccer pitch and to convert three other soccer pitches into a full-size GAA pitch for use by the East Belfast GAA club.

Since May 2023, there had been three security incidents at the site, including two suspect devices and an incident of criminal damage to goalposts and netting. Those incidents had impacted all users of the site, including East Belfast GAA, Clarawood FC and dog walkers/other leisure users. A nearby Primary School and Nursery had also been impacted.

As a result of those incidents, the PSNI's Crime Prevention Team had been engaged to assess the site and the current range of preventative and protective measures in place. Accordingly, they had recommended an upgrade to the current CCTV system and also the installation of lighting in the car park. In addition, they had commented on the

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

large number of potential access points along the site perimeter which was currently unfenced.

Officers had obtained quotes for the associated works which were as follows:

- Total cost for CCTV upgrade = £12,000
- Total cost for car park lighting = £25,000
- Total cost for perimeter fencing = £120,000

Those costs could not be met from within normal departmental operating budgets and given that it was capital expenditure, it was suggested that, should the Committee wish to proceed with some/all of those works, the Director of Finance would review the capital financing budget at the end of Quarter 2 and realign spend in order to provide the necessary finances.

The Committee approved an upgrade to the current CCTV system and also the installation of lighting in the car park at the Henry Jones Playing Fields, subject to the Director of Finance reviewing the capital financing budget at the end of Quarter 2 and realigning spend in order to provide the necessary finances.

The Committee agreed also to defer consideration of the installation of perimeter fencing to enable further discussions to be held with the key user groups.

Equality and Good Relations

Language Strategy Draft Action Plan 2023-26

The Committee was reminded that, following the agreement of the Language Strategy 2018-2023 in April 2018, an interim action plan which covered the period from December 2018 to March 2020 was agreed by Members.

The Council agreed a strategic approach to progress the Language Strategy in May 2021, including approving the establishment of:

- a cross-party, quarterly Member Language Strategy Working Group;
- a new external Irish Language Forum and a new external Ulster-Scots Forum to add to the existing Council stakeholder fora for the other language communities; and
- an internal Language Strategy officer working group.

The internal Language Strategy Officer working group had developed a detailed, prioritised Language Strategy Action Plan which was agreed by the Committee in November 2022 for the purposes of pre-consultation engagement with stakeholders, following which an updated Plan would be submitted to the Committee for approval to go to public consultation.

The Interim Director of Legal Services reported that pre-consultation engagement had been undertaken with the Irish Language Stakeholder Forum, the Ulster-Scots Stakeholder Forum, a sub-group of the Migrant Forum and the Sign Language Forum.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

Following on from feedback from those various stakeholders, the Action Plan had been updated. The external Irish and Ulster-Scots Foras have been meeting on a monthly basis since March this year. She pointed out that the actions were not the same in respect of all languages and this was reflective of the feedback from stakeholders in terms of the issues they raised in terms of accessing Council services, visibility etc.

Accordingly, the Committee was now being asked to agree that the Draft Language Strategy Action Plan be issued for a 12-week public consultation exercise via an online survey and online public meetings.

Following the consultation, an updated Action Plan would be brought back to the Language Strategy Working Group and the Committee in due course. Officers were hopeful that the Action Plan would be formally adopted by April 2024.

The Committee:

- Approved the Action Plan for the purposes of formal public consultation; and
- Noted that the draft Language Strategy Action Plan would be issued for public consultation in October 2023.

**Review of Hate Crime Legislation – Response from
Permanent Secretary Department of Justice**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To consider a response from the Permanent Secretary, Department of Justice, to the Committee’s request for an update on the independent review of hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the response.**

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

- 3.1 The Committee will recall that, at the meeting on 26th June, it granted approval for the new draft amenity bye laws governing the City Centre to be issued for formal public consultation. The Committee agreed also, at the request of Councillor de Faoite, to request an update from the Department of Justice on the independent review of hate crime legislation in Northern Ireland.**

- 3.2 A response to that request has since been received from Mr. R. Pengelly, the Permanent Secretary in the Department of Justice, a copy of which is attached.
- 3.3 The Permanent Secretary begins by stating that, following the publication of Judge Marrinan's Independent Review of Hate Crime Legislation Report in December 2020, the Department of Justice has been progressing work to implement recommendations aimed at improving the criminal justice system's response to addressing hate crime and providing redress to victims. Where relevant, a number of recommendations from the Review will be implemented through the provision of a Hate Crime Bill and work on policy development and public consultation, in preparation for a Bill, is ongoing. This work, in the legislative sphere, will complement and strengthen non-legislative work also being taken forward to address hate crime, including working collaboratively with partners in relation to tackling the enabling factors of hate crime such as intolerance, prejudice and hate.
- 3.4 He points out that, in response to the complexity of some issues and the desire to advance public engagement in the Department's consultation process, it was agreed to approach the public consultation on hate crime legislation in two phases. The first of two planned public consultations has now been completed and a summary report on the consultation findings and (then) Ministerial approved way forward was published in March 2023 and is available here : www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/phase-one-summary-responses-hate-crime-review-legislation
- 3.5 The Permanent Secretary then explains that work on developing policies to be included in the phase two public consultation process has now commenced, with the intention of publishing a public consultation on these issues in 2024, subject to the return of Ministers. The remaining policy aspects relate to consideration of the following three strategic themes:
- adding age and sex/ gender/ variations in sex characteristics as protected characteristics within hate crime legislation (Recommendations 9-11);
 - range of issues relating to stirring up offences (Recommendation 14); and
 - a statutory duty for named public authorities to remove hate expressions from their buildings and public

spaces where they carry out their functions
(Recommendation 15).

- 3.6 He concludes by stating that, whilst it remains the intention to introduce a Hate Crime Bill in the current 2022-2027 mandate, the timing will be subject to any impact on the Department of Justice's wider legislation programme due to delays in the formation of an Executive and an incoming Minister will wish to review the current programme, taking account of the time available for delivery.

3.7 **Financial and Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

3.8 **Equality or Good Relations Implications**

None associated with this report."

The Committee noted the response.

**Minutes of Shared City Partnership
Meeting on 11th September 2023**

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 11th September 2023, including:

Belfast Stories

- That Members note the contents of this report and agree to extend an invitation to the Belfast Stories team to attend the October meeting of the Partnership.

Shared City Partnership Membership (Verbal Update)

- That members note the verbal update provided by the Good Relations Manager detailed in the minutes attached in Appendix 1.

PEACE IV (Verbal Update)

- That members note the verbal update provided by the Good Relations Manager detailed in the minutes attached in Appendix 1.

TEO Asylum Dispersal Funding Update and Project Request

- Members are asked to note the contents of the report and to and agree the approach for reprofiling costs in relation to the Asylum Dispersal Fund and funding available through the Belfast Health Development Unit, to support the

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

commissioning of a drop-in good relations and health and well-being winter programme for asylum seekers.

Peace Plus Workshop

- That members note the Peace Plus presentation to Shared City Partnership attached in Appendix 2 to the report.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of Party Group Leaders
Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 14th September.

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations in respect of those applications received up to 8th September, as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2023 EVENTS						
European Federation of Living (network of housing associations)	9 November 2023	EFL Conference Lunch Reception for guests attending a 2-day conference. Numbers attending - 70	A & B	No (Waiver as linked to Visit Belfast)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
West Belfast Partnership Board	28 November 2023	Celebration of Word Millionaires from across Belfast primary schools - reception and presentations to children who have become Word Millionaires through participation in the Accelerated Reader programme, which WBPB purchased for all schools in west Belfast through our DE funded Sharing the Learning Education Programme	C & D	No Charge as charity	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Wine Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for reception</i>

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

		to raise literacy standards at Primary school level. Numbers attending – 200				
Conway Education Centre	14 December 2023	Launch of 'Meet the New Neighbours' project and promotional material showing the contribution, skills and talents of refugees and asylum seekers in Belfast. Numbers attending – 80	C & D	No Charge as charity	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Wine Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for reception</i>
2024 EVENTS						
The Bar of Northern Ireland	15 May 2024	Welcome to World Bar Conference Evening Reception for guests attending a 2 day conference. Numbers attending - 150	A & B	No (Waiver as linked to Visit Belfast)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
Belfast One BID	19 May 2024	Belfast One-Way Edit Fashion Show - Reception and showcase of 50 city centre retailers Numbers attending 350	B	Yes £300	No hospitality	Approve Charge £300 No hospitality
Ulster University / Irish Accounting & Finance Association	13 June 2024	Irish Accounting & Finance Association Gala Dinner for guests attending their 3 day conference taking place in UUJ. Numbers attending – 120	A & B	No Charity	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry	21 June 2024	Annual President's Lunch – annual lunch for the NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry to mark economic benefits to the City. Numbers attending – 400	B	Charge £300	No Hospitality	Approve Charge £300 No hospitality
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Request for the Use of the City Hall Grounds

The Committee was reminded that requests for the use of City Hall and its Grounds were normally dealt with under the authority delegated by the Committee to the Director of Legal and Civic Services using criteria agreed for this purpose. Occasionally, however, it was necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the request set out below fell into this category.

The Interim Director of Legal Services advised that Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) had approached the Council seeking permission for up to 100 PWC staff to sleep out in the grounds of City Hall on Friday 20th October 2023.

A similar event had taken place in June 2014 to raise awareness of homelessness in the city centre, on that occasion participants had slept outside City Hall grounds along the cobbled area and footpaths.

This proposed sleep would take place along the West façade of City Hall, with participants sleeping overnight on the pathways, ensuring a safe distance from the intruder alarms situated along façade. Their preference was concrete rather than the grass lawns. City Hall building and grounds would be closed to the public as normal at that time.

The only Infrastructure onsite would be portaloos, no catering provision was planned, and participants would bring their own sleeping materials. A wet weather alternative was not available inside City Hall.

PWC staff would fundraise in advance of this event and monies raised would be donated to charities helping with homelessness. PWC would provide all stewarding/marshalling staff and would have first aiders present. PWC would risk assess the event and participants should complete medical checks in advance. PWC would have to comply with the usual conditions, including indemnities for damage and submission of a formal event-management plan and insurance.

The Committee approved the request from Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) seeking permission for up to 100 PWC staff to sleep out in the grounds of City Hall on Friday 20th October 2023 to raise awareness of homelessness.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

Attendance at CIPR PRide NI Awards 2023

The Committee was advised that the Council's Marketing and Communications team have been shortlisted for three categories at this year's CIPR PRide NI Awards, which recognised best practice in private and public sector communications across the region.

The shortlisted categories included:

- Best In-House PR Team – for our proactive and reactive media and social media activity
- Best Use of Content – for our #BeSoundBelfast social media campaign, calling out abuse on our online platforms
- Best Integrated Campaign – for our #YourDogYourJob campaign, using multiple channels to highlight the impact of dog fouling

The awards were being delivered in-person in Belfast for the first time since 2019 and cost for attendance was £99 per person.

The Committee:

- Agreed to the council's attendance at the CIPR PRide NI Awards on 13th October 2023; and
- Approved the attendance of the Chairperson of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, or her nominee, and five Council officers.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Social Policy Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Social Policy Working Group of 5th September; and approved also the Council's response to Part 2 Consultation on draft regulations to implement the Procurement Bill.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Language
Strategy Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Language Strategy Working Group of 1st September.

**Minutes of the Meeting of the All-Party Working
Group on the City Centre**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the All-Party Working Group on the City Centre of 8th September.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd September, 2023**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Cost of Living Working Group**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Cost of Living Working Group of 15th September.

Chairperson

People and Communities Committee

Wednesday, 6th September, 2023

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murray (Chairperson);
Councillors Bell, Black, Bower, R. Brooks,
Bunting, Canavan, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
R-M Donnelly, Flynn, Kelly, Magee, Maghie,
G. McAteer, McCusker, Ó Néill and Verner.

In attendance: Ms. V. Donnelly, City Protection Manager;
Mr. A. Ferguson, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. P. Conway, Regeneration Development Surveyor; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were recorded from Councillor Cobain and de Faoite.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Housing Investment Plan 2023 Annual Update

The Committee was informed that the following representatives of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) were in attendance to provide the annual update on the Housing Investment Plan for Belfast 2023-2026:

Grainia Long (Chief Executive)
Aengus Hannaway (Regional Manager)

Joining remotely:

Jennifer Hawthorne (Acting Director of Housing Services)
Andy Kennedy (Asset Management)
Leeann Vincent (Asset Management)
Liam Gunn (Regional Manager – Deputy)
Fiona McGrath (Head of Belfast Place Shaping)
Gerard Flynn (Area Manager)
David Brown (Area Manager)
Paul McCombe (Area Manager)
Aisling McDermott (Area Manager)
Theresa Maguire (Area Manager)

**Special People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 6th September, 2023**

The NIHE Chief Executive commenced by thanking the Members for their commitment to Housing, Dhe emphasised the importance of the Community Planning Partnership and working together towards meeting the outcomes within the Belfast Agenda. Ms. Long then provided an overview of the following priorities and initiatives within the context of community planning:

- that the new four-year Belfast Agenda draft Action Plan was currently out for consultation;
- Advised that Housing Led Regeneration in the City was being explored through the Housing Led Regeneration Subgroup. Fits within the “Our Place” theme in the new draft Action Plan;
- Collaboration was supported to increase housing supply across all tenures, including through the mixed tenure approach in the Local Development Plan where 20% affordable housing would be required;
- this work included the assessment and identification of a pipeline of housing development sites, including public and privately owned land; and
- that a partnership with the private sector was critical to this work to understand barriers to housing delivery and bring forward solutions to unlock delivery.

The Chief Executive then provided a tenure breakdown of the housing across the city, She explained that the Housing Investment Plan (HIP) provided an overview of the housing market in the Belfast City Council area and reflected Community Planning priorities locally. She confirmed that 51% of homes in Belfast were owner occupied, 23% private rented and 26% social rented. She advised that, relative to other Councils, there was a lower level of owner occupation in Belfast and higher level of private rental, however, that was not unusual for cities.

She then provided an overview of Housing Executive spend across Belfast during 2022/2023. She stated that the NIHE had invested more in tenants’ homes, over the past 12 months, than in any of the previous 15 years, this demonstrated the NIHE’s commitment to improving the health and well-being of its tenants by keeping their homes safe, warm and dry.

She advised that, of the £158.5m spent, £64.58m related to ‘Investment New Build’, £26.01m had been spent on planned maintenance and improvements, £22.07m on response maintenance, and £22.48m on the Supporting People Programme. She also detailed projected spend for 2023/24, including £23.24m allocated to planned maintenance including stock improvements, £26.28m for response maintenance and £21.76 to Supporting People.

She specifically referred to the success of the retrofit programme and noted that unfortunately the funding for this programme was now coming to an end.

The Committee noted that in 2022/23 the NIHE had:

- Managed over 83,500 social homes;

**Special People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 6th September, 2023**

- Allocated almost 5,800 homes;
- Approved 822 disabled facilities grants;
- Invested £95.05m in Planned Maintenance and Stock Improvement;
- Started 1956 new social homes;
- Paid out £470m in Housing Benefit;
- Invested £371m in new build social homes;
- Provided over 19,000 housing support places to the most vulnerable through the Supporting People Programme and invested £75.23m;
- Sold 554 homes;
- Completed 85% of repairs within target; and
- Invested approximately £55.1m in Rural Communities.

She provided an overview of the success of the Boiler Replacement Scheme, which unfortunately was also coming to an end. In terms of the Affordable Warmth Scheme, she advised that this was now a reduced programme and highlighted the changes that had been made to the administration of this scheme, with the NIHE now having sole responsibility for its delivery. This would no longer be a targeted scheme, however, eligibility and income eligibility for the scheme both remained the same.

The Members were presented with figures regarding waiting lists, which showed an increase in applications and an increase of those in housing stress. The number of allocations had fallen in recent years, broadening the gap between supply and demand, which was deemed to require urgent intervention. She stated that with the current economic climate it was predicted that this gap would increase further with many private landlords leaving the sector and she emphasised the need for new builds.

She provided an overview of the New Build/Social Housing Development Programme, as follows:

In 2022/23

- 405 new social homes completed; and
- 1,680 new social homes under construction at end of March 2023.

Future Housing Requirements

- 7,984 new social housing units would be needed over the next five years.
- 2023/26 SHDP – 1,985 (gross) new social housing units were programmed.

5 Year SHDP Performance

- 2,963 starts was the SG target for Belfast during the 5-year period.
- 2,157 starts were achieved against the target.
- Resulting in 73% of the SG Target being achieved.

Ms. Long reported on the figures for temporary accommodation costs and those presenting as homeless, in the period 2022/23, advising that the NIHE now had 10,000 placements annually in temporary accommodation which had grown rapidly since the onset of the pandemic. She emphasised that chronic homelessness was unprecedented within Belfast

**Special People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 6th September, 2023**

and advised that it was a critical priority for the NIHE which was working closely with the other various statutory stakeholders, including the Council, to try and address the ongoing issues.

The following points were highlighted as key housing issues within Belfast:

- 4605 placements in temporary accommodation. Increased reliance on non-standard accommodation, including hotels and Bed and Breakfasts;
- 12,175 Total applicants on Waiting List for Belfast at March 2023, with 9,531 (78.3%) in housing stress;
- Just over 1,580 social housing allocations in 2022/23. An identified need for new 7,982 new social units over the next five years;
- Investment requirement of £123k per dwelling or £4k per annum; and
- Challenges with the delivery of planned and response maintenance including major adaptations.

She detailed the Key Housing Opportunities, as follows:

- Across Northern Ireland, the NIHE had completed more than 1300 retrofits of its existing stock;
- Increased investment in stock, provided positive impacts for local supply chains;
- Regionally, £250m in new work had received approval and was commencing in Autumn 2023;
- New Modern Methods of Construction Pilot, a significant opportunity;
- Progress ongoing to enable the NIHE to borrow in order to invest in its stock and add to new supply; and
- Strategic partnerships on homelessness, for example, 'Homewards'; systems change.

In conclusion, the Chief Executive emphasised the importance of the Community Planning Partnership and working together towards meeting the housing outcomes within the Belfast Agenda. She advised that she Chaired the Housing Led Regeneration Group, which specifically focused on identifying the right land in the right location to satisfy housing need with other public sector partners. She advised that this group had been working closely at identifying and overcoming barriers to use as levers to bring forward other public sector lands, stating that she was hopeful that a further update, detailing the top 10/15 sites that had been identified across DfC, NIHE and BCC sites, would be available in the Autumn, with progress to be made as a matter of urgency. In addition, the Regeneration Group was also considering the stumbling blocks that were preventing other organisations getting involved and using it to try and encourage other public partners to sign up to the initiative.

**Special People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 6th September, 2023**

Several of the Members spoke positively about the working relationships between the Council and the NIHE staff, however, highlighted the demands and pressures that staff vacancies were putting on the service.

A Member noted the success of the retro fit programme and expressed disappointment that it was ending.

In terms of the Affordable Warmth Scheme, the Chief Executive reiterated that the eligibility for the scheme had not changed, and she undertook to provide a written update to Members on the detail of the Scheme.

During discussion a Member highlighted that a demand existed for smaller units as well as family homes. She stated that when Place Shaping were considering housing schemes it was not just about addressing housing need but also building communities.

The Members also discussed the growing housing need, particularly among young families and single people, along with issues associated with poor housing standards. They also discussed the high cost of private rentals in specific areas of the city now often making it impossible for people to private rent in some areas. During discussion it was noted that single persons represented 46% of the waiting list in housing stress, this was a significant % of the overall figures.

A Member sought the latent demand figures for each Common Landlord Area, stating that she did not feel that the NIHE accurately recorded the data for people's preferential area. She cited East Belfast as an example, with residents of Tullycarnet and the Tower Blocks having priority over other applicants in this area, this often resulted in people having to choose another area if they wished to be housed quicker, however, their preferential area would not actually be recorded as they 'opted' to be housed elsewhere. She stated that, in terms of shaping places, this data would be crucial to understanding the need for each of the Common Landlord Areas.

The NIHE representative confirmed that a pilot of latent demand had been successful in the Sandy Row area.

Detailed discussion ensued in regard to housing need and demand and it was agreed that a separate workshop would be convened with the NIHE and Committee Members to discuss this specific matter.

