

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 7th October, 2025

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor R. Brooks (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Abernethy, Black, Bower,
Bradley, Bunting, Canavan, Cobain, Collins,
M. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, Flynn,
Garrett, Magee, Maghie, Murray, McKeown
and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet,
Open Spaces and Streetscene;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

There were no apologies received.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th September were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st October, subject to the amendment of the minute under the heading 'Deputations - Pilot Opening Hours Scheme at Botanic Gardens' to reflect that invitations would be extended to both the Friends of Botanic Gardens and the Rugby Road Residents' Association to present at the meeting on 7th October.

Declarations of Interest

In respect of the agenda item 4 (c) 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls – Additional Funding', Councillors Murray, R-M Donnelly and Doran declared an interest in that their employers had applied for support under the terms of the project.

Councillor M. Donnelly declared an interest in item 6 (d) 'Integrated Advice Partnership Fund - Additional Funding' and item 6 (e) 'Neighbourhood Renewal Advice Services Funding' in that his employer had applied for support under the terms of both projects.

Since the aforementioned items did not become the subject of discussion or debate, the Members were not required to leave the meeting whilst the matters were under consideration.

**Deputations – Pilot Opening Hours
Scheme at Botanic Gardens**

In accordance with its decision of 9th September - and the amendment by the Council on 1st October - the Committee received the following deputations regarding the Pilot Opening Hours Scheme at Botanic Gardens.

Stranmillis Neighbourhood Association

Mr. J. Harris, chairperson of the above-mentioned association, reminded the Committee that the Council's survey in the matter had indicated that 236 of the 652 responses received had been in favour of the 24-hour opening of the gardens, which equated to 36 percent. He indicated that the association was of the view that the only amendment that should be considered would be an extension of the gardens' opening hours to 6.30pm during winter months, which would benefit local residents and the business community together with those who worked or studied at The Queen's University of Belfast.

Friends of Botanic Gardens

Mr. A. Walsh of Friends of Botanic Gardens outlined the unique and historical nature of the park and stated that any extension to the current opening hours would be, in his view, inappropriate. He added that the current 'dawn to dusk' opening hours helped to protect the historical buildings and protect biodiversity within the wider gardens. The use of artificial light to facilitate extended opening hours would, he suggested, have a detrimental impact on the natural growth cycle of certain plants.

Rugby Road Residents' Association

Ms. B. Hinds of the Rugby Road Residents' Association indicated that the association was supportive of the view expressed by the Friends of Botanic Gardens in that it agreed that 'dawn to dusk' opening hours were the most appropriate. Such an arrangement, she stated, would help protect the environment and amenity of the gardens and its unique place in Belfast's history. She referred to the consultation exercise which had been undertaken on the proposals and stated that the survey, in her view, had not taken account of the distinctive nature of the gardens when compared to other parks across the City.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and noted further that the views expressed would be considered within the overall context of the consultation exercise on the pilot scheme.

Notice of Motion – Community Orchards

The Committee considered the following notice of motion, which had been moved by Councillor Bower and seconded by the High Sheriff (Councillor McAteer) and which the Standards and Business Committee had referred to the Committee at its meeting on 23rd September:

“This Council recognises the wide-ranging social, environmental, and economic benefits of community orchards, including increased access to fresh fruit, the promotion of local food resilience, the enhancement of green spaces, improved mental and physical wellbeing, and stronger community cohesion. It acknowledges that community orchards contribute to climate resilience through increased biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and natural cooling effects in urban areas. It also notes that community orchards offer valuable opportunities for intergenerational learning, volunteering, and environmental education, particularly in areas where green space and access to nature are limited.

This motion is requesting that this council commits to supporting the creation and maintenance of community orchards across the city through partnerships with residents, schools, and local organisations. Council will take part in identifying underused or neglected public land that could be repurposed for community orchard use. This would require commitment to some expenditure for planting, equipment, and training necessary to establish new orchards in identified areas. Council would also encourage and support community-led management of orchards and provide resources and guidance to support their long-term sustainability.”

The Committee agreed to adopt the motion and agreed that it would be considered also within the context of existing motions and Council initiatives – such as the ‘One Million Trees’ – and that a report would be submitted in due course.

**Notice of Motion – Feasibility of a Dedicated
Scrambler Site and Programme**

(The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty) attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee was reminded that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 23rd September, had referred the undernoted notice of motion, which had been proposed by The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty) and seconded by Councillor de Faoite, to the Committee for its consideration:

“This Council recognises the serious risks and community concerns associated with illegal and reckless scrambler use across Belfast, where incidents have endangered lives, damaged public spaces, and affected community wellbeing. Accordingly, this Council agrees that officers prepare a report for Committee which will:

- explore the feasibility of identifying a dedicated site for a scrambler programme in Belfast which aims will be to divert young people away from offending behaviour, rehabilitate those caught up in crime, provide vocational training and learning opportunities and create a safe, managed environment that works to remove scramblers from our streets and parks;

- undertake a land audit of Council-owned sites to assess their potential suitability; and
- identify potential stakeholders and collaborators, including relevant Stormont departments, the PSNI, youth and community organisations, and training providers;
- outline preparatory requirements, indicative timelines, and opportunities for partnership to inform Members of the potential for taking such a project forward.”