In response to several others issues which had been raised during discussion, the representatives confirmed:

- that the NIHE continued to prioritise work with a range of partners to secure additional temporary accommodation provision, with particular consideration for the needs of those with addiction.
- that the NIHE rents needed to be affordable and sustainable for both the tenant and landlord (NIHE), ensuring the correct balance for both;
- the paving of gardens was not usually considered but the NIHE officer undertook to discuss the specific case with the Member;

**Special People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 6th September, 2023**

- that officers were aware of the Build Shankill initiative and knew of the desire to redevelop the area with social housing;
- the NIHE had a policy on Electric Vehicle Charging Points and agreed to forward this for circulation to the Members;
- the Housing Executive was committed to delivering housing across all housing tenures and confirmed the LDP's 20% affordable housing policy;
- the powers that the NIHE had to bring vacant/dilapidated properties back into use and also noted the age of a lot of the current stock;
- in terms of the large number of vacant houses throughout the City, that the NIHE relied on landlord single let properties being presented for rental; and
- that the NIHE Chief Executive had scheduled a meeting with the Council's Chief Executive to discuss the potential loss of housing providers in the market due to the impact of HMO legislation on short-term accommodation.

The Chief Executive highlighted the budget constraints for the next financial year and the impact this would have on the investment into additional homes, specifically a 25% reduction in capital funding for new build housing. She reported that, historically, the NIHE would seek to deliver circa 2,000 new starts on site, but with this reduction to the programme, realistically this would equate to 1,500 per year. This was on the back of waiting lists increasing by approximately 19%, therefore, people would inevitably have to wait longer to access a new home.

She detailed that there was a need for 7,984 new homes over the next 5 years with 1,985 homes programmed, this would require additional capital funding to support as well as ensuring that housing associations had the capacity to deliver this need, this would obviously only add to the housing stress situation.

Detailed discussion ensued regarding homelessness, the Members were advised that the level of demand was unprecedented and that the NIHE staff were seeking to identify additional temporary accommodation from every source possible. Those efforts, however, were set against circumstances in which accessing temporary accommodation options was more difficult than ever. This was in part due to demand in the private rented sector, an option which via single lets had traditionally provided a large proportion of the temporary accommodation portfolio. Unfortunately, due to the numbers of those presenting, the NIHE was now having to spend most of the homelessness budget in providing temporary accommodation (£9.2m out of a total £23.71m across the region), as opposed to spending this money on tackling homelessness.

During discussion the Members highlighted the lack of suitable accommodation for those who live with an addiction.

The Chief Executive advised that officers at both operational and strategic levels continued to explore options to increase provision across a range of potential types of temporary

**Special People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 6th September, 2023**

accommodation. In addition, the NIHE's Complex Lives Team was working closely with accommodation partners to create planned and supported moves on options for those in temporary accommodation to encourage turnover and create space within low threshold accommodation providers. Partners were committed to supporting the further development and expansion of this model.

The Members were also advised that the Housing Executive could only discharge its statutory duty to those who had FDA via the acceptance of a social rented property or refusal of two reasonable offers. She detailed that in cases which had yet to have their duty discharged, the NIHE would continue to meet its statutory duty via the provision of temporary accommodation.

The Chief Executive concluded by advising the Members that every effort was being made to source additional temporary accommodation.

The Chairperson thanked the NIHE representatives for attending.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed to convene a workshop to further consider housing supply and demand.

Chairperson

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People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 12th September, 2023

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murray (Chairperson);
Councillors Bell, Bower, R. Brooks, Canavan,
Cobain, de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
R-M Donnelly, Flynn, Kelly, Magee, Maghie,
McAteer, McCusker, Ó Néill and Verner.

In attendance: Mrs. C. Matthews, Director of Resources and Fleet;
Mr. D. Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were recorded from Councillors Black and Bunting.

Minutes

The Committee was asked to note that the minutes of the meetings of the Committee of 8th August had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th September, subject to the following amendments:

- Under the heading Pitches Strategy Update, the Council agreed that the minute under the heading “Pitches Strategy Update” be amended to reflect that a report was being undertaken by Council officers in relation to the use of micro plastics, which would include Health and Safety Risks, and the duties and obligations of the Council, in this regard; and
- Under the heading The Bullring DFC/BSC Capital Project, the Council agreed that a report be submitted to a future Committee meeting in relation to the operation of the Divis Back Path Facility and the reinstatement of the temporary facility management agreement that had previously been in place.

Request for Matter to be Taken Back for Further Consideration

Responsible Dog Ownership

- under the heading “Responsible Dog Ownership”, the Council agreed that the minute be taken back to the Committee for further consideration, and to allow further information on the issue to be provided.

Sustainable Period Product Scheme

- under the heading “Sustainable Period Product Scheme”, the Council agreed that the minute be taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

Street Sign Format

- under the heading “Street Sign Format” the Council rejected the minute and accordingly, the Council agreed that the report requested on the issue would not be submitted to the Committee for consideration.

The minutes of the meetings of 8th August were taken as read and signed as correct, subject to the amendments as outlined.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Doherty declared an interest in agenda item 4b Matters referred back from Council - Sustainable Period Products Scheme as he had previously collaborated with the Council regarding this scheme.

Item Withdrawn from Agenda

The Committee noted that agenda item 5 (d) Belfast City Council (BCYC) Terms of Members and Recruitment had been withdrawn from the agenda.

Restricted

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

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

Presentation

All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. P. Pinto and Ms. K. Charnley representing the All-Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care on what was Palliative Care Week, an annual public awareness campaign that was held each September.

Ms. Pinto commenced by thanking the Committee for the opportunity to present on the work of the Institute. She advised that it had been established in 2011, as a membership organisation that sought to promote excellence in palliative care. It had a total of 28 members, which included hospices, health and social care organisations, charities, and universities on the island of Ireland.

She advised that the Institute undertook work in research, education and practice, and policy and engagement. Through those areas it sought to improve the palliative care experience of people with life-limiting conditions and their families, through the following measures:

- involvement of service users, carers and communities in palliative care delivery and development, particularly through its volunteer group, Voices4Care (54 individuals across the island of Ireland, some of them service users, carers or former carers and interested citizens; inform and guide the work of the Institute);
- working to integrate palliative care across the health system so people were supported as early as possible; and
- supporting the development of specialist palliative care services for everyone who required it.

She detailed that they were currently on the third day of the 10th annual Palliative Care Week campaign. She highlighted that this week was very important because there were many misconceptions about palliative care, often meaning that people who could be benefiting from the services and having a better quality of life did not. Palliative care was usually associated with end-of-life care and cancer, however, she explained that it was much more than that. It was also for symptom management, providing respite for carers and family members and that it could be provided upon diagnosis and for several years, not just at end-of-life. It was also important to highlight that it was not just for cancer, it was also for other conditions such as heart failure, motor neurone disease and dementia, amongst others.

Whilst this campaign was led by the Institute it was very much driven and informed by the palliative care sector. She advised that there were many different events, in person and online, taking place across the island to try and bring more awareness and knowledge to the general public.

She thanked the Committee for the opportunity to present to highlight and publicise the issue and she encouraged the Members to have conversations around death, dying,

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th September, 2023**

bereavement and advance care planning to ensure that the public was well informed and able to avail of the available services when and if they should need to avail of them.

Noted.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 1 2023/24

The Director of City Services summarised the contents of the report which presented a Quarter 1 financial position for the People and Communities Committee, including a forecast of the year end outturn. She explained that the Quarter 1 position for the Committee showed an underspend of £1.2m, representing 0.7% of the net expenditure budget. She also advised that, while the Quarter 1 forecasting was early in the financial year, it obviously fell short of the Corporate targeted £3m in year savings required to deliver a Council balanced budget.

The Members noted that work was ongoing with departments to review plans to ensure that service expenditure was within cash limits by the year end and that revised forecasts would be included in the Quarter 2 finance report.

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

**Update on Local Government
Regional Resilience Function**

The Director of City Services asked the Committee to note the updated Local Government Regional Resilience function and to grant approval of the reviewed Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and Belfast City Council.

She reported that the update proposal had been presented to the NI branch of the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) at its meeting in August 2023 and all 10 councils had subsequently been asked to review and approve.

She also referred to an update on SOLACE which provided a summary of a few key current work priorities, the Covid-19 Inquiry, Martyn's Law, an update of the review mechanism for regional partnership arrangements and also upcoming multi agency training. She advised that, in relation to routine work, all councils were active members of the sub regional Emergency Preparedness Groups, and all Council Emergency Planning lead officers met regularly via the Local Government Emergency Planning Group.

A Member welcomed the progress that had been made regarding Martyn's Law and the impact that it was having.

The Committee noted the terms of the updated SLA and agreed that Belfast City Council sign the updated agreement to enable the ongoing support for the regional resourcing model for local government civil contingencies.

Mullaghglass site update

The Director of City Services provided an update the Committee in terms of the ongoing legal proceedings regarding the Mullaghglass site.

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th September, 2023**

A Member advised that complaints had also been received regarding odour emanating from another separate site.

The Committee:

- noted the update on legal proceedings and granted approval for officers to enter into without prejudice discussions with the legal representatives of Alpha Resource Management Ltd. to explore the resolution of this dispute on a consensual basis, based on the advice from Senior Counsel; and
- agreed to submit a report to a future meeting regarding odour nuisance investigation and engagement with other agencies.

Matters referred back from the Council/Motions

Responsible Dog Ownership

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 8th August which had been referred back to the Committee by the Council at its meeting on 4th September. An extract of the minute is set out hereunder:

HYBRID MEETING OF THE CITY
PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8th August, 2023

Responsible Dog Ownership

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide members of the People and Communities Committee with an update on addressing better responsible dog ownership, in particular:

- ***The Committee noted the previous update at the meeting on 7 March 2023 and requested a Members' Workshop to discuss the issues and potential solutions to dog fouling in the city in more detail.***
- ***Actions taken following the Members' Workshop on 25 April 2023 on Tackling Dog Fouling in the City; and***

- *The deferred decision regarding proposed changes to Fixed Penalty Fines for dog fouling offences and littering offences.*

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 *The Committee is asked to:*

- *Note the actions and outcomes following the Members' Workshop on 25 April 2023.*
- *Reconsider Options 1 – 3 in relation to the new fixed penalty limits for dog fouling and agree a preferred option.*
- *Consider Option 4 - applying any changes made to the fixed penalty limits for dog fouling offences to littering offences.*

3.0 Main Report

3.1 PART 1 – Members' Workshop

3.2 *A Members' Workshop on responsible dog ownership and the tackling of dog fouling in the city took place on 25 April 2023. An overview of the Dog Warden Service was followed with fouling statistics and trends; the challenges when tackling dog fouling and updates from the various teams in the Council with responsibility for tackling dog fouling.*

3.3 *Sixteen actions have been grouped under eight headings and since the workshop, officers in the Dog Warden Service, Environmental Education and Outreach Team, Corporate Marketing and Communications, Open Spaces and Streetscene and the Performance and Improvement Unit have held further workshops and been working through these actions.*

DATA

3.4 *ACTION 1 – Consider how best to use data from street inspections / street index data or other data sources to identify hot spots and look at impact. Consider how best to provide data to Members.*

3.5 *A full analysis of the available data was carried out and the key findings were:*

- *Customer complaints in relation to dog fouling increased by 14% from 21/22 (889) to 22/23 (1013).*
- *The data from the Council's Quality Monitoring Survey evidences a seasonal trend to dog fouling, where there is increased dog fouling in the winter months (December –*

February) compared with the summer months (June – August). This same seasonal trend has been identified in customer complaints recorded by the Customer Hub. It shows from about November to March in both 2021/22 and 2022/23 there was a sharp rise in complaints.

- The number of fixed penalties and revenue from the fines are currently low. Fouling detection patrols are resource intensive and are carried out in pairs. We are continuing to review the opportunity for fouling detection patrols against the other demands on the Dog Wardens time.*
- There was a greater number of people with dog licences pre-pandemic than post pandemic.*

3.6 *Outcome 1 - We will continue to use the data from complaints (via public and Members) and the Quality Monitoring Surveys to target hot spot areas and direct resources. Resources permitting, additional fouling patrols will operate between December and February. We are continuing to work towards pre-pandemic levels of enforcement activity. A licensing intervention has been introduced with an additional resource secured to tackle the backlog. Open Spaces and Streetscene will review the available data and determine how best to circulate future performance information.*

3.7 *ACTION 2 – Benchmark other locations with good practice.*

We restricted our benchmarking to Northern Ireland as we felt that other NI authorities would provide information that was most relevant to Belfast in managing these issues. 8 of the 10 councils responded. We asked a series of questions about fouling patrols; dog enclosures; dog control orders; signage; stencilling; provision of free poo bags and use of dispensers. We also reviewed the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Briefing 2019 which collated a list of good ideas from local authorities across the UK:

- The Green Dog Walkers Scheme*
- Rewards for residents reporting fouling*
- Chalk stencils with messages being painted onto pavements*
- Highlighting fouling with bright coloured sprays*
- Glow-in-the-dark posters to target night-time fouling*
- Dog Watch Schemes – inspired by Neighbourhood Watch Schemes*

- *A Council reporting app that allows individuals to identify the location of fouling*

3.8 *Outcome 2 – Where appropriate the benchmarking findings have been included in the relevant actions below.*

3.9 **ACTION 3 – Survey / updated research**

We reviewed available research including that commissioned by BCC and carried out by QUB (Canine Behaviour Centre, School of Psychology) in 2004 and 2009. We have re-engaged with QUB and are hoping to work with the university in the coming academic year to draw up a strategy for new research that will be tailored to our needs. However, the university has stressed that resources are limited and any research will need to be conducted within very tight parameters.

3.10 *We also reviewed the most recent research from the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) Briefing 2019 which included findings from local authorities across the UK. It notes dog fouling is one of the most prevalent issues for local authority environmental services. It is particularly difficult to tackle for a number of reasons:*

- *People are aware they could be fined, but many do not think they will ever be caught;*
- *Fouling can happen at any time of day or night, so patrolling often will not catch the offenders;*
- *Residents are (rightfully) hesitant to confront residents who persistently allow their dog to foul;*
- *Prosecution requires good evidence;*
- *Attempts to introduce new dog controls to combat dog fouling can lead to a public*
- *backlash;*
- *The public is still largely unaware that (in many areas) they can dispose of dog waste in any available local authority litter bin;*
- *Many people do not consider leaving dog waste bags on the ground fouling.*

3.11 *Outcome 3 – We will continue to engage with QUB regarding opportunities for bespoke research. We will seek to increase awareness of successful prosecutions and will work to address the difficulties listed above through our education programme.*

MESSAGING - EDUCATIONAL MESSAGING VIA LEAFLET DOOR DROPS

3.12 ACTION 4 – Build on current leaflet drops with public awareness messaging in identified hot spot areas.

This is a cost effective and visible action. However, it does have limitations. If we leaflet a street with significant dog fouling, it is not necessarily the residents of that street that are allowing dogs to foul in their own street. In an attempt to mitigate for this we will normally leaflet several surrounding streets. Fouling in gated alley ways can be attributed to specific houses with access to the alley way and only those houses would be targeted through leafleting.

Outcome 4 – Dog Wardens will continue to leaflet houses in hot spot areas. Colleagues in our Enforcement Team, who tackle littering, will continue to assist with leaflet drops.

3.13 ACTION 5 – Humanise the message, make messaging local. Harder hitting – health impacts / implications, especially to children.

3.14 *The ‘think again’ dog fouling campaign was launched during October/November 2022, with a second burst of activity in February 2023 and it has recently been shortlisted for a CIPR (Chartered Institute of Public Relations) Pride Award for best Integrated Campaign. Our objective was to create a campaign using real insights and research to help influence behaviour change by encouraging dog owners to pick up after their dog, take responsibility and Think Again! The campaign used integrated communications consisting of heavyweight advertising, social media and innovative PR.*

3.15 *Independent research was commissioned to evaluate the paid for advertising element of the campaign and it found that 93% recalled the message; 80% said the artwork was understandable and 72% said its greatest benefit was encouraging dog owners to take responsibility. As the ‘think again’ campaign is so new Marketing and Corporate Communications have recommended that we do not invest in a new campaign creative until 2025/26 in order to let the ‘Think Again’ campaign embed and percolate. The current campaign shows the consequences of not cleaning up after your dog. Future campaigns could focus on the perpetrator (hopefully the QUB research will help us identify main perpetrators) and creative approach would also be reviewed at this time to incorporate feedback from the workshop such as the possibility of having Belfast identifiable images within advertising assets.*

- 3.16 *Outcome 5 – We plan to develop a new campaign creative in 2024/25 (for use in 2025/26) and will use up to date research to identify who to target and how best to deliver the message.*

- 3.17 *ACTION 6 – Use of social media in future campaigns, particular focus on targeting hot spots, males under 30 etc. and the evaluation of impacts.*

Our integrated marketing campaigns already use a wide range of media formats (including social media) to target people during all aspects of their life, when at home before they walk their dog, when they are out walking their dog, when they are online and travelling to and from work. Hotspot areas are currently targeted within current dog fouling campaigns for example during the ‘think again’ campaign Adshel posters were located at hot spot areas.

- 3.18 *Outcome 6 – Marketing and Corporate Communications team will select the most appropriate media channels in future campaigns to target hot spot areas based on findings/feedback and select the most effective ways of reaching perpetrators based on any new research findings.*

- 3.19 *ACTION 7 – Further promotion of the Green Dog Walker scheme to reward positive behaviour.*

Our Environmental Education and Outreach Team promote this scheme in our parks during summer fun days with Scoop Dog and also support this scheme with social media activity. (See Appendix 1 & 2) Anyone signing up to the scheme must have a licence for their dog so the scheme is raising awareness of the licensing requirements too. By taking the Green Dog Walkers' pledge and using a Green Dog Walker's lead, owners commit to:

- always clean up after their dog;*
- carry extra dog waste bags;*
- give free dog waste bags to other dog walkers.*

- 3.20 *Outcome 7 – We will continue to promote our successful Green Dog Walker scheme.*

- 3.2.1 *MARKETING – SIGNAGE*

ACTION 8 – Signage in parks / on street, consider positioning / visibility and work with communities on location.

Our Open Spaces and Streetscene colleagues in parks will continue to use signage at appropriate locations throughout our parks. Whilst we appreciate the role of signage and agree with Members that location is important, we are reluctant to encourage

excessive signage. We believe the current level of street signage throughout the city is sufficient. We will however still consider requests for additional signage but need to be cognisant of the requirement for permission from the Department for Infrastructure should we want to erect signage on its property. As an alternative to street signage we have designed a poster (see Appendix 2) which we can be distributed to local communities in hot spot areas for indoor use.

- 3.22** *Outcome 8 – Open Spaces and Streetscene will continue to use signage in our parks. The Dog Warden Service and our Environmental Education and Outreach Team will continue to engage with communities and raise awareness of the new poster.*

- 3.23** *ACTION 9 – Signage: Consider materials, design bespoke signs for specific areas. Consider CCTV message as a deterrent, wardens patrolling this area etc.*

Through our benchmarking we have determined that all councils in NI use signs with a variety of construction materials including metal, Perspex, cortex and banners. There was a difference of opinion as to whether graphic signage or cute dogs were the best way to engage with dog owners. Some include the level of the fines on signage and others do not. Given the limitation to use DfI property for additional signage we have instead continued to develop our banners (See Appendix 4) that can be used on park and school railings. We will take account of all of the benchmarking information when developing our next campaign during 2024/25.

Members had suggested CCTV signage (similar to PSNI speed camera signage) to be used as a deterrent. We have taken advice and use of such signage, when we have no CCTV would mean we would intentionally be misleading the public and it would put us at odds with our own Code of Conduct. We already use social media as a deterrent by advising of current and future dog fouling patrols.

- 3.25** *Outcome 9 – We will consider the benchmarking findings on signage when developing our next campaign. We will continue to use social media about dog fouling patrols as a deterrent.*

- 3.26** *ACTION 10 – Chase DfI for permission to stencil. Review stencilling and its impact on changing behaviour.*

Through our benchmarking we have determined that 7 of the 8 councils that responded use or have used stencilling. Anecdotally, it is considered to be better at raising awareness in the summertime. We have now received confirmation from DfI that it does not object in principle to stencilling. However, we are

required to contact the appropriate area manager for each location, to obtain permission, in advance of any stencilling. This is because stencilling can cause damage to certain pavement surfaces. We have already carried out a small pilot of stencilling at schools in East Belfast and are now waiting on permission from DfI for hot spot schools in North, South and West Belfast. A Quality Monitoring Survey will be carried out before and after in N, S and W and we will then evaluate the effectiveness of stencilling.

- 3.27** *Outcome 10 – Provided we obtain permission from DfI we will undertake a small pilot of stencilling when the new school term starts and evaluate its effectiveness.*

3.28 **MARKETING – COMMUNITY**

ACTION 11 – Actively encourage reporting, make reporting process for residents straightforward. Consider pros and cons of providing bag dispensers in certain locations for emergency use.

- 3.29** *In the last year we have amended our online dog fouling reporting form. It has been broken down into several questions which prompt more detailed information and we have found the information provided is more useful for targeting hot spots / individuals. The ‘think again’ campaign also encouraged reporting and our colleagues who manage the social media channels always make a response when fouling is reported.*
- 3.30** *We recently ran a Billboard Challenge focused on dog fouling in Spring/ Summer School Term and had an excellent response with 19 schools participating. The Key Stage 2 pupils received an interactive, curriculum-based talk around dog fouling and the issues surrounding it. The pupils then designed their own billboards, and we had 4 winners (N/S/E/W) who had their artwork displayed on a local billboard. (See Appendix 5 & 6). The entries were such high quality we added 4 runners-up, who will receive their entries as a banner for their school. We received positive media coverage of this project.*
- 3.31** *From our bench marking all the responding councils provide free poo bags in variety of ways e.g. at pop up events, when on fouling patrols, via Green Dog Walker Scheme, in community centres and when sending out licence renewal letters. There were reports of complaints when supplies at council buildings ran out as dog owners mistakenly thought it was the council’s role to provide bags. In Belfast we will continue to supply all community centres with free dog bags and a poster encouraging centre users to pick up free bags there.*

- 3.32 *Based on the costings for the dispensers that were installed in Belfast during the COVID pandemic we estimate each dispenser would cost in the region of £800 - £1000 to purchase and install. There would then be on-going refilling and maintenance costs. We have over 50 parks and open spaces and most have multiple entrances. The bench marking findings demonstrated some difficulties where poo bag dispensers were located outside – in one trial in 4 parks all the dispensers were either destroyed or stolen, another reported that dispensers were ‘robbed’ almost as soon as they were filled and vandalised dispensers are no longer being replaced. There is the potential when free poo bags are provided in parks for those observed committing an offence to use the lack of poo bags in the park dispenser as a defence. We firmly believe that purchasing poo bags is the responsibility of all dog owners and whilst provision of them at events or during fouling patrols is beneficial, the cost to provide them via dispensers is prohibitive and contradicts the message of responsible dog ownership.*
- 3.33 *Our Dog Wardens will continue to engage with the public to encourage reporting of dog fouling and to provide free poo bags where appropriate. Our Park Wardens will do the same within our parks.*
- 3.34 *Outcome 11 – We will continue to encourage reporting and to provide free dog poo bags at events, at community centres, during fouling patrols and in our engagement with visitors to our parks.*
- 3.35 **SERVICE DELIVERY**
- ACTION 12 – Continue to deliver a visible response to reports of fouling.**
- 3.36 *Through our benchmarking we determined that none of the 8 responding councils patrol 7 days a week as is the case in Belfast. All councils had some scope for variations in the timings of patrols to take account of problem areas, time of year etc. Two of the responding councils have used WISE Enforcement (an external, self-funding company) to enhance / support their Dog Warden fouling patrols. There was no agreement about the best time of day to detect fouling and it was considered to be extremely difficult to detect and more opportunistic in witnessing rather than at planned locations and times. There was a mix of high viz and low viz patrols across the 8 councils with 3 using a blend of both.*
- 3.37 *Outcome 12 – We will continue to deliver a visible response to reports of fouling with the use of social media to highlight our activities.*

3.38 ACTION 13 – Consider dog enclosures in parks; more bins; more resources to deal with dog fouling; and more FIDO machines.

3.39 *Bench marking revealed that 5 of the 8 responding councils have separate dog enclosures in their parks. Within Belfast there are 2 dog enclosures – one at the Grove and one at Stormont. Previous Committee approval was granted in August 2018 with regards to pilot dog enclosures in the West, South & East, however, due to financial pressures, resourcing and Covid this was not progressed. The financial and resourcing pressures still exist, however, this will be refreshed and updated and taken back through the Area Working Groups and then to Committee for approval.*

3.40 *Outcome 13 – Officers to revisit and refresh the 2018 report and to include graffiti and other pressures such as Anti-Social Behaviour.*

3.41 ENFORCEMENT

Action 14 – Bring back report to Committee on increasing dog fouling fine to maximum of £200.

3.42 *Outcome 14 – See Part 2 of this Committee Report.*

3.43 LEGISLATION

Action 15 – Consider if new legislation is needed.

3.44 *There is provision within the existing legislation for Councils to decide to introduce Control Orders for specific scenarios and in Belfast we have one for dog fouling and one for the maximum number of dogs that can be walked by one person. A legal process which involves public consultation must take place before a council makes a dog control order. Back in 2012/23 the Council did consider Dog Control Orders for dogs on leads and exclusion zones but ultimately decided that more information / consultation was needed prior to introducing additional Dog Control Orders.*

3.45 *All but one of the responding councils have dog control orders including dog exclusion zones and dogs on leads. They apply at various locations e.g. in parks, cemeteries and other specified land owned by the Council and if appropriate at various times. They are restricted to Council owned land because the legislation states: 'No offence is committed where the person has a reasonable excuse for failing to keep the dog on a lead, or the owner, occupier or other person or authority having control of the land has consented (generally or specifically) to the person failing to do so.'*

3.46 *The primary consideration is to balance the interests of those in charge of dogs against the interests of those affected by the activities of dogs, bearing in mind the need for people, in particular children, to have access to dog-free areas and areas where dogs are kept under strict control, and the need for those in charge of dogs to have access to areas where they can exercise their dogs without undue restriction. Those who responded provided anecdotal evidence that fouling is less likely to happen when a dog is on a lead and our own Dog Wardens agree.*

3.47 *Outcome 15 – We already have Byelaws that require dogs to be kept on leads on certain council owned land but there are difficulties with enforcement (including lack of a fixed penalty) however a feasibility study could be carried out regarding the introduction of a Control Order for Dogs on Leads in our parks, cemeteries etc.*

This is to be considered as part of the update report in Action 13.

3.48 **FINANCE**

Action 16 – Report back to Committee in August with costings of options where appropriate.

3.49 *Where appropriate, estimated costings have been included under the relevant actions throughout the report. In addition a separate Committee Report, including costings for Action 13 will be submitted at a later date.*

PART 2 - PROPOSED CHANGES TO FIXED PENALTY FINES FOR DOG CONTROL OFFENCES

3.50 *In our report for Committee on 7 March 2023 we provided details of The Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 which came into force on 30 December 2022 and amend the previous 2012 Regulations. The effect is to alter the amount of a fixed penalty capable of being specified by the Council for certain fixed penalties. We detailed 4 options for the Committee to review and after some discussion it was agreed to defer until a future meeting. 4 councils in NI have already increased their fines and we would ask that the options below are considering again.*

3.51 **OPTIONS**

- *Option 1 – no change*
- *Option 2 – increase to maximum of £200 with reduction if paid within 10 days. Suggested reduction to £100 as an*

incentive to pay the fixed penalty promptly and avoid court action.

- *Option 3 – increase but not to maximum with reduction if paid within 10 days. Could be anything from £90 - £190, with any level of reduction.*
- *Option 4 – Consider applying any changes made to the fixed penalty limits for dog fouling offences to littering offences. The Council previously agreed to set the level of fixed penalty fine for littering at £80, reduced to £60 if paid within 10 days. There would be no additional signage costs as most signs include information about dog fouling and littering.*

3.52 Finance and Resource Implications

Part 1

There is currently no additional budget available to implement any of newly the suggested outcomes in this report.

Part 2

There are cost implications if changes are required to signage. We do already have a budget for signage and cost varies depending on the size of the sign and the method of mounting but is in the region of £20 - £25 plus VAT each. The livery on council vehicles would also need to be removed or updated.

3.53 Asset and Other Implications

None

3.53 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

The Committee thanked the Director of City Services for the update report and detailed discussion ensued regarding the ongoing issues that had been highlighted at the workshop.

During discussion the following issues were, once again, discussed/highlighted:

- *The lack of dog off lead facilities in parks and open spaces*
- *Undertaking a feasibility study for dog off lead facilities, citing Wallace Park in Lisburn as a good example;*

- *Noted the introduction of a new streamlined digital process and the rates charges for concessionary fees for dog licencing;*
- *Enhancing and localising the dog foul media campaign and also promoting and publicising the need for dog licences;*
- *Welcomed the stencilling campaign in east Belfast and sought to extend it to the south, north and west of the city (to include liaison with DfI in this regard);*
- *Discussion regarding the provision of free dog foul bags in problem areas within park locations and not just via community centres and publicising that they were available;*
- *Ensuring adequate bins for disposal were available for the disposal of dog waste and noted the importance of the location of these bins;*
- *The use of Fido machines and need to benchmark with other Councils;*
- *Ensuring adequate staff resources, with costings sought for what would be deemed to be necessary to improve the service;*
- *A suggestion that officers promote and give out advice regarding the Dogs Trust neutering scheme, which was available at a cost of £50 for dogs belonging to owners on means-tested benefits (for a restricted number of breeds);*
- *Sought the location and details of how many people had signed up to participate in the Green Walkers Scheme; and*
- *The development of responsible dog ownership campaigns in the Council's parks and playing field locations.*

The Director highlighted to the Committee that it had previously decided not to increase the fixed penalty limits for dog and litter offences and asked the Members whether they wished revisit this again in light of discussions.

A number of Members stated that they would be opposed to increasing the fees at this stage and would be keen to see some of the other initiatives implemented prior to this measure being further considered.

Following discussion, it was

*Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,*

That the Committee agrees to introduce option 2 and option 4, as detailed in the report.

On a vote, 6 Members voted for the proposal and 13 against and it was declared lost.

Further Proposal

*Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,*

That the Committee agrees to introduce option 2.

On a vote, 11 Members voted for the proposal and 8 against and it was declared carried.

The Committee therefore:

- ***agreed to adopt Option 2 in respect of fixed penalty limits for dog fouling and dog fouling offences - to increase the fine to a maximum of £200, with a reduction of £100 if paid within 10 days as an incentive to pay the fixed penalty promptly;***
 - ***agreed not to apply any changes to littering offences at this time and noted that an update report would be submitted to committee in due course.***
-

Following consideration of the aforementioned minute, it was

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

“This Council recognises that dog fouling is a continuous problem in our city, with many streets experiencing persistent instances of dog fouling throughout the year.

The Council notes that many responsible dog owners will pick up after the dog, but for many who continue to allow their dogs to foul a change in behaviour is needed.

The Council is asked to undertake a feasibility study on providing street bins in areas where fouling has been a persistent problem. This will include using data from members of the public, elected members and data gathered through the customer hub to identify hot spots within our communities where dog fouling is a problem.

This feasibility should include:

- An initial trial period across four areas of the city where dog fouling is a persistent problem.
- Benchmark across other councils on the use of street bins to deal with dog fouling.
- A cost/benefit analysis to determine ongoing administration costs of providing a street bins scheme.”

The Members agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting regarding the Council undertaking a feasibility study on providing street bins in areas where fouling had been a persistent problem and added that this should also include consideration of the erection of lamppost bins in certain hotspots areas.

In regard to the minute that had been referred back to Committee, the Director asked that consideration of the minute from the 8th August Committee be deferred to enable officers

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th September, 2023**

to prepare a report on the various options available regarding fixed penalty fines and the Members were in agreement.

A further Member asked for an update on FIDO machines to be included in a future report.

Sustainable Period Product Scheme

Extract from Minutes of:-

HYBRID MEETING OF THE
PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 8th August, 2023

Sustainable Period Product Scheme

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 provide members with an update on the success of the Period Waste Scheme (March 2022 - current) and seek direction on future delivery.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the contents of the report and make a recommendation that the Environmental Education & Outreach team will cease provision from April 2024 given that:**
- current demand appears to have been met through the first two pilot programmes;
 - there is no available budget to run a third programme
 - provision will be established through the new legislation
- 2.2 The Committee is also asked to authorise the Director of City and Organisational Strategy to submit a formal written response on behalf of council, as outlined at 3.13, to the TEO consultation on the provision of free period products.**

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1** The aim of the Period Waste initiative was to raise awareness and encourage increased use of reusable period products. This will have an environmental benefit as it will reduce the amount of period waste that is entering our waste stream and being landfilled, and it will also reduce plastic waste. Disposal of single use menstrual products - tampons, pads and applicators generates 200,000 tonnes of waste per year in the UK¹. In addition, sanitary waste can be made of up to 90% plastic.
- 3.2** In the most recent BCC Waste Composition Study (2014) it was found that 1.87% of all miscellaneous combustible waste (the largest category of waste we collect) was of a sanitary waste nature (including other absorbent hygiene products but excluding nappies). This means each household was producing on average 3.38Kg of this type of product waste per year.
- 3.3** This project was primarily focused on waste reduction but also had the benefit of providing a sustainable resource for those affected by period poverty which is an added pressure on individuals and families as a result of the current cost of living pressures.
- 3.4** The pilot scheme was launched on 30 March 22 to unprecedented demand and in less than 24 hours the pilot had to be closed because of demand. Through the scheme we provided free access to reusable period products to 3,159 people in the Belfast area. Council worked with the social enterprise, 'Hey Girls'. (www.heygirls.co.uk) to deliver the scheme, where participants could register and order reusable sanitary products online.
- 3.5** Social media coverage and feedback on the scheme was also very positive. Commentary praised Belfast City Council for bringing the initiative forward. Over 95,000 people were reached through Council social media on the topic with over 225,000 people having viewed twitter posts promoting the scheme.
- 3.6** Market research targeted at participants of the pilot found that 94.2% of respondent use the products they received all or some of the time. 43.5% said they no longer use single use period products and 86.9% say it has lessened their use of single use products. The project has recently been awarded the Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful 'Behaviour Change Award for Tackling Single Use Plastic' for 22/23.

¹ Calculation by Natracare 2018

- 3.7 In August 22, SP&R approved expansion of the project and an additional budget allocation so that another tranche of the pilot could be delivered. This was launched in January 2023 and is currently ongoing. To date, 1770 individual orders of products have been processed during this phase of the pilot. As would be anticipated, the rate of requests for products has significantly decreased, given that products are reusable and therefore repeat orders from individuals would not be expected. This pilot continues to be promoted and it is projected that the remaining budget will be utilised by March 2024.
- 3.8 In addition to the extension of the pilot, a project with support from the Climate Change Fund was launched in June 2023. This project engages with partners in the Community Voluntary Sector (CVS) to provide them with reusable sustainable solutions to period poverty which they can then pass on to their service users. Officers have been engaging through women's groups and other CVS groups and have shared information with the Women's Steering Group as well as promoting the initiative through council's social media. Any group interested in becoming involved should email EnvironmentalOutreach@belfastcity.gov.uk

Future Considerations

- 3.9 Period products are essential items for personal care to address a normal biological need and should therefore be available to everyone who needs them, regardless of their economic status.
- 3.10 In recognition of this, the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (NI) was made by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2022 and requires that period products will be made available from May 2024. The requirements of the Act go beyond seeking to make provision for those in financial difficulty, there is a recognition that period products are necessary and essential items that should be available free of charge and accessible by all persons who need to use them.
- 3.11 The Executive Office (TEO) is currently undertaking a public consultation process which is seeking views on how best the Executive Office (TEO) can ensure that period products are 'obtainable free of charge' by 'all persons who need to use them', 'while in Northern Ireland'. Further detail on the background is contained in the full consultation document available here: www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-free-period-products.
- 3.12 A reasonable choice is required by the Act. Within the Act 'products' are defined to include tampons, sanitary towels and articles which are reusable. It is anticipated that there will be an

expectation that council will be a partner in the delivery of this service though no details are available at this stage.

- 3.13 The TEO consultation survey is predominantly seeking the views of those who use period products and/or who buy products on behalf of other family members. Therefore, whilst it would not be appropriate for council to answer the TEO these questions, it is recommended that council should submit a letter of response outlining our support for the need for period products to be offered to everyone as they are essential items for personal care to address a normal biological need and should therefore be available to everyone who needs them, regardless of their economic status. In addition, we will request early engagement with Council to explore our role in any delivery mechanism which is envisaged. Our response will also highlight the learning we have gained from our pilot initiatives on period poverty (as part of our Gender Equality Plan and linked, Belfast City Council launched a pilot offering free period products for the public in council buildings and facilities and free access to reusable period products and) and stress the importance of ongoing collaboration around this issue.

Recommendations for Reusable Period Product Pilot

- 3.14 The legislative requirement to be introduced by the Period Products (Free Provision) Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 will ensure that period products are available to individuals to ensure period dignity. The reasonable choice element will supersede the reusable period product pilot in that individuals can request reusable items within the legislation.

The Committee agreed 'in principle' to support the scheme, subject to funding. It, therefore, referred the matter to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to ascertain if funding could be secured, it was noted that the report would detail the options available, and that the level of funding, if any, that was allocated would determine whether the scheme could be supported and at what level.

Notice of Motion - Urban Wildflower Meadows

The Committee was advised that, at the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 29th August, the following motion on Urban Wildflower Meadows, which had been proposed by Councillor R. McLaughlin and seconded by Councillor Long, had been referred to the Committee for consideration.

"This Council reaffirms its commitment to enhancing our city's ecological credentials. Therefore, this Council is dedicated to a pilot project that will aim to identify one site for wildflower cultivation in each quadrant of the city. These sites must adhere to one of the following criteria: a) Owned by the Council itself, b) Owned by another Government Department, or c) Currently unadopted.

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th September, 2023**

The precise locations for these pilot projects will be presented for discussion during the inaugural convening of the area working groups.

This Council comprehends the benefits that Urban Wildflower Meadows can bring to our city, ranging from reduced maintenance to supporting our climate change ambitions, and ultimately leading to Belfast becoming a more biodiverse city.”

A Member stated that, whilst he welcomed the motion, he felt that much of this had already been included in a previous motion which had been adopted by the Committee in September 2022 in respect of a Herbicide Reduction Policy.

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed that a report on how this would be facilitated, resourced and managed would be submitted to a future meeting.

Committee/Strategic Issues

**Tree Strategy (including a short
Presentation on the Strategy)**

(Mr. A. McHaffie, Senior Woodland and Recreation Officer, and Ms. M. McAleer, Performance and Improvement Officer, attended in connection with this item.)

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. K. Rogers, Project Lead, Treeconomics.

Mr. Rogers commenced by providing an overview of the key aspects of the Belfast Tree Strategy 2022 – 2032, this included detail regarding the consultative process that had taken place with the various stakeholders, including the public.

He referred to the future vision for woodlands, hedges, and tree provision in the city, advising that the strategy had incorporated the aims of the Council and its key city partners and was reflective of existing programmes, such as, Belfast One Million Trees, the Belfast Local Development Plan and the Belfast Agenda. It had also connected with the Belfast Resilience Strategy, Green and Blue Infrastructure Plan with the aim of delivering 37 key actions over the next ten years.

He drew the Members’ attention to the vision of the Belfast Tree Strategy and how this vision would be achieved, noting that the strategy would have a 10-year life span from its launch date and would set out a commitment to delivering key priorities and actions through a fully resourced action plan which would be reviewed at approximately three yearly intervals.

The representative concluded by drawing the Members’ attention to the targets, priorities and actions that had been identified, along with specific detail as to how these would be delivered through the strategy, a copy of which was available [here](#).

The Committee then considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issue

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the outcome of the Belfast Tree Strategy public consultation and to seek approval for publication of the final strategy.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- **Consider this report along with a presentation on the development of the Belfast Tree Strategy and action plan from Kenton Rodgers, co-founder of Treeconomics and to give approval for the publication of the new Belfast Tree Strategy.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

At its meeting of the 8 November 2022 members of this committee received a report (copy at Appendix 1) on the development of the Belfast Tree Strategy. A public consultation commenced on 24 January 2023 and concluded on 24 April 2023. This included engagement with communities across Belfast with five workshops at the following venues:

- **Girdwood Community Hub**
- **Falls Park Bowling Pavilion**
- **Avoniel Leisure Centre**
- **2 Royal Avenue Belfast**
- **Malone House Belfast**

- 3.2 In total over 900 people attended the workshops during the 12- week period and 500 free trees were distributed along with practical advice on planting and maintenance from Council staff.**

- 3.3 This second phase of consultation also contained a survey delivered via the Your Say Belfast Platform on the Council Website. This received 119 responses.**

- 3.4 The key findings from the second phase of consultation were as follows:**

- **97% of respondents definitely agree or agree with the vision of the Belfast Tree Strategy.**

- 103 responses came from members of the public.
- Consultation responses were received from every DEA.
- 90% of respondents definitely agree or agree with the Councils targets, priorities and action on Trees and Urban Forest Structure, community framework and sustainable resource management.
- 89% agree with the 23 commitments the Council has set out with the strategy.