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed that a report, which would examine also a range of comments and suggestions made by Members in this regard, be submitted to a future meeting.

Notice of Motion - Safeguarding Belfast's Playparks

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 5th August, it had deferred consideration of the above-mentioned motion to allow for clarity to be provided by the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum on the process to be followed, should the motion be adopted, in respect of the development of a policy and the undertaking of a consultation exercise. Accordingly, the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services updated the Committee and indicated that he had been advised that, should the motion be adopted, it would be necessary, firstly, to format the draft policy and that a consultation exercise on the policy be undertaken thereafter.

The Committee noted the comments of the Strategic Director and reconsidered the following motion, which had been moved by Alderman McCullough and seconded by Councillor McCormick:

“Belfast City Council, hereinafter “this Council”, expresses its deep concern at the growing number of reports relating to indecent, threatening, and predatory behaviour in Council-owned playparks across Belfast. These spaces, intended for the happiness and well-being of children, are increasingly being compromised by individuals loitering without lawful purpose, in a manner that alarms parents and communities.

This Council believes that every child has the right to play safely, and every parent has the right to peace of mind when bringing their children to a local park. Public spaces must reflect public values – including the protection of childhood innocence, the upholding of decency, and the moral duty to safeguard the vulnerable.

Accordingly, this Council commits to the creation of a comprehensive Safeguarding Belfast's Playparks Policy – including, but not limited to, the following objectives:

1. to prohibit loitering in and around children's playparks by any adult not accompanying a child, or without a legitimate purpose;

2. to conduct a full public consultation, both online and in person, to hear the views of residents, parents/guardians, and community organisations in directly shaping this policy; and
3. to work with statutory bodies – including the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Home Office, and community organisations – to combat predatory sexual crime and anti-social behaviour in our public spaces.”

Proposal

Moved by Councillor R-M Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor Black,

That the Committee agrees, given the inability of Members to reach a consensus on the specific wording for the motion, that it be rejected and, accordingly, closed.

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

Sally Gardens Playing Fields

Pitch Bookings

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 8th October, 2024, it had agreed that officers would liaise with service users at the Sally Gardens Playing Fields to ascertain the reasons for recurring pitch cancellations with a view to addressing the matter to ensure the maximising of the use of the facility in the event of such cancellations.

The Operational Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reported that the principal reasons for the recurring cancellations had been identified and the matter had been raised with the Council's partners in the management of the venue, that is, the County Antrim Board of the Gaelic Athletic Association. It was reported that all clubs using the pitch had been reminded of their obligations to fulfil bookings and the negative impact which such cancellations had on the use of the overall use of the facility.

The Committee noted the work which had been undertaken to reduce cancellations to a minimum and to maximise the utilisation of the pitch at the Sally Gardens site.

Partnership Agreements

The Committee was advised that the Ulster Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association had requested a one-year extension to the current partnership agreements for the management of pitches at Cherryvale Playing Fields, Cliftonville Road Playing Fields, Woodlands Playing Fields and the Sally Gardens Playing Fields. The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services advised the Committee that, should it accede to the request, such an extension would permit the current booking and prioritisation model to continue until a revised model had been considered and agreed through the Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy and a new Pitches Strategy.

The Committee agreed to extend, until 16th October, 2026, the aforementioned partnership agreements between the Council and the Ulster Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association.

Arising from discussion in the above-mentioned matter, the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services confirmed, in response to a Member, that the introduction of an independent stand-alone pitch booking system would be one of the recommendations contained within a new Pitches Strategy to be presented for consideration in due course.

Provision of Alley Gates

Installation Update

Further to the Committee's meeting of 5th August, when concerns had been raised in relation to the delays which had been encountered in the installation of alley gates under Phase 5 of the programme, the Committee considered a report in the matter.

The Committee was advised that, since its meeting in August, additional funding had been secured and the delivery of Phase 5 had commenced, with the gates associated with 'tranche one' of the programme having been installed. It was reported that Council officers were liaising with the current contractor to agree a schedule for the delivery of the rest of the programme. In this regard, it was anticipated that 'tranche two' would commence during October, 2025, with installation estimated to be completed by February, 2026.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Belfast City Council (Holylands) **Traffic Regulation Order 2025**

The Committee agreed to the enactment of the Belfast City Council (Holylands) Traffic Regulation Order 2025, which was a pre-requisite requirement for the undertaking of work within that area under Phase 5b of the above-mentioned programme.

Replacement Keys for Alley Gates

Further to a Member's request which had been made at the Committee's meeting on 9th September, the Committee noted the contents of a report which outlined the costs incurred in providing replacement alley gate keys to local residents.