3.5 The commentary and feedback during the public consultation phase also included a wider range of views and asked for Council focus on the following areas:

- More trees and green spaces within the City Boundaries and City Centre
- Encourage volunteering and adopt a tree warden scheme to support the delivery of aims of the strategy.
- Stricter targets for native planting within each Council ward
- That the strategy is ecologically vital.
- Tree parks need to be created for peace and tranquility.
- More advice for people planting trees in their own gardens.
- Council to consider the maintenance, including pruning and mixed tree planting.
- More tree planting in working class communities in North Belfast and around the new university.
- Set aside land for orchards.
- Encourage DFI to adopt additional trees or landscaping within their schemes and address issues relating to maintenance (tree roots) in streets.
- Please remember to include native trees and wildflowers, which help pollinators.
- Strongly agree with the aim of developing a new biodiversity action Plan

3.6 Other important stakeholder engagement took place through presentations to and discussions with Belfast City Council Disability Advisory Panel and Council's Sustainability and Climate Change Board. The BBC Radio Ulster Gardening Programme also covered the development of the tree strategy and the public consultation events.

National Recognition

3.7 Belfast City Council's progressive approach to the development of the Belfast Tree Strategy has been noted at a national level and the Senior Woodland and Recreation officer has been invited to present a paper on the Belfast Tree Strategy at two conferences:

1. National Tree Officers conference – Reading, England on the 7th of November 2023
2. European i-Tree conference – Dundee, Scotland on the 20th of June 2024

3.8 The development process of the Belfast Tree Strategy was selected in July 2023 by researchers from the University of Cambridge as a case study for their research project on the Management of Physical Infrastructure Systems in Cities to Protect Public Health from Climate Change-Related Hazards.

Belfast Tree Strategy Action Plan – Development and Delivery

3.9 The Belfast Tree Strategy is accompanied by a 5 year action plan and a copy is attached at Appendix 3. This sets out in more detail the work that must be done to deliver the strategy, its aims, priorities, and commitments, including the actions and resources required for delivery starting from Oct 2023. A number of key actions are prioritised as follows:

1. Move from a 5 to a 3 year tree health and condition inspection Programme for all semi - mature to fully mature park trees, and from a 5 year to a 2 year tree health and condition tree inspection Programme for the Department for Infrastructure street trees which the Council manage on behalf of the DfI.
2. Undertake a detailed canopy cover assessment including woodlands and hedges.
3. Create an ‘opportunity tree planting plan’ for both hard and soft landscape areas across the city.
4. In partnership with the Woodland Trust – undertake a tree equity mapping exercise.
5. Coordinate collaborative arrangements to meet the objectives of the Council’s One Million Tree initiative.
6. Set up and establish a Tree Warden scheme across the city.
7. Coordinate collaborative arrangements to meet the objectives of the plan, including skills building, potential courses and feed into apprenticeship schemes.
8. Develop and manage trees within woodlands and assign a management plan for each woodland.
9. Undertake a Capital Asset Value for Amenity trees of trees owned by the Council
10. Commit to developing a new biodiversity action plan

Equity Mapping

3.10 One of the actions of the Belfast Tree Strategy highlighted above will be to undertake an Equity Mapping exercise across the city.

- 3.11 Equity Mapping looks at tree canopy cover in terms of health, air pollution, education, employment etc. Typically, lower income areas have fewer trees, and this is something which is acknowledged within the Tree Strategy, and it's recognised that trees should be made available to everyone in all areas of the city. The Woodland Trust are working with American Forests to bring Tree Equity Scores to the UK. This will help cities to assess tree cover and to prioritise areas where trees can be planted to provide the greatest benefits to local communities.
- 3.12 As a result of the close working relationship between the Woodland Trust and Belfast City Council, Belfast along with Birmingham City Council has been chosen by the Woodland Trust and American Forests to test the Tree Equity scoring model before its roll out across all UK cities. It would be important to note that this project will not incur any cost to the Council. As part of the Tree Equity Mapping project, the Woodland Trust would like to mark the launch of this initiative through a tree planting event in Belfast sometime between the end of November and December 2023 with some form of commemorative tree(s) in either a street, or a park such as Ormeau, Falls, Water Works or within a number of local school grounds, all of which has yet to be agreed upon and confirmed.
- 3.13 Discussions are ongoing with the Woodland Trust and if a park is the preferred option to plant a tree(s) we would seek Members approval to proceed, and the Woodland Trust has confirmed they will cover all costs associated with any tree planting.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.14 The development of the Belfast Tree Strategy and action plan to date has cost £30K. The Council has contributed £20k with provision for this made from existing revenue estimates in 2022. The remaining £10k was kindly provided by the Woodland Trust in the same year. Resourcing of staff and equipment required to deliver the strategy and associated activity is detailed within the action plan. Committee are asked to note that delivery of the action plan will require additional resources and investment in the Woodland & Recreation team. A subsequent bid for resources will be submitted as part of the Council budget estimates process for 2024/25.

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

- 3.15 There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs Implications identified at this point."

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th September, 2023**

A Member highlighted that he had specifically raised the installation of tree pits as road chicanes in residential areas to increase overall tree coverage, slow the speed of traffic, promote road safety, and support the development of active travel yet he did not see this specifically referenced within the strategy.

The Senior Woodland and Recreation Officer advised that this was part of the ongoing work of the Council regarding street trees, he confirmed that Council officers liaised regularly with the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) which was also keen to plant more trees but that both were trying to give awareness to the location of utilities. He confirmed that they were also keen to increase the areas with tree canopy cover throughout the city, however, they needed to be mindful that, equally as important, was ensuring that there was a proper maintenance programme, and that staff and utility providers were properly educated.

The need for utility companies and developers to try and find better alternatives when accessing sites, to avoid cutting down established trees, was also discussed.

The Committee discussed the issue of Tree Protection Orders and acknowledged that these were within the remit of the Planning Committee. Following discussion, the Committee agreed to recommend to the Planning Committee that it consider the options available during the planning application process to encourage developers not to remove existing trees from sites (trees that were not covered by Tree Protection Orders (TPOs)).

The Committee also discussed the success of the Tree Warden Scheme and Forest of Belfast Initiative and the need for these to be citywide initiatives as they had previously been limited to specific areas of the city.

At this stage in proceedings the Chairperson thanked Mr. Rodgers for his input, following which he left the meeting.

The Committee noted the presentation and report on the development of the Belfast Tree Strategy and action plan and granted approval for the publication of the new Belfast Tree Strategy.

Waste Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide an update to members on Waste Collections Management and performance.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

- **Note the contents of the report.**
- **Provide feedback on the current consultation on the draft regulations for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR for packaging scheme.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Waste Performance & Recycling Rates – 2022/23 Year to Date

- 3.1** DAERA has recently published the Northern Ireland, Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste Management Statistics for Q4 (Jan-Mar'23) 2022/23. The general picture is one of a stagnant recycling rate (46%) combined with a slightly increased energy recovery rate (28%) and corresponding decreasing reliance upon landfill (24%) as a disposal route.
- 3.2** An examination of the 12-month rolling figures for Belfast City Council, which in this instance can act as a proxy for the annual figures, indicates the following:
- **Municipal Waste Arisings** – the total tonnage of all types of waste collected by the Council was 158,000 tonnes. This is a reduction of 10,000 thousand tonnes (6%) on the previous year.
 - **Municipal Waste Recycling Rate** – the percentage of all types of waste collected by the Council which was re-used, recycled or composted, declined by 1% to 37%.
 - **Household Waste Recycling Rate**– the percentage of household waste only collected by the Council which was re-used, recycled or composted, remained unchanged at 41%.
- 3.3** The validated annual figures will be published by NIEA later in the year and an analysis will be provided to Members following their publication.
- 3.4** As noted within this report, there are a number of legislative, strategic and financial drivers which are going to shape future waste management arrangements. Until there is sufficient clarity around this environment, radical, systemic change aimed at delivering significant improvements in the recycling rate are unlikely.

In the interim the Service is exploring initiatives which could be delivered, such as communications campaigns and doorstep engagement, aimed at reversing the trend, aligning with policy drivers and improving performance.

Waste Framework Update

- 3.5 At the People and Communities Committee meeting of June 2017, Members approved the Waste Framework document. It provides an overview of options on how waste could be managed within the city over the next decade. It was developed to align with the objectives of the Belfast Agenda and Resourceful Belfast (Circular Economy), designing out waste, improving the quantity and quality of recycling and supporting local jobs.
- 3.6 The Waste Framework focuses on four themes (i) Collection Arrangements, (ii) Infrastructure, (iii) Behaviour Change and (iv) Technology.
- 3.7 Resources and Fleet continue to look at initiatives and opportunities to develop methods of collection and introduce new schemes to encourage the reuse and recycling of waste as a resource. The following provides an insight on the work and initiatives currently being undertaken under the 4 main workstreams.

Persistent Organic Pollutants

- 3.8 Members will be aware that at the February 2023 meeting of the Committee the issue of Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPS) was discussed. These are chemicals which can remain intact in the environment for long periods, and if not disposed of properly can have harmful impacts on human health and on the environment. In relation to the handling and treatment of waste these pollutants are to be found in many types of soft furnishings such as chairs, sofas etc as fire retardants or indeed within clothing items with water /fire resistant properties.
- 3.9 In 2022, the Environment Agency in England issued a Regulatory Position Statement (RPS) lasting until end of December 2023 informing Local Authorities that it would be implementing a more robust enforcement regime regarding the treatment of POPs in such waste streams. This is an issue which continues to exercise English Local Authorities as they consider the collection, storage and treatment of these materials, as the RPS states that items with these materials (suspected or otherwise) should be collected, stored internally and transported separately from other waste streams and cannot be put into landfill but be destroyed by permanently changing their chemical make-up i.e through incineration.

- 3.10 In Northern Ireland, the NIEA has yet to issues a Regulatory Position Statement in regard to POPs. Council Officers have requested clarity at several meetings of the Government Waste Working Group, but still await definitive guidance on the matter. The lack of an RPS is of concern to officers as there may be serious consequences in terms of lack of Council infrastructure (collection and storage facilities) and additional costs in relation to the final treatment of the particular waste – in all likelihood the transport to mainland UK or abroad for incineration, hopefully as part of a Refuse Derived Fuel (RDF).
- 3.11 Until such times as a Regulatory Position Statement is issued by NIEA, all identified POPs items collected by the Council will be dealt with under the new Interim Residual Waste Contract which commenced on 1st July 2023, i.e. all residual waste is being pre-treated before export as RDF to energy from waste plants in Europe.

(i) Collection Arrangements

Inner City Recycling Scheme Update

- 3.12 The aim is to transition to a weekly, segregated collection of dry recyclables and food waste, combined with a restriction on residual waste. This was arrived at based on the NI Recycling Gap analysis (WRAP) and BCC bespoke options appraisal (Resource Futures).
- 3.13 A detailed financial evaluation (green book appraisal) on the Council's kerbside recycling collection schemes was completed in October 2021. This was considered at the Waste Programme Board meeting of 8th November 2021 and subsequently presented to Party Group Briefings/Leaders and SP&R Committee in June 2022.
- 3.14 Members requested that Resources and Fleet conduct a feasibility study regarding Option 5 of this report, namely the in-housing of all kerbside recycling, while at the same time commencing a procurement exercise to ensure service continuity in the 'inner city' area beyond August 2024, which is the expiry date for the Bryson contract. The transition from the current two box scheme to the 'wheelie box' solution for the inner city is also considered within this work. The feasibility study on Option 5 is well progressed with an indicative completion date of September 2023, following which it will then be subject to normal governance arrangements.

- 3.15 Resources and Fleet has also initiated the procurement exercise for the continuation of kerbside recycling provision in the inner city. The market engagement exercise has been concluded and officers are developing the contract specification document with the intention to issue Sep/Oct 2023.

Carpet Recycling

- 3.16 In November 2021, supported by capital funding from the DAERA Collaborative Change Programme, Resources and Fleet initiated separated collection arrangements for carpets at all Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRCs).
- 3.17 The contract for treating the carpet was provided by USEL Recycling Solutions, an organisation specialising in employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Carpets were brought back to the USEL site in Belfast for quality checking and baling. Before being shipped for further reprocessing with the resultant material being sold into the equine sector as flooring / bedding, across the UK and Ireland. In the first year of operation the target was exceeded with 406 tonnes captured.
- 3.18 Following on from the emerging issues around POPs the contractor for carpet recycling has informed BCC that their treatment outlet is no longer accepting this material if it cannot be declared as free of POPs. Despite seeking alternative arrangements, the contractor has to date been unsuccessful at sourcing an alternative provider as there is a view within the marketplace that carpets will be included in the next tranche of POPS related enforcement and as such companies are seeking to disengage from the recycling of this material. Officers continue to liaise with USEL and DAERA (funding provider for the carpet skips) regarding this matter, but it is envisaged that the solution may result in this material being sent for energy recovery. While this is disappointing, it should be noted that it would be an improved situation vis-a-vis the pre-pilot disposal route which was a mixture of landfill and energy recovery.

Reuse of Laptops & electrical equipment

- 3.19 In December 2021, in collaboration with colleagues in Community Services, a small trial of reusing unwanted smart technologies commenced at Ormeau Household Waste Recycling Centre.
- 3.20 Resources and Fleet has taken on board the learning from the pilot scheme and is now, with the assistance of Climate Change funding, looking to expand the duration of the initiative while at the same time develop a more sustainable model not solely reliant

upon external funding. The scheme was launched at Ormeau recycling centre on 5th September 2022.

- 3.21 Despite the efforts of Corporate Communications at promoting the scheme, uptake remains much slower than anticipated. This could be down to a number of factors; cost of living crisis with people holding on to their technology for longer and also the increased number of retail outlets now providing incentives on second hand technology. The Service will assess this scheme at the end of the 2023/24 financial year.

Pre-loved Toys

- 3.22 Given the resounding success of this scheme last year, at the March 2023 committee meeting, Members agreed to run the pre-loved toys scheme again this year. In line with the recommendations of the report, planning work has commenced earlier this year to explore the general approach and delivery model.

Kerbside Glass

- 3.23 A feasibility study on the expansion of kerbside collection of glass was reported to committee in June 2022. Internal discussions are ongoing regarding the financing and delivery plan for such a scheme and will need to be considered in the revenue estimates and rates setting process for 2024/25.

Community Repaint Scheme

- 3.24 The Service is exploring the potential for a Community RePaint scheme at HWRCs. Not only would this seek to reduce the amount of paint being treated and disposed of through the sites but it may provide a useful resource to community groups.
- 3.25 In January 2023, Members agreed to the establishment of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) in principle with the Community RePaint scheme. The service has launched phase 1 of this initiative which is an assessment of the preferred approach and level of demand. It is anticipated that phase 1 will be completed by October 2023 and phase 2 will then commence, a procurement exercise to appoint the delivery partner, implement communications and launch. This scheme is also supported by the Council's climate fund for 23/24.

(ii) Infrastructure

Recycling Centres & Dargan Road WTS

- 3.26 The Service has identified the need for capital funding to replace aged containers (compactors & skips) at recycling centres. A sum

of £160k of non-recurrent funding was allocated to commence this project and the Service purchased six compactors for cardboard which were installed by 1 April 2023. An application for tranche 2 funding has been submitted to the Financial Oversight Board.

Recycling Centres and Pedestrian Access

- 3.27 A detailed feasibility study on the potential for pedestrian access to Alexandra recycling centre was presented to Committee in September 2022.
- 3.28 An additional site visit was conducted to assess the potential impact on the trees within the vicinity of the proposed works. This tree study has been completed and the access point has been agreed. The Service is liaising with colleagues in Property & Projects to obtain a time frame for the works.

arc21 Residual Waste Project and Interim Residual Waste arrangements

- 3.29 Following the refusal of planning permission by the Minister for Infrastructure in April 2022, arc21 submitted an application for judicial review against this decision. On 31 May 2023, the High Court issued an agreed Order reflecting that the Department for Infrastructure had conceded that this decision to refuse the proposed development of residual municipal solid waste treatment infrastructure was unlawful (on the grounds of irrationality) could not be sustained and was therefore to be quashed with immediate effect. Ecological surveys required by the Habitat Directive are being updated as is other information supporting the application. Clarification on the administrative process for getting the re-determination process underway is currently being sought by arc21.
- 3.30 Due to the prolonged timescales regarding the residual waste treatment facility at Hightown, arc21 initiated a procurement exercise to secure future services for the treatment and/or disposal of constituent councils' residual waste. This service was broken down into a number of lots to reflect the different time scales and material requirements of the constituent councils.
- 3.31 Arc21 awarded the Belfast City Council lot to ReGen with an effective contract commencement date of 1 July 2023. The Council's contractor at that time, River Ridge Recycling challenged this decision through the courts and sought an injunction. On the 26 June 2023, the court refused to grant an injunction to stop the implementation of the contract and the contract for services related to interim residual waste disposal for use by Belfast City Council commenced as planned

on 1 July 2023. It should be noted that while the injunction to prevent commencement of services was not successful, there is still a legal challenge by River Ridge against the award of this contract by arc21. The time frame for this case has still to be determined.

Connected Circular Economy - Shared Island Project

- 3.32 The Service continues to work with colleagues in the Economic Development Unit and Climate Team along with Dublin City Council to deliver a feasibility study into a "Connected Circular Economy." This will include the sharing of knowledge and good practice initially, with the ambition for the development of hubs in Dublin and Belfast to support the growth of the circular economy island-wide, leading to a Connected Circular Economy. The final report is due November 2023.

(iii) Behaviour Change

Recycling Communications Campaign

- 3.33 Following a request at Party Group Leaders in December 2022 to look into the possibility of a recycling campaign the Marketing and Corporate Communications team has developed an integrated campaign to create awareness around recycling. The campaign "Be Bincredible Belfast" is positioned to inspire and energise people to consider recycling as a mature and responsible act. The campaign messaging sets about getting citizens to think about recycling as a social responsibility, not just a personal one.
- 3.34 The campaign call to action is to make recycling feel like a larger, community-wide effort and encourage people to do a little bit more and recycle the right way. "Be Bincredible Belfast" is very much about celebrating those who have already been putting in the work and letting them know that their efforts are appreciated. The second phase of the campaign is based on increased education and a "back to basics" approach to getting recycling right first time, delivering increased capture of materials and improved quality from an operations point of view. Marketing and Corporate Communications have been working closely with both the educational team and the operations team in the development of the campaign.
- 3.35 The first phase of the campaign will be delivered via an integrated advertising campaign encompassing outdoor, radio, digital (video on demand) and social media and will go live w/c 25th September and will run for approximately 3 weeks. In terms of the educational piece and encouraging citizens to recycle correctly, this will be delivered beyond the initial advertising campaign

using channels such as social media and assets such as City Matters and will be supported via roadshows delivered by the Environmental Outreach Team.

Waste Access & Acceptance Policies at HWRCs

- 3.36 A Service Working Group was established with the primary aim of improving the recycling rates achieved at the recycling centres and CA sites. This group looked at the development of effective, Waste Access & Acceptance Policies to assist staff in managing waste on site.
- 3.37 The draft policy has been developed and provided to Legal Services and we await a formal response. Once this has been received, engagement with the Departmental Policy team will take place to carry out an equality assessment and determine the level of public consultation required.
- 3.38 Before this document is finalised, the Resources and Fleet will seek to engage with Members to visit recycling centres and see first-hand the positive work which goes on at the sites and the challenges encountered by staff.

Tackling multiple black (residual) bins.

- 3.39 Through previous Committee reports, Officers have asked for support from Members to tackle the complex issues around collections and recycling, and to be aware of the current Waste Collection Policies as Officers look at how these can be applied effectively.
- 3.40 Current policy is that BCC will collect one residual waste bin per household unless an assessment of further need has been carried out and approved by officers. Multiple studies have recognised that one of the most effective ways to increase domestic recycling is to limit the volume of residual waste capacity (per week equivalent) to 'encourage' residents to divert their waste towards recycling waste streams (blue, brown or glass receptacles, including bring banks). Indeed, this is likely to be a major recycling improvement initiative in the DAERA considerations around their proposed Common Collections Guidance, to be published for consultation in due course during 2023.
- 3.41 A working group within the Service carried out a project to target, on a crew-by-crew basis, those addresses identified as presenting multiple bins. To date, several small pilot areas have been completed and learning captured. In recent months this project has been suspended due to other competing priorities (Full Shift cover and Report-It APP). It is envisaged that this project will re-

commence following the DAERA public consultation and the working group will consider how the exercise could be suitably scaled up and accelerated to deliver the anticipated benefits.

(iv) Information Technology

In-Cab Technology

3.42 Following the successful deployment of the Report IT App, Resources and Fleet are currently looking to build on the opportunities modern software systems can deliver. A project is currently underway to potentially procure a system which can:

- Hold all safety information on vehicles and routes.
- incorporate live time information flows to and from the operating centre to crews and vice versa.
- capture all the functionality of the Report IT App
- optimise routes as the city grows to ensure operational efficiency.
- link in with Customer Hub software to deliver customer service.
- monitor vehicle condition and driver behaviour.

3.43 An Outline Business case will be presented to the Financial Oversight Board in September for consideration of capital requirements for 2023/24 financial year.

Operational update - Access Issues

3.44 Members may be aware of 2 ongoing pieces of ongoing work to look at addressing the issues around access to certain streets for our collection vehicles.

3.45 Following the single item Committee meeting in March 2023 to discuss access issues, officers have engaged with officers from the PSNI and DFI to look at what measures might be available within their remit to assist collection crews. BCC officers have identified the most affected streets, based on crew reporting and residents' calls. These streets have been prioritised by difficulty and sorted by post code for the other agencies to consider how to move this forward.

3.46 These streets have also been presented to the Waste Collections operations team in a high level assessment to identify, in their opinion if

- they have current parking restrictions that are not being adhered by motorists or

- they have no current / insufficient parking restrictions where the addition of same might be of benefit.
- 3.47 We will continue to engage throughout the autumn to develop a targeted action plan. This will involve a stepped process that might include member engagement, leafleting of impacted streets, enforcement support and further work on those streets that are difficult to access but do not currently have any parking restrictions.
- 3.48 Secondly, we are in the final stages of agreeing a final report on the possible costs and benefits of utilising smaller refuse collection vehicles within these narrow streets across the city. We intend to have the final report approved in time for consideration within this year's estimating process to bring forward as a potential growth proposal for the 2023/24 financial year.

Inter Council / DAERA Collaboration

- 3.49 Council Officers continue to engage with DAERA counterparts in the formulation of policy required to deliver the legislative targets set by Central Government. It has recently been announced that the introduction of the Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme (EPR) for packaging has been delayed for at least 1 year and that the Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) has been delayed likewise following the difficulties incurred in its introduction in Scotland.
- 3.50 In England, the delay in the EPR scheme also means a delay in the introduction of Common Collections Guidance (CCG) for Local Authorities in England, i.e., EPR is a precursor to CCG. As it currently stands, however, DAERA continues to develop its policies on Common Collections Guidance for NI Councils and officers await notification of a final timetable for any proposed Guidance.

Carbon Budget

- 3.51 The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 received Royal Assent on 6th June 2022. It provides Northern Ireland with its first climate change legislation.
- 3.52 The Act contains a legal requirement for all NICS Departments to ensure that targets and carbon budgets are met. This legal duty is the first of its kind in Northern Ireland to recognise the need for strong collaboration in tackling climate change.

The headline elements of the Act are:

- Net zero target by 2050
- Carbon Budget to be set every 5 years.

- Climate Action Plan to be published every 5 years.
 - Establish a NI Climate Commissioner (being led by TEO)
 - Just Transition Commission and a Just Transition Fund for Agriculture
 - Sectoral Plans (not timebound)
 - Requirement to bring forward Public Body Reporting legislation.
- 3.53 Officers from Resources and Fleet (along with other Councils counterparts) have been attending DAERA stakeholder workshops to contribute to a response to the DAERA consultation on Northern Ireland's 2030 and 2040 Emissions Reduction Targets and First Three Carbon Budgets. The process is also aimed at informing DAERA on Councils views on the Climate Change Committee's (CCC) [Advice Report: The Path to Net Zero Northern Ireland](#) published on 2 March 2023.
- 3.54 This 16-week exercise, running from 21 June to 11 October 2023, aims to receive feedback on the proposed first three carbon budgets 2023-2027, 2028-2032 and 2033-2037 as well as 2030 (48%) and 2040 (77%) interim targets.
- 3.55 DAERA has stated, 'This consultation provides an opportunity to talk about what we need to do to respond to the threat presented by climate change and about the opportunities that might emerge. Work is progressing at pace in developing Northern Ireland's first ever Climate Action Plan and all NICS departments have a legislative duty to set out how they will reduce emissions. This consultation and the conversations that will take place will be used to help inform the draft Climate Action Plan.'
- 3.56 The following informative slides are taken from the DAERA stakeholder workshops.
- 3.57 As demonstrated in the graphic below, it is estimated that the Waste Sector in Northern Ireland is responsible for approximately 4% of current NI emissions and has reduced its emissions by 61% since 1990 base year. However, the Waste sector is still responsible for approximately 799 CO₂e kilo tonnes of emissions each year. It is clear that the waste sector still has an important part to play in the reducing emissions overall.

Waste Sector - Current Emissions

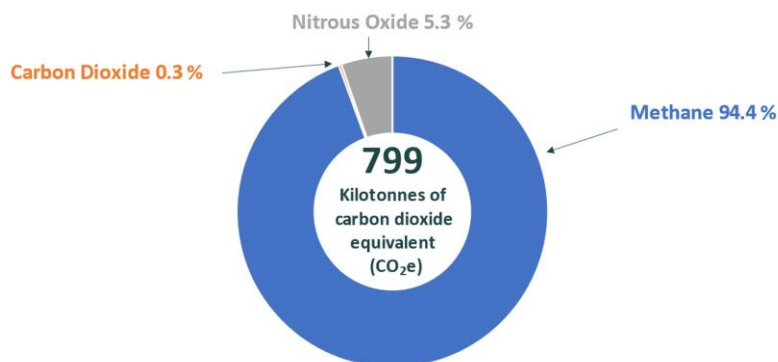


NI's 2030 and 2040 Emissions Reduction Targets and First Three Carbon Budgets & Views on the CCC's Path to Net Zero



- 3.58 In terms of what the remaining emissions consist of, we can see that the vast majority from the slide below that Methane (CH₄) has the lion's share of the total amount of GHG's attributed to the waste sector at just over 94%, the majority of which originates from the landfilling of waste, especially biodegradable waste. This makes tackling these types of GHG's a priority for the first carbon budget.
- 3.59 The next largest contributor is Nitrous Oxide (N₂O) at 5.3%, Nitrous Oxide is a key challenge for the wastewater sector as it represents a significant component of 'Scope 1' type emissions for the mechanical treatment and storage of wastewater treatment. However, solutions to dealing with this GHG are presently cost prohibitive.
- 3.60 Carbon dioxide (CO₂) represents only a small fraction of the total GHG emissions within the waste sector.

Waste Sector – Current Emissions

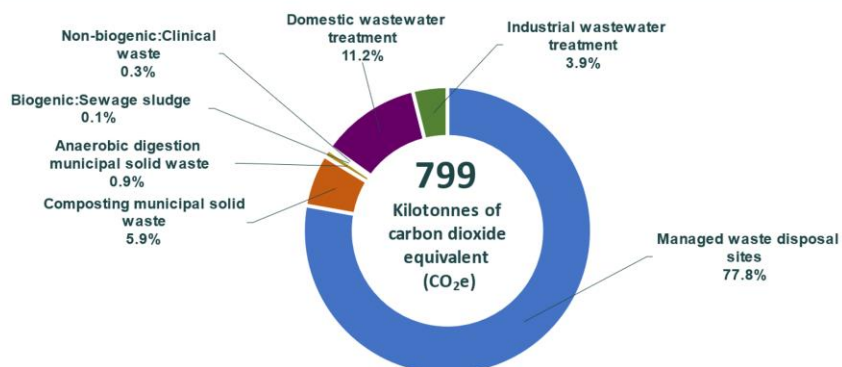


NI's 2030 and 2040 Emissions Reduction Targets and First Three Carbon Budgets & Views on the CCC's Path to Net Zero



- 3.61 Finally, it can be seen that the source of these emissions are primarily from Managed Waste Disposal Sites, i.e. landfill
- 3.62 This will inevitably reinforce the demand to reduce the amount of waste to landfill in the future through new policy, but there is also the need to address the emissions that are already there, exploring new technologies and innovations to help deal with that.

Waste Sector – Current Emissions



NI's 2030 and 2040 Emissions Reduction Targets and First Three Carbon Budgets & Views on the CCC's Path to Net Zero



3.63 These challenges will feed into DAERA prioritisation of policy making in the short and medium term. Stakeholders were informed that it is likely that DAERA priorities will be as follows:

3.64 **Immediate actions**

- Legislate and implement a ban on all landfilling of biodegradable municipal and non-municipal waste from 2025.
- Accelerate investment plans for councils to put in place universal municipal waste recycling collections (Common Collections Guidance)
- Set the 70% NI recycling target for recycling.

3.65 **Medium Term Actions**

- Mandatory business food waste reporting by 2022 (Overdue)
- Phase Out Waste exports by 2030.
- Eventual diversion of all wastes from landfill
- Increased methane capture and oxidation
- Examine the impact of waste reduction and recycling targets on the utilisation of (and need for further) EfW plants.
- New waste conversion plants must be built with Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) or CCS ready.

Consultation

3.66 DEFRA has launched a public consultation on draft regulations for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging scheme.

3.67 The link to the consultation is as follows
<https://consult.defra.gov.uk/extended-producer-responsibility-team/consultation-on-the-draft-producer-responsibility/>

3.68 This consultation seeks views on how well the proposed 2024 Regulations reflect the Gov response published in March 2022 (which was generated by 2019 consultation on reforming UK Packaging Producer Responsibility System and the 2021 Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging). Please also use in conjunction with the impact assessment published in March 2022
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1063588/epr-final-impact-assessment.pdf

3.69 The 2024 regulations will revoke and replace the 2023 Regulations as well as PRO Regulations 2007.

3.70 The draft Regulations also include provisions to:

- Enable the appointment of a Scheme Administrator.
- Allow a Scheme Administrator to raise fees from obligated producers to cover local authority costs for the management of household and binned packaging waste, the costs of public information campaigns, and its operational costs.
- Set recycling targets on producers covering all types of packaging waste (i.e., primary, shipment, secondary, tertiary; household and non-household). • Require certain types of packaging to be labelled to indicate recyclability.
- Introduce a mandatory takeback and recycling requirement for fibre-based composite cups.
- Require all reprocessors and exporters of packaging waste to register with a regulator and to report data, and, for those that choose to, to become accredited and issue recycling evidence.
- Enable regulators to effectively monitor compliance and enforce the draft Regulations.

3.71 The consultation closes on 9th October and our response is being coordinated by our Waste Officer (Compliance and Research), Jennifer Stephens. The questions within the consultation are quite technical and relate to draft legislation. These technical questions are laid out in Appendix 1. Officers will formulate and submit the response and report back to members at the October P&C Committee meeting. However, should any member wish to contribute any views on the questions, please contact Jennifer via email in the first instance to ensure that these views are full captured stephensj@belfastcity.gov.uk .

Financial and Resource Implications

3.72 There are no financial implications associated with this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessments

3.73 There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report.”

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th September, 2023**

The Committee noted the report and:

- agreed to provide feedback within the timeline on the current consultation on the draft regulations for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR for packaging scheme);
- noted that a report was scheduled to be submitted to the October meeting considering the introduction of additional smaller waste tonnage vehicles, which would include a cost benefit summary of the potential savings in not having missed collections;
- noted that the pedestrian access to the Ormeau Road Recycling Centre was being progressed, however, a different option would be necessary to ensure suitable disability access, an update would be provided in due course; and
- agreed that a site visit would be organised to a Council recycling facility to provide an opportunity for Members to familiarise themselves with the services provided, the challenges faced and the opportunities available to support the local circular economy.

People and Communities Committee Plan

The Committee agreed to defer the report to the October meeting to enable the Members to consider its content in more detail.

**Response from DAERA Re: Air
Quality Detailed Assessment**

The Director of City Services drew the Members' attention to correspondence that had been received from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in response to a letter that had been forwarded from the Committee in August seeking Air Quality Monitoring Stations to be erected around Primary Schools.

The Committee was advised that, in her response, the Head of Air and Environmental Quality in DAERA had advised that the Air and Environmental Quality (AEQ) Unit had considered the Council's request for funding support for a dedicated ambient air quality monitoring programme to be implemented outside of schools as part of the councils 2023/24 LAQM Grant application. She advised that it fully recognised the importance of monitoring, and this had been reflected in the revised priorities for the new grant.

She referred to the increased rates of funding available for some aspects of the grant which had been determined in an effort to assist all Councils as much as possible, at a time of both financial and funding pressures, and within the correspondence she set out, in detail, the priorities for this year's grant, which included the following key measures:

- Maintenance of existing monitoring;
- Staff costs;

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th September, 2023**

- Expansion of monitoring; and
- Behavioural change/education campaigns.

The correspondence concluded by stating that she hoped that the funding offered this year, in particular, for the Schools 'idling vehicle' air pollution monitoring and awareness raising project, would go some way to help obtain a better understanding of ambient air quality in the vicinity of schools and to assess the beneficial impacts of mitigation measures.

The Committee noted the correspondence and that the Air Quality Officer would look at the program of monitoring in year and submit an update to the Committee in due course.

Operational Issues

Proposal for Dual Language Street Signs

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at Stockmans Drive, Whiterock Gardens, Dermott Hill Drive, Dermott Hill Park, Linview Court and Thornberry Glen.

Proposal for Naming New Street

The City Solicitor drew the Members' attention to an application to name a new street in the city off the Monagh By Pass, as Black Ridge View. She advised that a late request had been received from the developer seeking permission to erect a second nameplate in Irish. She advised the Committee that, should it choose to, it was able to use its Residual Discretion to permit the developer as there was currently no residents on the street to survey.

A Member stated that she did not agree with this approach as it could ultimately result in other developments also being permitted dual language street signs without being surveyed and this might make a development less appealing to some sections of the community.

Following discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Ó Néill,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the Committee agrees to the erection of a dual language street sign at Black Ridge View, off the Monagh by Pass.

On a vote, 14 Members voted for the proposal and 3 against and it was declared carried.

The Committee agreed the application to name a new street in the city at Black Ridge View, off Monagh by Pass, BT11, and agreed to use its Residual Discretion to permit the developer, as per a late request, to also erect a dual language street sign, given there was no residents on the street to survey.

**St Oliver Plunkett Football Club –
Request for Container**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To advise members of a successful funding application made by St Oliver Plunkett FC to the Irish Football Association/DCMS Grassroots scheme and to seek approval for a one-off funding contribution by Council to help secure the drawdown of this external funding.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Committee note the successful application and agree to permit the installation of a container at Lenadoon Millennium Park for exclusive use of SOPFC for the storage of equipment purchased using the IFA funding. The proposal is that the costs of the concrete base to support the container (Circa £5k) would be provided from revenue budgets as a funding contribution from Council, while the Club will meet the costs of the container itself and that this approach will enable £25k of external funding to be secured.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

- 3.1 St Oliver Plunkett FC has been successful in an application to the Irish Football Association/DCMS for sporting equipment at a value of £25,000. The majority of the club's bookings are made at Council's Lenadoon Millennium Park which is managed under a FMA by the Lenadoon Amateur Sports Community Interest Company. The CIC were supportive of the application.
- 3.2 The club's award is conditional on adequate secure storage being provided and to satisfy this condition the club is requesting permission to install a container on council land at the site. The container would be purchased by the club and placed in a location to be agreed between the club, Council and the CIC. Given ground conditions at the site enabling works will be required to support the container and it is proposed that Council will meet these costs (circa £5k) from current revenue budgets.
- 3.3 Members may recall that at a previous meeting of this committee in December 2022 it was agreed that no further requests for the installation of club owned containers would be considered until a

formal policy had been adopted. Unfortunately, a resource to take forward this work has not yet been identified and in the interim, East Area Working Group made an award of £30k LIF funding to eight soccer clubs in East Belfast for containerised storage in March 2023.

- 3.4 Members are therefore asked if they would wish to accede to the request from St Oliver Plunkett FC to help secure the clubs draw down of the external IFA funding.

Financial and Resource Implications

The cost of providing the container at Lenadoon would be met by the club. The cost for the enabling works (£5k) would be met by Council from existing revenue budgets. This approach will secure £25k of external funding for the club.

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

- 3.5 None.”

The Committee adopted the recommendation at paragraph 2.0 of the report.

Issues Raised in Advance by a Member

Request to Receive a Presentation – Councillor Flynn

At the request of Councillor Flynn, the Committee agreed to receive a presentation at its October meeting from Causeway Coast Dog Rescue.

**Policy regarding Bilingual Signage for
New Developments – Councillor Ó Néill**

At the request of Councillor Ó Néill, the Committee agreed that a report be submitted a future meeting which would consider, as a matter of practice, the Council amending its current policy on naming a new street to permit Developers/Housing Associations to request Bilingual signage as a part of an application for a new street, with the final sign-off being with the People and Communities Committee.

Chairperson

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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.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

**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

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

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

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

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 Nicola 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.
- Reinstatement of 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)
- Reinstatement of 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**

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

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

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

- 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.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

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

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

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.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th September, 2023**

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

Licensing Committee

Wednesday, 20th September, 2023

MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McKeown (Chairperson);
Aldermen McCullough and McCoubrey;
Councillors Anglin, Bradley, P. Donnelly, Doran,
D. Douglas, Lyons, Murray, F. McAteer, McCabe,
McCann, McMullan, Ó Néill and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. S. Hewitt, Building Control Manager;
Mr. K. Bloomfield, Houses in Multiple Occupation
Manager; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 16th 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, 2023, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Murray declared an interest in Item 2f, namely, Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for 55 Haypark Avenue, in that the Managing Agent was the landlord of a property in which he had been a former commercial tenant. After seeking clarity from the City Solicitor, the Member confirmed that, as it had been over a year since he had had any association with the Agent, there was therefore no requirement for him to withdraw from the discussion.

Councillor Anglin declared an interest in Item 2g, namely, Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Apartment 2, 169 Stranmillis Road, in that the applicant might be known to her. She therefore left the meeting for the duration of the discussion on that item and did not participate in the decision making process.

Non-Delegated Matters

Review of Pavement Cafe Licensing Scheme

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 Members are reminded that the Council, in June 2020, decided to introduce a temporary process for considering pavement café applications to assist the hospitality sector during the recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown.
- 1.2 The temporary pavement café licensing scheme has now been extended twice and will expire on 30 September 2023.
- 1.3 This report is presented to seek guidance on how to progress with pavement café licensing when the temporary process comes to an end.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Based on the information provided Members are asked to consider proposals that:
 - 1. The temporary scheme is extended until the 31 December 2023 to enable all consultation work to be completed and to report the findings back to Committee for consideration before that date.
 - 2. In principle, Members support the introduction of a permanent Pavement Café licensing scheme from 1 January 2024.
 - 3. A transition and implementation period of 3 months is introduced to allow existing licensed businesses to continue to operate until the grant of their permanent licence is determined and after which temporary licences will no longer be valid.
- 2.2 Members are advised that the Licensing Committee does not have delegated powers in relation to policy decisions concerning licensing matters and as such your recommendation will be subject to ratification by Council.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Licensing of Pavement Cafes Act (NI) 2014 ('the Act') came into operation on the 1 October 2016. However, the Council, along with a number of other councils, did not

implement the legislation at that time as the Department for Infrastructure Roads had not, and still has not, issued their technical guidance for Councils in support of the Act.

- 3.2 That said, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has now evaluated and determined the appropriateness of 94 Temporary Pavement Café applications in Belfast, using their professional expertise and their own guidance documents.

Temporary Licensing Process due to Covid 19

- 3.3 The Council, in June 2020, introduced a temporary process for considering pavement café applications.
- 3.4 The process was always intended to be a temporary process as Members will remember when businesses reopened after lockdown patrons were not allowed to be inside the premises due to social distancing restrictions.
- 3.5 This temporary process was considered as part of the solution to help business recovery but was originally to be for a period of one year. It gave the ability to businesses to start using the pavement café area whilst their licence application was being determined and statutory agencies were encouraged, by Government, to take a very liberal view when considering applications to allow hospitality businesses to reopen.
- 3.6 This liberal approach when considering applications meant permitting Pavement cafes that would not have been agreed in 'normal' circumstances. For example:
- Much larger pavement café areas,
 - Pavement cafes being allowed to use the road,
 - DfI introducing 'Parklets' to be used as a pavement café area, and
 - DfI temporarily closing or restricting roads so they could be used for a pavement café area.
- 3.7 Also, post lockdown, the City was a very different place compared to now; patrons were not allowed to be inside hospitality premises, there were social distancing and mobility restrictions, most people were working from home, footfall was down in the City centre, as was traffic and this gave significantly more available space on the street.

Pavement Café Workshop

- 3.8 On 5 September 2023 a workshop was held for Members to discuss pavement café licensing and in particular the

temporary scheme. As well as officers from Building Control and Planning there were staff from Open Spaces and Street scene, City Regeneration and Development, and Legal and Civic Services available to provide input to the workshop on matters such as how pavement cafes contribute to vibrancy, impact on amenity and their effect on other road/pavement users.

3.9 Some of the key outcomes of the workshop were that:

- Members were generally of the view that Pavement Cafes were a positive addition to the City
- Proper regulation and proportionate enforcement would be an important aspect of any permanent scheme to ensure a fair approach for all those wishing to benefit from a Pavement Café licence
- Consultation on progressing with a permanent scheme should be undertaken with key stakeholders including current licensees, the business community in general, representatives of those people with disabilities and relevant government agencies
- There should be clear and straightforward procedures for applicants (including clear guidance on the transition between a temporary and permanent scheme)
- Clarity on how we can progress to a permanent scheme should be provided for Members before a decision can be made on any future scheme.

4.0 Key Issues

- 4.1** There is an obvious desire to create a vibrant café culture in the City with al fresco dining now an accepted part of the hospitality offer. In doing so we must also be mindful of the impact this may have on the various needs of all those who use our City.

Current Situation

- 4.2** There are now 94 Pavement Cafés in Belfast that have received temporary licences. The majority of these are well run with no complaints to the Council. There are also a significant number of businesses operating who have not applied for a Temporary Pavement Café licence.
- 4.3** A recent survey carried out by council officers of pavement cafes in the City highlighted that almost 60% are operating without a Pavement Café Licence.

- 4.4 A few licensed pavement cafés, in particular in the City centre, have been a source of complaint from adjacent businesses and from members of the public. The nature of those complaints relates to:
- The size of the area being used.
 - The area affecting footfall and trade to adjacent businesses.
 - Furniture not being removed at the end of trade.
 - Impact on early morning deliveries.
- 4.5 As reported at the workshop the Council's cleansing and waste management crews are experiencing difficulties in getting their vehicles in to empty bins and clean the streets as pavement café furniture is not being removed at the end of trade.
- 4.6 Additionally, the pavement is not being cleaned and litter generated by customers using the area is not being collected by the business. This is contributing to the ongoing cleanliness issues in the City.
- 4.7 Temporary licences will expire at the end of September and several licensees have been enquiring about 'renewing' their licence.

Next Steps

- 4.8 It was apparent from the workshop that Members were keen that further stakeholder engagement is undertaken and presented to Members before they make a final decision in relation to the future of Pavement Café licensing.
- 4.9 Consultation is therefore underway and we are currently engaging with existing licensees, the business community, representatives of people with disabilities and relevant government agencies, as well as undertaking a YourSay public consultation to obtain views on the merits of Pavement Café licensing and to gather any issues members of the public may raise.
- 4.10 The YourSay public consultation is planned to run for 8 weeks during October – November 2023 which, with additional more focused consultation and workshops targeted at those groups and businesses likely to be most impacted by the Pavement Café Licensing scheme running alongside the public consultation.

- 4.11 The consultation will not be completed before the temporary licences expire on 30 September, and it is therefore requested that Members extend the temporary scheme until the 31 December 2023 to enable all consultation work to be completed and to report our findings back to Committee for consideration before that date.

Proposed Transitional Arrangements

- 4.12 It is considered necessary to have a transition and implementation period of approximately 3 months for the introduction of a Permanent Pavement Café Licensing scheme. During the implementation period those with an existing temporary licence will be required to apply for a licence under the permanent scheme but may continue to operate their pavement café until their new application is determined.
- 4.13 The implementation period will also allow the Council time to process grant applications for permanent applications and for relevant statutory and public consultations to be undertaken. An implementation period will also avoid the prospect of an influx of grant applications having to be considered in a short space of time.
- 4.14 A cut-off date for transitional arrangements to enable a move to a permanent Pavement Café Licence scheme is suggested as 31 March 2024. Thereafter any temporary licences will no longer be valid and any that have not made an application for a Licence will be subject to routine enforcement procedures.
- 4.15 It would be helpful if Members were to confirm that they are supportive of introducing a permanent Pavement Café licensing scheme with a proposed implementation date of 1 January 2024 and that this will be subject to the transitional arrangements as outlined.
- 4.16 In providing such direction this will ensure we can effectively engage with licensees and other stakeholders and will provide clarity for them in the direction of travel proposed by the Council.

Guidance

- 4.17 To implement the temporary licensing scheme guidance for applicants, based on the Department for Communities guidelines and supplementary guidance from the Licensing Forum Northern Ireland was produced.

- 4.18** In general, this guidance has proved effective but we will review this and reflect any feedback obtained through our stakeholder consultation to improve or supplement our guidance for applicants if necessary.

Fees

- 4.19** Given the circumstances under which the temporary scheme was introduced, the Council waived any fees associated with a Pavement Café application, unlike in England where a nominal charge of £100 was set.
- 4.20** At your meeting in December 2016, the Committee, after considering a number of options, agreed the fees that should be charged for a Pavement Café Licence and determined that a grant application fee is £225.00 with an annual licence fee of £55.00 for the ensuing 4 years. (No annual licence fee is charged in the first year).
- 4.21** Whilst the legislation allows the Council to set fees at full cost recovery levels Members decided to set a significantly reduced fee, equating to 25 pence per day for a 5-year licence.
- 4.22** Through our stakeholder engagement we will explore their views on the Council charging the fees agreed by Council in 2017.

Licence Conditions

- 4.23** The Licensing Committee agreed, at their meeting of December 2016, to Standard Licence Conditions which would be applied to pavement café's.
- 4.24** The majority of those conditions have proven appropriate, however there is scope to clarify and augment some of those Conditions, particularly in relation to street cleanliness issues and issues around removing and storing pavement café furniture.
- 4.25** Through our stakeholder engagement we will explore their views on any suggested revisions to these conditions which will then be reported to Committee for consideration.

Enforcement

- 4.26** Over the course of the pandemic the Council has responded to requests from the Assembly and industry to assist recovery and we have therefore been endeavouring to provide support and minimise impact on small businesses.

- 4.27 For that reason, there has been a very 'light touch' approach to enforcement in relation to those who have not made application, failed to provide the necessary information to progress their application or who may not be operating in accordance with the terms of their licence.
- 4.28 As restrictions have ceased there needs to be a gradual return to normal and proportionate enforcement procedures in line with established council policy guidance. This will include addressing applications which cannot progress because insufficient information has not been provided, commencing proactive action in relation to unlicensed pavement cafes and dealing with breaches of Licence Conditions.

Duration of Licences

- 4.29 As previously determined by Council in 2017, Pavement Café licences will be granted for a period of 5 years.
- 4.30 Through our stakeholder engagement we will explore their views on the duration of licences which will then be reported to Committee for consideration.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

- 5.1 The grant application fee for a 5-year pavement café licence is £225.00 with an annual licence fee of £55.00 for the subsequent 4 years. If the fees are waived there will be a total lost income over 5 years of at least £41,830 on the basis of applications granted at present.

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

- 6.1 A review of the equality screening exercise undertaken in 2020 and reviewed in 2021 for the temporary scheme is being carried out prior to public consultation, and a full equality screening and rural needs assessment will be undertaken prior to progressing to a permanent scheme."

A Member stated that he had found the Workshop on Pavement Cafés very useful. He stated that Pavement Cafés had certainly played a key role in reimagining what the City Centre could look like and, for the benefit of both citizens and businesses, it felt appropriate to ensure that there was a long term and consistent approach taken towards them.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

In response to a Member's question as to whether those businesses which had been operating Pavement Cafés without a licence would be consulted, the Building Control Manager advised the Committee that, while the consultation would be sent to those who had current Pavement Café licences, it would also be open to Members of the public to submit responses. A number of Members stated that it would perhaps be useful to consult with those businesses which had not applied for licences under the temporary scheme, to determine if there were specific reasons or barriers which they had encountered in order to address any issues.

In response to a further Member's question, the Building Control Manager explained that, as a key stakeholder, officers would be meeting with the Department for Infrastructure's Roads Service in relation to the issue of Pavement Cafés. He stated that, while Roads Service had previously raised issues with the operation of some specific Pavement Cafés, they had a good working relationship with them and he did not envisage any major issues in that respect.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

**The adoption of the Belfast Local Development Plan,
Plan Strategy and the associated implications for the
approach to the assessment of concentrations of HMOs**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To update members on the adoption of Belfast Local Development Plan, Plan Strategy on the 2 May 2023 ‘2023 Strategy’ and the associated implications for the approach to the assessment of concentrations of HMOs as previously set out in the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) Subject Plan for Belfast City Council Area 2015 ‘2015 Plan’.

1.2 How for the purposes of [section 8\(2\)\(d\)](#) and [section 12](#) of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 ‘2016 Act’ when considering overprovision of HMOs in the locality in which the living accommodation is situated, account will be taken of the 2023 Strategy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Committee is asked to note the adoption of Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP)

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

- 3.1** [Belfast Local Development Plan, Plan Strategy](#) was formally adopted on the 2 May 2023. The plan introduces Policy HOU10 – Housing Management Areas (HMAs)
- 3.2** The Housing Management Areas (HMAs) will be designated within the local policies plan. In advance of the local policies plan, policy HOU10 will be applied to the previously designated HMO policy areas outlined at designation HMO2 of the 2015 Plan.
- 3.3** HOU10 states - Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA.
- 3.4** HOU10 goes on to say - outside of designated HMAs planning permission will only be granted for HMOs where the number of HMOs would not as a result exceed 10% of all dwelling units on that road or street. Where such a street is in excess of 600 metres in length, the 10% threshold will be calculated on the basis of existing residential units within 300 metres of either side of the proposal on that street.
- 3.5** Pursuant to the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, the Council may only grant a new HMO licence if it is satisfied that the granting of the licence will not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality.
- 3.6** To ensure consistency as both a planning and licensing authority the HMAs as referenced in Policy HOU10 of the 2023 Strategy shall continue be used by the Council to define localities for the purposes of HMO licensing within the Council area.
- 3.7** When considering whether the granting of a licence will result in overprovision in a locality the Council must have to regard to –
- a) The number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality,
 - b) The need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation is required to meet that need, and

c) Such other matters as the Department may by regulation specify.

- 3.8 To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, officers will take account of the 2023 Strategy. It is recognised that HMOs make an important contribution to the private rented sector, providing choice and assisting with meeting a range of community needs, however the location of HMOs must be carefully managed as the infrastructure within such areas was not designed to cope with the increased population enabled through these types of development, leading to a decline in residential amenity and difficulties relating to car parking, waste collection and noise and other disturbances.
- 3.9 Officers are developing, subject to permissions and licensing agreements with Land and Property Services (LPS) an online mapping viewer to make information on intensive forms of housing and licensed HMOs accessible to the public. Officers will keep members updated on future progress.
- 3.10 The initial percentage from July 2023 of licensed HMOs and intensive forms of housing within HMAs are included at Appendix 1. This will be updated on a monthly basis with work ongoing in relation to data from mid-August.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.11 None. The cost of assessing the application and officer inspections are provided for within existing budgets.

Equality and Good Relations Implications

- 3.12 There are no equality or good relations issues associated with this report.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Hostel accommodation in Belfast and the relationship to HMO licensing

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 At its meeting of the 21 June 2023 whilst considering applications submitted by Queens Quarter Housing Limited for the granting of new HMO licences at Flats 1 & 2, 6 Sandhurst Road, Belfast, BT7 1PW this Committee agreed to

defer consideration of the applications to enable officers to explore the strategic context of the issues which had been raised in relation to the applications, and the wider hostel accommodation in Belfast, and to present this information at a future meeting.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Committee is asked to note the content of this report regarding the need and dispersal of hostel accommodation in Belfast.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 The Housing Executive as the regional housing authority became responsible for addressing homelessness in Northern Ireland in 1989. In 2010 a legislative duty was placed on them to formulate and publish a strategy for homelessness.

Ending Homelessness Together – Homelessness Strategy 2022-27

- 3.2 On 23rd March 2022 the Housing Executive published ‘[Ending Homelessness Together – Homelessness Strategy 2022-27](#)’. The vision of ‘Ending Homelessness Together’ reflects a continued need for the Housing Executive to work with its partners across the sector to address the varied and complex factors that lead to homelessness, many of which extend beyond the provision of accommodation.
- 3.3 In line with the Homelessness Strategy 2020 -27 the Housing Executive published a strategic action plan for temporary accommodation 2022 – 27 titled [Ending Homelessness Together - Homeless to Home](#)
- 3.4 The Housing Executive has published a [Belfast Local Services Directory](#) as part of the Ending Homelessness Together Strategy. The directory details Belfast based accommodation and related support services.
- 3.5 The action plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders with the goal of assessing how effectively the current temporary accommodation portfolio meets the needs of customers experiencing homelessness. The Housing Executive state that the needs of homeless customers have been changing; today’s homelessness issues are much different to those of 10 years ago, with customers presenting with increasingly complex health and support needs.

- 3.6 The Housing Executive is responsible for delivering the statutory homeless accommodation duties which is provided to households who are legally homeless, until a more permanent housing solution can be secured. It is also provided to households whose homelessness application is undergoing assessment and who are believed to be homeless and in priority need.

- 3.7 The Housing Executive state that there are five main types of temporary accommodation in operation as detailed -

Hostels

- 3.8 Hostels in Northern Ireland come in a range of types and sizes with significant variation in the levels of support provided. They are funded by Supporting People and managed largely by voluntary sector providers.

Single lets

- 3.9 Single lets are furnished private sector dwellings managed by landlords or managing agents to accommodate homeless households on a temporary basis. Referrals are from the Housing Executive alone.

Housing Executive temporary accommodation

- 3.10 The Housing Executive provides some furnished temporary accommodation across Northern Ireland. These are a mix of dispersed properties, blocks of flats or terraces, and purpose-built hostels, mostly managed by the Housing Executive, with a small number managed by voluntary sector providers.

Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency Accommodation (DIME)

- 3.11 This is a scheme of 118 units which are leased by the Housing Executive and where the provider is employed under a contract to act as the Housing Executive's managing agent and support provider. The service is jointly funded by homelessness and Supporting People. This provision caters for customers with intensive support needs and high-risk behaviours. The Housing Executive have confirmed that Queens Quarter Housing Ltd is the sole provider of DIME accommodation in Belfast.

Night Shelters

- 3.12 Funded by Supporting People, these services are emergency crisis accommodation intended for short term use by those with no other accommodation options.

Number of units

- 3.13 The Housing Executive have advised that table 1 is the most up to date information as of the 21 July 2023 on the number of units across the five types of temporary accommodation referenced in the Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation 2022/27 -

Table 1

<i>Type of accommodation</i>	<i>No. of units</i>
<i>Hostels</i>	c. 1,447 units
<i>Single Lets</i>	c. 2,499 units
<i>Housing Executive Temporary Accommodation</i>	c. 302 units
<i>Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency Accommodation (DIME)</i>	118 units
<i>Night Shelters</i>	31 units

- 3.14 Appendix 1 provides details of the voluntary sector, NIHE hostels and DIME temporary accommodation bedspaces recorded by Belfast postcode district.

Projected needs

- 3.15 The action plan indicates that –
- a) demand for temporary accommodation will remain higher than pre-pandemic levels and will outstrip supply,
 - b) single person households will remain the largest cohort presenting for temporary accommodation, and also with the greatest support needs,

- c) young people who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, will continue to need accommodation and support,
- d) Belfast and Derry/Londonderry will continue to have the highest gap between supply and demand,
- e) levels of support needs will continue to grow, particularly related to mental health and addictions,
- f) there will be increased demand from those losing private rented accommodation,
- g) it is anticipated that there will be increased demand from victims of domestic abuse.

Minimising the need for temporary accommodation

- 3.16 The Strategic Action Plan indicates there are two main work strands to minimising the need for temporary accommodation; one is effective targeted homelessness prevention/tenancy sustainment, and the other is improved access to permanent housing supply to enable permanent rehousing at the earliest opportunity and minimise time spent in temporary accommodation.
- 3.17 The Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation has noted that often the current homelessness response is crisis led, with a need to provide temporary accommodation. A systemic and cultural shift towards homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing is required. Ambitions to reduce numbers in temporary accommodation depend on the delivery of broader housing supply options. An adequate supply of social and affordable housing is fundamental to any long-term goal to end homelessness.

Supporting people

- 3.18 The Supporting People Programme helps people to live independently in the community. The Housing Executive administer the Programme in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Department for Communities.
- 3.19 Many different groups of people can benefit from housing related support through the Supporting People programme. These include:
 - homeless people
 - people with a learning disability

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

- people with poor mental health
- older people
- women at risk of domestic violence
- young people leaving care
- people with drug or alcohol use problems
- offenders or people at risk of offending”

The Committee noted the content of the report regarding the need and dispersal of hostel accommodation in Belfast.

Delegated Matters

**THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN PURSUANCE
OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT UNDER STANDING ORDER 37(d)**

Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee noted a list of applications for licenses which had, since its last meeting, been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licenses
Issued Under Delegated Authority**

The Committee noted a list of applications which had been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation during June, July and August.

**Application for a New Licence to operate a House
of Multiple Occupation for Flat 1, 6 Sandhurst Road; and**

**Application for a New Licence to operate a House
of Multiple Occupation for Flat 2, 6 Sandhurst Road**

(The Committee agreed to consider these two items simultaneously.)

The Chairperson reminded the Committee that it had initially considered the applications from Queens Quarter Housing (QQH, the applicant) at its meeting on 21st June, 2023, where it had agreed to defer their consideration in order to enable officers to explore the strategic context of the issues which had been raised in relation to the applications and the wider Hostel accommodation in Belfast.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee of the report which he had presented earlier in the meeting regarding hostel accommodation in the City and the relationship to HMO licensing.

The Committee was reminded that, prior to the meeting on 21st June, numerous items had been submitted by the legal representative of the applicant and officers had raised several concerns relating to those documents at the meeting.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

Firstly, the Committee was advised that QQH Referral Policy and Procedure stated:

“QQH can accommodate up to four individuals who have an arson conviction. This agreement has been made following discussion with stakeholders and consultation with risk assessment consultant Willis Ltd. For risk management and insurance purposes, QQH ensure placements are available for these individuals in staffed accommodation”.

It was reported that the fire risk assessment, encompassing Flats 1, 2 and 3, 6 Sandhurst Road, submitted with the HMO licence application, dated 12th October, 2022, made no reference to individuals with arson convictions being housed in the accommodation.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that officers had written to the applicant on 26th June, 2023 stating that the fire risk assessment submitted as part of the application did not include any reference to the possibility of the accommodation housing persons with prior arson convictions and, as such, the Council was no longer satisfied as to the suitability of the fire risk assessments submitted and that new assessments, taking into account all material factors, would be required as an urgent priority. Furthermore, due to the vulnerability of the other users within the accommodation which the applicant's legal team had highlighted as part of their presentation to the Committee, the Council required personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) for each of the occupants in residence.

The Committee was advised that the Council, as the licensing authority, had not been consulted in relation to the accommodation potentially being occupied by persons with arson convictions and had also requested a copy of the consultation document or risk assessment produced by Willis Limited.

It was reported that, on 18th July, 2023, officers from the NIHMO Unit and the NI Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) had undertaken a joint inspection of the accommodation. The Committee was advised that verbal reassurances were provided by the applicant during the inspection that the accommodation was not occupied by persons with arson convictions and, although some deficiencies were noted and forwarded to the applicant for actioning, the NIFRS confirmed the outcome of the audit was “broadly compliant”.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager pointed out that officers had received an updated fire risk assessment from the applicant earlier that day. He advised the Members that officers were content with it, on the basis that the minor works which were included within it were addressed, and that written confirmation be submitted from the applicant, that no persons with arson convictions would be housed within the property.

The Committee was advised that no Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) had been submitted for the vulnerable residents within the properties. Furthermore, a copy of the fire risk assessment from Willis Ltd had not yet been provided.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

QQH Referral Policy and Procedure stated that:

“QQH can accommodate individuals with a history of violent offending. Any referral made for potential services users who have a history of these offences will be assessed as per availability of appropriate accommodation for risk management of staff and other service users.”

The Committee was advised that the PSNI had disclosed that there had been an incident where they had been called by staff due to a service user being aggressive and an incident of assault by one tenant on another tenant.

At the Committee meeting on 21st June, 2023, Legal Counsel, on behalf of the applicant, had made reference to and indicated that the Members should take comfort from the fact that QQH was unable to provide accommodation for service users whose circumstances changed during their stay to “court bail” or “criminal charges”, that would change the risk to residents or the local community. The PSNI had confirmed that they did not conduct bail checks at the premises and, furthermore, if there were persons who were placed on bail after they had been housed in the premises, those persons were moved to suitable alternative accommodation.

QQH had also indicated that “pertinent background information” was sought through the Public Protection Unit and placements were approved by the PSNI, as per the Public Protection Arrangements Northern Ireland (PPANI) where applicable.

At the meeting on 21st June, Legal Counsel on behalf of the applicant had referred to a letter from the Director of Operations of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, dated 17th May, expressing their support for “the renewal of the Licence at Queen’s Quarter Hostel IV Unit, to allow for their continued service delivery.” The Committee was advised that officers had since sought clarification from PBNI as to whether it was supporting the application for new HMO licences at 6 Sandhurst Road or if it was in support of the wider services provided by QQH.

The Members were advised that a response had been received from the Director of Operations of PBNI, on 18th September, 2023, clarifying that the letter was in support of the wider services provided by Queens Quarter Housing Limited, and not in support of the particular HMO licence applications per se.

At the 21st June meeting, the PSNI had drawn the Members’ attention to the incident log which provided detail of reported incidents linked to the properties. They had described the community impact of the accommodation being used as a HMO, together with the pressure on Policing to safeguard the area. It was reported that officers had received allegations of public nuisance associated with the premises which were deemed relevant to the licence application, from the owner of a licensed HMO situated near 6 Sandhurst Road. It was pointed out that those representations had been received outside of the statutory consultation period. The City Solicitor advised the Members that it was for the Committee to decide whether or not to exercise its discretion and consider those representations, and to consider what weight it would attach to such information. The Committee agreed that it would take the late representations into consideration.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager outlined that, on 4th August, 2023, the applicant had written to Autonomie, a neighbour of the property and an objector to the two HMO licence applications, requesting a meeting to discuss their concerns. The Committee noted that the Chief Executive of Autonomie had responded to the applicant on the 29th August, 2023, stating that they would be open to meeting to discuss the matter further and requested a draft agenda and details of who was likely to attend the meeting from QQH. Autonomie had confirmed that no further correspondence had since been received from the applicant.

The Committee was advised that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's strategic action plan for temporary accommodation 2022 – 2027, "Ending Homelessness Together - Homeless to Home" outlined that:

- "demand for temporary accommodation will remain higher than pre-pandemic levels and will outstrip supply,
- single person households will remain the largest cohort presenting for temporary accommodation, and also with the greatest support needs,
- young people who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, will continue to need accommodation and support,
- Belfast and Derry/Londonderry will continue to have the highest gap between supply and demand,
- levels of support needs will continue to grow, particularly related to mental health and addictions,
- there will be increased demand from those losing private rented accommodation,
- it is anticipated that there will be increased demand from victims of domestic abuse."

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that, although the housing need in the relevant locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need was something that the Council must have regard to, officers were not proposing the refusal of the two HMO licence applications on the grounds of overprovision.

He highlighted that the proposed grounds for refusal of both applications solely related to section 8(2)(e), as read with section 13, which stated that the Council may only grant a licence if it was satisfied that the accommodation was suitable for use as an HMO for the specified maximum number of persons or could be made so by including conditions in the licence, and, in coming to the decision, the Council must have regard to:

- the accommodation's location;
- the type and number of persons likely to occupy it;
- the safety and security of persons likely to occupy it; and
- the possibility of undue public nuisance.

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. L. Morrison, Chief Executive of Autonomie, a charity which provided support for complex needs persons and which operated out of the neighbouring property to the application site. The charity had objected to the applications

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

for the two HMO licences and had spoken at the previous Committee meeting in June, 2023.

She advised the Committee that the difficulties still continued and that the young people who used the Autonomie building remained very unsettled. She reiterated that she was happy to enter into mediation with Queens Quarter Housing but that she would wish to know who would be attending such a meeting and the items for discussion in advance.

The Committee then welcomed Ms. L. Smyth, legal representative for the applicant to the meeting. She advised the Committee that the reason for deferral at the last meeting had been in order to receive further information on hostel accommodation throughout the City and that the report which had since been presented to it had, in fact, bolstered the applicants case to receive the two HMO licences. She advised the Committee that it was plain that that type of accommodation was certainly needed and would only prove to be more necessary in the coming years. She asserted that single person households would remain the largest cohort presenting for temporary accommodation and with the greatest support needs. She highlighted that, if the Committee was to refuse the licences, those people currently residing in the properties would be homeless until alternative accommodation could be found.

She confirmed to the Committee that no one with an arson conviction, nor an allegation of arson, would be housed in the application sites. She added that the applicant was content that it could be confirmed by condition as part of any HMO licence. She advised the Committee that it was her understanding that PEEPs could be issued as and when required, and that those could be conditioned, and apologised that no response had been submitted in respect of the Council's request but explained that it had been received during a holiday period.

She highlighted to the Committee that Autonomie was not a residential property and that their work with vulnerable young people occurred during the day. The application sites were, in contrast, a place for people to stay and sleep at night.

She pointed out that the applications had been listed as new applications for an HMO licence and that was incorrect. She clarified that they had been operating as HMOs for a number of years and that it was just that QQH had recently taken them over.

In response to Ms. Smyth's last point, the Manager clarified that the previous HMO at the site had been managed by an estate agent and had been a residence for students and young professionals. Before the date of transfer of the property, QQH had submitted an application so, pursuant to Section 28 of the Act, it was deemed a new licence application, however, for the purposes of overprovision, it would be treated as a transfer of a licence.

A number of Members acknowledged that there was certainly a need for temporary accommodation across the City and that organisations were providing a vital service to a wide range of vulnerable individuals. They stated that it was also important that the Committee considered the context and circumstances in which each application existed.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

A Member stated that a better spread of temporary accommodation was needed across the City, given that 56% of it was currently located within 3 postcode areas.

Mr. C. Toland, QQH, stated that there was an inaccuracy within the report, where it stated that there had been an increase in the crime rate in the local area since QQH had taken ownership of the premises. He advised the Committee that PSNI statistics, as found on their own website, illustrated that the rate had, in fact, gone down.

Accordingly, it was

Moved by Alderman McCullough
Seconded by Councillor McCabe and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refuse the applications for Flats 1 and 2, 6 Sandhurst Road, on the basis that it is not satisfied that the living accommodation is suitable for use as an HMO pursuant to section 8(2)(e) and section 13 of the 2016 Act.

**Application for a New Licence to operate a House
of Multiple Occupation for 71 Sandhurst Drive, Belfast,
BT9 5AZ**

The City Solicitor advised the Members that the applicant's husband, Mr. P. Doyle, who was in attendance to address the Committee, was an employee of the Council.

The Committee was apprised of the details of the application. The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that the property had the benefit of an HMO licence issued by the Housing Executive in the name of the of the previous owner, who was the son of the applicant. On 7th June, 2021, the ownership of the accommodation transferred to his mother, Mrs. S. Doyle, and in accordance with section 28(2) of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act the existing licence ceased to have effect on that date.

On 13th January, 2023, an application for a Temporary Exemption Notice "TEN" was received and subsequently approved on the 19th January, 2023, an extension to the TEN was approved on 19th April, 2023 which expired on 19th June, 2023. No further extension to the TEN was permitted under the 2016 Act.

On 6th June, 2023, an HMO licence application was received from the owner of the accommodation. If the new owner had applied for a licence before the change of ownership had taken place, the licence which had already been in effect in respect of the HMO would have been treated as being held by the new owner until such times as their application had been determined.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory);
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and—
 - i. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
 - ii. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

The Committee was advised that, as it was a new application, the Council's Planning Service was consulted. It had confirmed that a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development ("CLEUD") was granted on 19 May 2023.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with Environmental Protection Unit in relation to nighttime and daytime noise; Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years. It was also confirmed that officers were not aware of any other issues relevant to the Applicant's fitness.

No objections were received in relation to the application.

For the purpose of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Areas (HMA) "HMA 2/19 Stranmillis" as defined in the Council's Local Development Plan Strategy which was formally adopted on 2nd May, 2023. It was reported that Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement in section 8 of the 2016 Act upon the Council to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision.

The officers had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and
- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that "Nurturing sustainable and balanced communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP's housing policies." In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

"Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA."

The Committee was advised that, on the date of assessment, 18th August, 2023, 63% of all dwelling units in policy area "HMA 2/19 Stranmillis" were made up of HMOs

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit. There were 342 (44%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 1463 persons in HMA 2/19 Stranmillis.

It was outlined that there were a total of 777 dwelling units in “HMA 2/19 Stranmillis”. The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low income households and, more recently, migrant workers.

On 18th August 2023, out of 62 premises available for rent on the PropertyNews website, within the BT9 area, there were 14 licensed HMOs which represented 55 bed spaces. The availability of the HMO accommodation ranged from immediately to September 2023 and anecdotal evidence from previous conversations with HMO managing agents suggested that there was currently a lack of HMO accommodation available in that locality.

The Committee was advised that, with the continued expansion of the Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) sector and students transitioning from private rentals to PBSAs, it was too early to tell whether the increased competition from nonstudents for HMOs was a temporary problem, which could be managed by the reduction in students residing in existing HMO accommodation within the locality, or evidence of an emerging long-term supply issue.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

It was outlined that, on 12th September, 2023, officers had received a response to the notice of proposed decision, in which the Applicant had provided background information into the initial purchase of the property and the reasons for transferring the property into the Applicant's name in June, 2021.

The Chairperson welcomed Mrs. S. Doyle, the Applicant, and her husband, Mr. P. Doyle, to the meeting. Mrs. Doyle outlined to the Committee that she had purchased the existing HMO property in April 2017 as an investment for her son. The plan was for her son to live in the property when he had finished University in the summer of 2018 and let out the other three bedrooms as an HMO. However, their son moved to Australia in January 2019 and planned to stay for two years. As a result of the Covid lockdown and a delay in his return, it had become difficult to manage the house as all the bills were in his name. She explained that, when it was confirmed that he would not be returning, they decided to transfer the house into her name in order to more easily

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

manage the property. She outlined that, unfortunately, they had not realised the HMO licence implications before they made the transfer. She reported that they had managed the property as an HMO for over five years and had maintained a high standard within it, with excellent tenants.

Mr. Doyle explained to the Committee that they had retained the rent at £285 per tenant, which was considerably lower than the rental value in the area. He added that they had done so intentionally as they had four children of their own who had resided in rental properties and that they understood the financial burdens they faced. On Monday he had contacted two estate agents who had confirmed that they would list the property at £1100 or £1150, as a rental for two people. Mr. Doyle explained that, while it would not financially affect them, it would mean that the rental amount would have to be split between two persons instead of four, with two rooms being left vacant. He added that they had invested over £50,000 in renovation works, including the removal of the bath and replacing it with two shower rooms, to ensure that it met and exceeded the requirements of an HMO. He explained that the fact that the bath had been removed had also meant that the property would not be appealing to a young family. He requested that the Committee would use its discretion to grant approval to the licence application.

Moved by Councillor Donnelly,
Seconded by McCann and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refuse the application as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it was satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

**Application for a New Licence to operate a House
of Multiple Occupation for 55 Haypark Avenue**

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager advised the Committee that the decision was not subject to call-in, as the call-in period would exceed the time limit for determining the application pursuant to Schedule 2, paragraph 2 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

He explained that the property had the benefit of an HMO licence which had been issued by the Housing Executive in the name of the of the current owner, which had expired on 3rd September, 2022.

The Members were advised that, on 17th August, 2022, an application to renew the licence had been received from the owner of the accommodation, which, on 6th September, 2022, was rejected as the applicant had failed to publish notice of the application in one or more newspapers circulating in the locality of the HMO in accordance with Regulation 2 of The Houses in Multiple Occupation (Notice of Application) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 or provide the Council with a copy of the notice. A reminder of the requirement had been sent to the owner on 23rd August 2022.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

On 13th September, 2022, an application for a Temporary Exemption Notice “TEN” had been received and was subsequently approved on the same day, an extension to the TEN was approved on 8th December, 2022, which expired on 8th March, 2023. No further extensions to the TEN were permitted under the 2016 Act. On 13th June, 2023, an HMO licence application was received from the owner of the accommodation.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory);
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and—
 - iii. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
 - iv. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

He confirmed to the Committee, that, as it was a new application, the Council’s Planning Service was consulted. It had confirmed that a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development (“CLEUD”) had been granted on 3rd April, 2023.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with Environmental Protection Unit in relation to nighttime and daytime noise; Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years. The Applicant and Managing Agent had also confirmed that they had not been convicted of any relevant offences.

No objections were received in relation to the application.

The Committee was advised that, for the purposes of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Area (HMA) “2/03 Ballynafeigh” as defined in the document Belfast City Council’s Local Development Plan Strategy which had been formally adopted on 2nd May, 2023. Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement upon the Council, in Section 8 of the 2016 Act, to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision. In making such a decision, the Council had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and
- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that “Nurturing sustainable and balanced

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP's housing policies." In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

"Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA."

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reported that, on the date of assessment, 16th August, 2023, 24% of all dwelling units in policy area "HMA 2/03 Ballynafeigh" were made up of HMOs and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit as set out at Policy HOU10. The Members were advised that there were 77 (4.65%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 345 persons in HMA 2/03 Ballynafeigh.

It was outlined that there were a total of 1649 dwelling units in "HMA 2/03 Ballynafeigh". The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low income households and, more recently, migrant workers.

On 16th August 2023 out of 30 premises available for rent on the PropertyNews website, within the BT7 area, there were 7 licensed HMOs which represented 29 bed spaces. The availability of the HMO accommodation ranged from immediately to September 2023 and anecdotal evidence from previous conversations with HMO managing agents suggested that there was currently a lack of HMO accommodation available in that locality.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

The Chairperson welcomed the Applicant, Ms. O. O'Sullivan, and her Managing Agent, Mr. C. Dolan, to the meeting.

(As neither deputation had consented to being recorded the audio stream was switched off at this point in proceedings)

Ms. O'Sullivan advised the Committee that she had been a landlord for ten years and that she had been told that she was required to place the advert in two papers, which had caused the delay. She also stated that she would have submitted her application

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

earlier had she known about the 20% limit within Policy HOU10 in the LDP. She stated that it had taken the Planning Service 7 months to consider her CLUED application, which had further delayed her application.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor McCann,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to refuse the application as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it was satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

**Application for a New Licence to operate a House
of Multiple Occupation for Apartment 2, 169 Stranmillis Road**

(Councillor Anglin, having declared an interest in the item, did not participate in the discussion and left the meeting at this point)

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager provided the Committee with the details of the application. He explained that the property had had the benefit of an HMO licence having been issued by the NI Housing Executive in the name of the of the previous owner, a relative of the applicant. However, on 18th June, 2020, the ownership of the accommodation transferred to Mr. A. Watkins and, in accordance with section 28(2) of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act, the existing licence ceased to have effect on that date.

On 6th June, 2023, an HMO licence application was received from the owner of the accommodation. The Committee was advised that, had the new owner applied for a licence before the change of ownership had taken place, the licence which had already been in effect in respect of the HMO would have been treated as being held by the new owner until such time as their application had have been determined.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory);
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and—
 - v. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

- vi. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

He confirmed to the Committee, that, as it was a new application, the Council's Planning Service was consulted. It had confirmed that a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development ("CLEUD") had been granted on 16th March, 2021.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with Environmental Protection Unit in relation to daytime noise; Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years.

The Committee was advised that one noise warning notice had been issued, relating to nighttime noise at the property, on 20th August 2023. Officers were not aware of any issues relevant to the Applicant's fitness.

No objections were received in relation to this application.

For the purpose of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Area (HMA) "2/17 Sandymount", as defined in the Council's Local Development Plan Strategy, which had been formally adopted on 2nd May, 2023.

Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement upon the Council, in Section 8 of the 2016 Act, to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision. In making such a decision, the Council had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and
- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that "Nurturing sustainable and balanced communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP's housing policies." In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

"Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA."

It was reported that, on the date of assessment, 18th August, 2023, 77% of all dwelling units in policy area "HMA 2/17 Sandymount" were made up of HMOs and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit as set out at Policy HOU10. There were 114 (66%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 502 persons in HMA 2/17 Sandymount.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

There were a total of 172 dwelling units in “HMA 2/17 Sandymount”. The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low income households and, more recently, migrant workers.

The Committee was advised that, on 18th August, 2023, out of 62 premises available for rent on the PropertyNews website within the BT9 area, there were 14 licensed HMOs which represented 55 bed spaces. The availability of the HMO accommodation ranged from immediately to September 2023. The HMO Manager added that anecdotal evidence from previous conversations with HMO managing agents suggested that there was currently a lack of HMO accommodation available in that locality.

The Committee was advised that, with the continued expansion of the Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA) sector and students transitioning from private rentals to PBMSAs, it was too early to tell whether the increased competition from nonstudents for HMOs was a temporary problem, which could be managed by the reduction in students residing in existing HMO accommodation within the locality, or evidence of an emerging long-term supply issue.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. W. Sinton, Legal representative for the applicant, and Mr. A. Watkins, Applicant, to the meeting.

Mr. Sinton advised the Committee that there were particular personal circumstances which the Committee should be mindful of. He outlined that the property had been transferred to the Applicant from his mother, Mrs. Watkins, in June 2020. He highlighted that Mrs. Watkins had moved out of her family home at that time in order to care for her elderly father who had dementia and for her mother who was seriously ill with cancer. He explained that, due to the travel restrictions which had been in place at that time, and additionally because her husband, a Consultant Paediatrician, was still seeing patients, Mrs. Watkins had been unable to access the records for the HMO property.

He highlighted that Mrs. Watkins had acted in good faith in transferring the property to her son and that it was her understanding that the HMO licence would transfer with it. Indeed, she had written to the NI Housing Executive in April 2020 to advise it of

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th September, 2023**

her intentions. No response had been received and her correspondence had not been forwarded to the Council. The Committee was advised that, had NIHE or the Council responded to advise Mrs. Watkins that the transfer of the licence was not possible, there would have been a sufficient period of time in which she could have sought a new HMO licence under Section 28 of the HMO Act NI 2016, before the overprovision limits had taken effect. He added that the granting of a licence to the applicant would not result in a net increase in HMOs in the area, given the previous licence. The Committee was also reminded that Mr. A. Watkins had obtained a CLEUD subsequent to the transfer of the property.

A Member stated that there had been a history of bad planning decisions in relation to HMO applications in the area in question, with a number of issues regarding waste and cleansing. He highlighted that there had been three years between the transfer of ownership of the property and an application for a licence being submitted.

A further Member added that, while sympathetic to the former owner's difficult circumstances, three years was not an insignificant period of time and that 66% of licensed HMOs was substantially above the 20% limit as established in Policy HOU10.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Ó Néill and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to refuse the application as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it is satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

Chairperson

Planning Committee

Tuesday, 19th September, 2023

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Garrett (Chairperson);
Aldermen Lawlor and McCullough;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bradley, T. Brooks,
Carson, Doherty, P. Donnelly, Ferguson,
Groogan, Maskey, McCann,
Nic Bhranair and Whyte.
- In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management);
Mr. K. Sutherland, Planning Manager (Plans and Policy);
Ms. C. Reville, Principal Planning Officer;
Mr. D. O'Kane, Principal Planning Officer;
Mr. N. Hasson, Senior Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Councillors Doran, Douglas and Hanvey.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 29th June, 1st and 15th August, 2023 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, 2023, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Whyte declared an interest in relation to item 8d – LA04/2021/1447/F, 28-house development (social housing) including provision of new access, below ground pumping station, open space and landscape, Lands NE of 265 Whiterock Road, on the basis that he had previously worked with Radius Housing and left the meeting while the item was being considered.

Notifications from Statutory Bodies, Abandonment, Extinguishment and Vesting Orders

The Committee noted the notice of intention to vest land at Woodbourne Crescent and the extinguishment of a Public Right of Way for the pathway at Maureen Sheehan Centre.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

Provision of Accessible Parking Bay

The Committee noted the notices of provision of accessible parking bays at the following locations:

- 92 Disraeli Street;
- 9 Knock Link; and
- 7 Adelaide Avenue.

Appeals

The Committee noted the appeals decisions.

Planning Decisions Issued

The Committee noted the planning decisions issued between 1st and 31st August, 2023.

Miscellaneous Reports

Building Control Consultation Response

The Director of Planning and Building Control reported that the Buildings and Standards Branch of the Department of Finance (DoF) had sought the views of Council on its proposals to amend the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (as amended).

She outlined the application of the building regulations and stated that DoF was committed to considering the recommendations of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry and that some of the changes proposed focused on those recommendations where the inquiry called for changes.

She explained that the proposals mainly related to fire safety changes in buildings that contained flats, to provide assurance and additional safety measures to residents, and that other changes had been aimed specifically at assisting the Fire and Rescue Services to ensure they could provide an effective operational response.

The Director of Planning and Building Control outlined the proposed changes to the Committee and reported that the Building Control Service had reviewed the consultation proposals in detail in the proposed response on behalf of the Council.

The Committee endorsed the consultation response to the Department of Finance on proposed amendments to the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012.

Local Development Plan Enforcement Strategy

The Principal Planning Officer referred the Committee to the new Belfast Enforcement Strategy (BES) and explained how it set out how the Council would deal with complaints relating to breaches of planning control to protect the integrity of the development management process by taking effective action against unauthorised development.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

He reported that the BES identified local priorities for enforcement action and provided greater clarity on the approach to planning enforcement for all parties engaged in the development process.

He explained that the overarching principle was the protection of communities, natural habitats and built heritage from unauthorised development that would cause harm or had shown a disregard for the planning system.

He outlined the following key objectives of the Belfast Enforcement Strategy:

- To bring unauthorised activity under control;
- To remedy the undesirable effects of unauthorised development, including, where necessary, the removal of unacceptable building works and the cessation of unacceptable uses; and
- To take legal action, where necessary, against those who ignore or flout planning legislation.

The Committee noted the report and agreed to hold a workshop on the new Belfast Enforcement Strategy.

Planning Applications

**THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN PURSUANCE OF THE
POWERS DELEGATED TO IT BY THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER 37(e)**

(The Committee agreed to consider the following two items together)

LA04/2020/1901/F and 1899/LBC - Internal refurbishment works to existing listed building and retention and reconfiguration of existing office and ancillary floorspace across ground, first and second floors; Provision of ground floor extension with internal mezzanine floor; Partial demolition and reconstruction to third floor (attic) to provide new stairwell and lifts; External alterations to existing building including provision of dormers and rooflights; External layout reconfigurations to include construction of new access from Ormeau Road, amended parking layout, provision of cycle parking, bin store, substation and associated works. (Amended description and drawings). Former Good Shepherd Centre at lands at Nos 511 and 511a Ormeau Road; and

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

LA04/2022/1677/F - Change of use from artist's studio space (sui generis) at second floor of existing Good Shepherd Centre to office accommodation (Class B1). Former Good Shepherd Centre at lands at Nos. 511 and 511a Ormeau Road, Belfast BT7 3GS.

The Senior Planning Officer outlined the applications to the Committee and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of office development;
- Impact on the Listed Building;
- Impact on Residential Amenity;
- Access, road safety and parking;
- Impact on Trees; and
- Other environmental considerations.

He pointed out to the Committee that, since the report had been published, the Listed Building Consent application in relation to LA04/2022/1679/LBC had been withdrawn as the proposed works had already been covered within LA04/2020/1899/LBC. He also stated that a consultation response from the Council's Tree Officer had been received which raised concerns with regard to the impact on existing protected trees from construction of the new access but was content with the proposed tree removal.

He explained that the application site was located directly adjacent to the Ormeau Road arterial route and that the proposed access had been amended from the original proposal, to come directly from the Ormeau Road as opposed to the Carolan Road, which had attracted a considerable number of objections. He stated that DfI Roads had offered no objection to the amended proposal, subject to conditions.

He reported that, with respect to LA04/2020/1901/F, the Council had received 121 objections and, for LA04/2020/1899/LBC, the Council had received six objections which raised issues that related to transport, access, parking, trees, environment, principle of development, existing office use, built heritage, residential amenity, working patterns and procedural matters. He added that there had been no objections received in relation to LA04/2022/1677/F.

He stated that the proposal would secure the building's upkeep and survival and preserve the character, architectural and historic interest of the building.

The Committee granted planning permission and Listed Building Consent in relation to LA04/2020/1901/F, LA04/2020/1899/LBC and LA04/2022/1677/F, subject to conditions, that would include a condition that the Belfast Bikes station, located on the Ormeau Road, be extended to accommodate an increase in usage from employees located at the application site.

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of conditions and deal with any other issues that may arise, including outstanding consultations.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

LA04/2021/1808/F - Proposed residential development comprising of 14 dwellings, access from Lagmore View Lane and Lagmore Glen, completion of remaining areas of open space (including hard and soft landscaping), provision of parking bays and speed cushions to improve road safety along Lagmore View Road, and all associated site works. Lands South and East of 148-163 Lagmore View Lane North and West of 37, 81, 82 and 112 Lagmore Glen and Lagmore View Road, Belfast

The Planning Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application that included site photographs, layout, previous approval, elevations and sections. He highlighted the following key issues in the assessment of the application:

- Principle of Development (including Loss of Open Space);
- Layout, scale and design;
- Traffic, Movement and Parking;
- Private Amenity Provision;
- New Open Space Provision;
- Impact on Amenity;
- Affordable Housing Provision;
- Drainage and Flooding;
- Other Environmental Matters;
- Impact on existing Electrical Infrastructure;
- Section 76 planning agreement; and
- Pre-application Community Consultation.

He explained that DfI had acknowledged that the current road arrangement was not ideal and that a road safety audit had been carried out of the existing Lagmore View Road and that the proposal included a realignment with speed cushions at an estimated cost of £200K.

He pointed out that two letters of objection had been received in relation to road safety measures and increased traffic, which had been addressed by officers, and that two letters of support from a local residents' association had been received that highlighted the positive engagement between the developer and the local community.

The Committee granted planning permission and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, that would include the requirement to secure three of the units as affordable housing, and to deal with any other issues that may arise from outstanding consultations.

(Councillor Whyte left the meeting while the following item was being considered)

LA04/2021/1447/F - 28 house development (social housing) including provision of new access, below ground pumping station, open

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

**space and landscape, Lands NE of 265
Whiterock Road**

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and highlighted the following key issues:

- Principle of development;
- Affordable housing and Housing Mix;
- Accessible and adaptable accommodation;
- Design, layout and impact on the character and appearance of the area;
- Climate change;
- Access and parking;
- Drainage;
- Waste-water infrastructure;
- Ecological Impacts;
- Archaeology & built heritage; and
- Noise, odour, and other environmental impacts including contamination.

She pointed out that 117 letters of objection had been received, and that the main issues related to the loss to the community of a valued outdoor environmental amenity area and concerns related to traffic safety and congestion.

She stated that, having considered all matters, there was a clear and pressing unmet social need in the local area, therefore, the proposal was considered, on balance, to be acceptable and it was recommended that planning permission would be granted.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions, and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions.

(Councillor Whyte returned to the meeting.)

**LA04/2021/2811/F and/ or LA04/2021/2488/F-
Application under section 54 of the Planning Act
(NI) in respect of planning permission
LA04/2016/1276/F (community centre and
associated site works) to vary condition No.6
(seeking to remove requirement for
archaeological works set out in the approved
programme of works to be implemented prior to
commencement of any site works or
development). Corner site between Mayo Street
and Mayo Link, off Lanark Way, Shankill Road**

The Planning Manager outlined the application to the Committee and reported that Department for Infrastructure had no objection to the variation and that it had been recommended that approval be granted.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions, and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other matters which may arise.

**LA04/2023/3787/LBC - Proposed demolition of
lean-to external store. 2 Royal Avenue, Belfast,
BT1 1DA**

The Principal Planning Officer informed the Committee that, due to a technical administrative error, Listed Building Consent, with the recommended conditions, had been incorrectly issued on 14th September, 2023 and the agent had received the decision notice.

The City Solicitor explained that, even though the decision notice had been issued, the application had to be considered by the Committee, and that the Committee's decision would determine the officers' next steps.

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and highlighted key areas for consideration, that included the impact on the Listed Building and the Conservation Area.

She concluded by stating that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered acceptable and that it was recommended that Listed Building Consent would be granted, subject to conditions.

The Committee requested that a report would be brought back on the technical issues related to the issuing of the consent.

The Committee granted listed building consent, subject to conditions, and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to deal with any matters which may arise following expiry of the advertisement period.

**LA04/2022/0129/F - (Reconsidered item) Amended
Proposal: 2.4m wall to rear of all proposed
properties backing onto Dermot Hill Housing
Development. Proposed social housing led mixed
tenure residential development comprising 122
residential dwellings, pedestrian and cycle ways,
public open space, children's play area,
landscaping (including 8 metre landscaped buffer
to western boundary), boundary treatments,
parking, access (provision of a right turn lane) and
ancillary site works. Lands north of 14 Mill Race
and 15 Belfield Heights and south of 2-15
St Gerards Manor**

The Planning Manager outlined the application to the Committee and explained that the proposal had previously been approved by the Committee in February, June and August, 2023, and that final consultation responses from DfI Roads and DfI Rivers had been outstanding.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

He reported that DfI Roads had provided a response and offered no objection to the proposal, subject to conditions and that a response had also been received from DfI Rivers which had objected to the proposal on the ground that a portion of the site was in a climate change flood plain and therefore the proposal was contrary to Policy ENV4 of the Plan Strategy, however, he explained that DfI Rivers had since confirmed that its response had been advice, rather than an objection.

He outlined DfI Rivers' advice to the Committee, which noted that parts of the northern and southern ends of the site were at risk of flooding from the adjacent Mill Race, when allowance was made for climate change and that the applicant had provided a plan showing ten dwellings affected to the south and 24 dwellings to the north.

He explained how officers had applied the relevant policies and highlighted that the application was accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment and that a suitable Flood Management Plan and a range of flood resilience measures could be secured by condition.

He concluded by stating that it was recommended that the application would be approved with conditions and subject to a Section 76 planning agreement.

The Committee approved the application, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement, and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and to deal with any other matters which may arise.

Restricted Items

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the Press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following 2 items as, due to the nature of the item, 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.

Quarter 1 2023/24 Finance Report

The Director of Planning and Building Control outlined the Quarter 1 financial position of the Planning Committee and referred the Members to a summary of financial indicators and an executive summary.

The Committee noted the report.

LDP Update and Timetable

The Planning Manager outlined the draft timetable, governance and proposed engagement for the Local Policies Plan as the basis for submission to the Department for Infrastructure for formal approval.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th September, 2023**

The Committee:

- Endorsed the proposed timetable for preparation of Local Policies Plan for submission to the Department for Infrastructure;
- Noted the proposed change to the composition of the LDP Steering Group to include Party Group Leaders/Planning Committee representation or their nominees; and
- Noted the proposed approach to ongoing engagement and opportunities for wider participation to support the development of the Local Policies Plan both internally and externally.

Chairperson

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Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 14th September, 2023

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks, T. Brooks,
Carson, Collins, Doherty, M. Donnelly, D. Douglas,
Kelly, McCabe, McKeown, Smyth and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. R. McLernon, Climate Programme Manager City; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend was reported from Councillors S. Douglas and Maghie.

Minutes

In considering the minutes of the meeting of 10th August, which had been adopted by the Council on 4th September, Councillor T. Brooks indicated that the minutes stated that she had declared an interest as she was employed by QUB and the minutes on page H13 say that QUB gave the presentation on solar panels. That was not correct – as she declared an interest as QUB are one of the partners for the pathfinders net zero funding application. As it turned out there was no conflict issue at the time, but I would like the record to be correct.

Accordingly, the minutes of the meeting of 10th August 2023 were taken as read and signed as correct, subject to the foregoing variation,

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Restricted Items

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

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

**Climate and City Resilience Committee,
Thursday, 14th September, 2023**

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

National Cyber Security Centre – Presentation

(Mr. P. Gribben, Head of Digital Services, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee noted the presentation by the National Cyber Security Centre.

**Shared Island Funding –
Belfast City Council Project Updates**

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the ongoing work in relation to a number of project proposals which were being developed under the Shared Island Initiative. The report also outlined other projects being developed in partnership between the Council and partner councils in the Republic of Ireland for funding to develop agreed programmes of work.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update provided in relation to work underway to bring forward projects under the Shared Island initiative;
- ii. noted the update in relation to other partnership work being undertaken with partner councils in the Republic of Ireland to realise funding opportunities; and
- iii. noted the plans for detailed engagement with elected members, being organised via the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, that would form a key element in developing a wider Funding Framework for the Council. This wider Funding Framework will reflect current projects being developed under the Shared Island initiative and other funding plans being pursued with a North/South dimension.

Climate Action Pledge – BITC

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 This report will update Members on the Business in the Community (BITC) Climate Pledge and the opportunity for Belfast City Council to join the initiative.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- I. Note the opportunity for Belfast City Council to join the Business in the Community (BITC) Climate Pledge.**
- II. Note that a prerequisite of signing the pledge is the agreement of a Council target year for the reduction of**

GHG gases, and incorporation of relevant projects into the Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Plan, which would be followed by a public pledge to communicate this widely.

- III. Give their approval for the Council to sign up to the BITC Climate Pledge when the above prerequisite has been achieved.
- IV. Note that Belfast City Council manages a separate Belfast Business Promise which contains a pledge, criteria and workstream dedicated to Climate. Belfast City Council is currently working through the Belfast Business Promise accreditation process.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

3.2 Business in the Community Climate Action Pledge

3.3 Business in the Community established the Climate Pledge to encourage and support businesses to reach net zero, building momentum across a range of organisations across Northern Ireland.

3.4 Signatory organisations commit to reduce their absolute scope 1 and scope 2 greenhouse gas emissions by either 30% or 50% by 2030; and to work towards measuring and reporting their scope 3 GHG emissions. The chosen base year must be 2015 or thereafter. Members will be aware that a Belfast City target of 80% reduction by 2030 has been approved with 100% reduction to be achieved by 2050. Work is also underway with the procurement team to measure the Council's scope 3 emissions. Members should note that the achievement of the targets set out above would be subject to Council agreeing a net zero target and on including the relevant projects / actions within the corporate plan and medium-term financial plan.

3.5 In addition, through the campaign Business in the Community supports signatories to achieve the targets of the Pledge by providing:

- i. A [Climate Action Pledge FAQ factsheet](#) that helps the organisation to sign up to the Climate Action Pledge, use the Climate Action Pledge Reporting Platform, and meet the requirements of the commitment.
- ii. Free access for Pledge signatories to calculate and measure emissions on the Pledge Reporting Platform.

- iii. Bespoke training, e-learning and education opportunities for senior management and staff.
 - iv. Support with development and evaluation of strategies and action plans through workshops.
 - v. Sector-focused Climate Action Toolkits.
Signposting to useful resources from Business in the Community and external organisations
 - vi. Support with measurement, reporting and communicating progress to key stakeholders.
 - vii. Links to carbon offsetting opportunities at a local level.
 - viii. Best practice examples and case studies.
 - ix. Networking and profiling opportunities through BITC communication channels and events.
- 3.6 87 companies have signed up to the BITC Climate Pledge to date, including key city partners such as NIHE, Translink, Belfast Harbour and NI Water.
- 3.7 **Belfast Business Promise**
- 3.8 Members will be aware of the Belfast Business Promise, which is an initiative led by Belfast City Council is a key commitment in the Council's Inclusive Growth strategy with the aim of creating a more inclusive city. As such, it is also included as a key action in the refreshed Belfast Agenda. Members will be aware that a cross council team, led by the Strategy, Policy and Partnership in partnership with Economic Development, has been progressing the development of the Belfast Business Promise, alongside an external business working group and the council's Social Policy Working Group (SPWG).
- 3.9 The Belfast Business Promise has been co-developed with businesses and has eight pledges designed to create a more inclusive and sustainable city. As part of the development of the accreditation system, an accreditation mapping exercise has been completed so that the Belfast Business Promise recognises the accreditation standards that businesses may already have achieved. 22 organisations, including the Council, Translink, QUB, UU, BT, SENI and Equality Commission have signed up to the pilot phase to refine the Charter and delivery model for full roll-out later this year.
- 3.10 As an organisation, the Council has also signed-up to the Belfast Business Promise demonstrating leadership and commitment to working with employers to deliver on the ambition of creating an inclusive and sustainable city. Detailed internal discussions have been ongoing with key officers and professions to assess the Council's position in relation to meeting the pledges and the subsequent action planning to ensure continuous improvement.

The first assessment is currently in progress, with the initial feedback to be reported to the next meeting of the Social Policy Working Group in September.

- 3.11 Pledge 8 of the Belfast Business Promise – Protect our Environment, is a commitment to ‘Work together to tackle the global challenge of climate change and protect our environment for future generations’. All pledges are set out in the diagram below.



- 3.12 Officers from the Belfast City Council Climate Team have liaised with the Belfast Business Promise team to support the development of the criteria under pledge 8, to support and assess businesses who apply, and to support the process of Belfast City Council going through the accreditation process itself.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

- 4.1 There are no financial or resource implications at present.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct equality and good relations implications.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Climate and City Resilience Committee,
Thursday, 14th September, 2023**

Request to present - Ms. Lise McGreevy

The Committee acceded to a request from Lise McGreevy to attend a future meeting of the Committee to present on her RETAIN: SUSTAIN programme and short film on tackling eco anxiety in the wider Belfast Community.

Chairperson

Standards and Business Committee

Tuesday, 26th September, 2023

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McDonough-Brown (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan);
Aldermen Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers; and
Councillors Bradley, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, D. Douglas,
Duffy, Kelly, Lyons, Magee, F. McAteer, G. McAteer,
McCormick, McDowell and R. McLaughlin.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Long and McMullan.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 29th 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.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported.

Motions

The Committee considered the following three motions which had been received in advance of the Council meeting on 4th October:

Pavement Parking

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor T. Brooks and seconded by Councillor Nelson, be referred to the Council for debate, with no restriction to be placed on the number of speakers.

National Famine Memorial Day

The Committee agreed to adopt the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Whyte and seconded by Councillor Doherty:

“This Council recognises the tragic and historic impact of the Great Famine/An Gorta Mór, which affected the entire island between 1845 to 1852 and resulted in the death of nearly one million people and the forced emigration of at least a further one million. As the island’s second largest city, Belfast and its citizens were directly affected by the Famine, through death and the emigration of people from all backgrounds who lived both here and in the surrounding towns and countryside. Alongside these tragic events, various citizens led relief efforts in Belfast and across Ulster and Ireland, saving men, women and children from death by starvation.

As a first step towards a regular remembrance of the tragedy and events of the Great Famine, the Council will write to the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to request that Belfast host, in 2024, the National Famine Memorial Day, which takes place every May. This will be only the second time that the event is held in Northern Ireland and the first time that it is held in Ireland’s second city and can play an important role in commemorating the tragic events of that period.”

Right to Food Campaign

The Committee agreed that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Doherty and seconded by Councillor McCusker, be referred to the Council for debate, with no restriction to be placed on the number of speakers.

Chairperson

Pavement Parking

“This Council notes that inconsiderate pavement parking affects everyone in Belfast, but disproportionately children, people with visual impairments, mobility aid users, neurodiverse people and people with prams or pushchairs; and therefore it is essential that the Council plays its full role in reinforcing the message that pavements are for people and it is never acceptable to park in a manner which forces people off a footway and into the road. This Council acknowledges the challenges in solving this issue but resolves to work towards stopping vehicles from blocking pavements through inconsiderate or dangerous parking, including by undertaking a public information campaign about the negative impacts of pavement parking in its forthcoming communications.”

Proposer: Councillor Tara Brooks

Seconder: Councillor Nelson

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Right to Food Campaign

“This Council recognises the impact the scourge of food poverty is having on families right across our city, made worse by the cost-of-living emergency and recent price rises and gives its formal backing to the Right To Food campaign, joining cities like Liverpool and Manchester in becoming a Right To Food city.

We believe that the British Government and any restored Executive must prioritise food poverty, implementing a range of new measures including universal free school meals, support for community kitchens and enshrining the Right To Food for all through legislation.”

Proposer: Councillor Doherty

Seconder: Councillor McCusker

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