Arising from discussion, the Committee agreed that information be submitted to a future meeting that would outline the number of replacement keys which had been issued, the origin of their manufacture, together with income received in charging for keys by the Council over the past 24 months.

Consultation on the Renaming of **Balfour Avenue Playpark**

Further to the request which had been made at the meeting on 9th September in relation to the above-mentioned matter, the Committee noted the contents of a report which outlined the criteria and the corporate processes that would be followed in

considering a request to rename parks, playparks, playing fields or open spaces under the management of the Council.

DAERA Funding and Urban Meadows Update

The Director informed the Committee that, in September, the Council had been awarded £472,000 from within the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DEARA) Challenge Fund. The key priorities for that scheme was to enhance nature and climate recovery and to connect people with the environment by developing Conservation Management Plans and a Nature Recovery Network across Belfast. The total cost of the scheme would be £522,500, of which the Council would contribute a pre-budgeted sum of £50,500, with the remaining amount being met from within the aforementioned DEARA funding of £472,000.

The Director further reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 12th September, 2023, it had adopted a motion under the heading 'Urban Wildflower Meadows' which, amongst other things, had agreed 'to identify a suitable site for wildflower cultivation in each quadrant of Belfast'. The Committee was informed that four sites in each area of the City had been identified, after a workshop and consultation exercise, that being, Glencairn Park, Ormeau Park, Belmont Park and Brook Leisure Centre, as the preferred options for the development of urban meadows. The indicative site costs for the Council-led interventions were just under the £50,000 budget which had been allocated within the 2025/2026 budget.

After discussion, during which the Director clarified the criteria which had been used in the short-listing of the sites, the Committee agreed that the project would proceed at the four sites identified.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following six 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 on the following items as there could be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Committee was advised that the content of the 'restricted' reports and any associated discussion should be treated as 'confidential information' and that such information could not be disclosed as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct.

Lagan Valley Regional Park

Further to its decision of 7th October, the Committee received Ms. S. McClintock, Chief Executive, and Dr. A. Bridge, Park Manager, representing the Lagan Valley Regional Park, and they proceeded to deliver a presentation on matters relating to that organisation's future governance and sustainability.

After discussion, the Committee noted the several funding models which had been presented and agreed to defer consideration of the matter to enable a report to be submitted that would provide further information and analysis on the financial status of LVRP; together with further detail on the several options proposed and additional information on the level of engagement with - and the funding intentions of - the Department for Infrastructure, DEARA and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council.

**Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) – Proposed
Annual Schedule of Charges 2026/27**

The Committee considered the proposed Annual Schedule of Charges for 2026/27 which had been prepared by GLL in relation to the Council's leisure centres.

The Committee noted the schedule of charges for 2026/27 and the rationale used in support of the price revisions. However, the Committee agreed that it be recorded that it was opposed, in principle, to the overall percentage increase applied by GLL, which was in excess of the Consumer Price Index. In addition, it was agreed that GLL be requested to re-examine specifically the proposed increase to the family membership package with a view that it be reduced to 5% for 2026/27.

**Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) –
Annual User Survey Outcomes 2024**

The Committee noted the information which had been provided within the above-mentioned survey and welcomed the level of qualitative data included and the user-friendly manner in which the information had been presented.

**Ending Violence Against Women
and Girls – Additional Funding**

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reported that correspondence had been received from The Executive Office indicating that additional in-year funding had become available to support the Strategic Framework for Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. He outlined a proposed course of action that would be undertaken in applying for additional funds and answered a range of Members' questions in this regard.

After discussion, the Committee:

- noted the process and timeframe outlined for the submission of an application for additional in-year programme support;
- approved the draft Council Ending Violence Against Women and Girls - 2025/26 Momentum Programme as outlined;
- noted that the previously agreed approach to the allocation of additional in-year funding to Local Change Fund grant applications; and

- noted the invitation to Regional Change Fund grant recipients to bid for a potential uplift to their current funding allocation for 2025/26, and the officer involvement and Council commitment to administer the related letters of offers.

2026 European City of Sport

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 5th November, 2024, it had agreed that Belfast would submit a bid to be designated as the 2026 European City of Sport by the Brussels-based ACES organisation. The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services provided an update on the progress of the bid to date and the next stages in the process.

Noted.

Draft Support Framework for Independent Advice and Debt Service - Consultation

The Committee endorsed a [draft response](#) to the above-mentioned consultation and agreed that, in order to meet the closing deadline for submissions, it be forwarded to the Department for Communities (DfC), subject to its adoption or amendment by the Council on 3rd November. It was agreed also that the following points would be emphasised to DfC as part of the Council's response:

- that the responsibility remained with DfC - and not local councils - to provide adequate funding for Advice and Debt Services, particularly as the need for such services was growing year-on-year and that inflationary increases were essential to address increasing need; and
- that the views of service providers and those with lived experience of such services should be fundamental to any review and/or recommendations arising for the future delivery of advice and debt services.

Fly-tipping and Littering

(Ms. C. McGeown, Senior Policy Performance and Improvement Officer, attended in connection with this item.)

At its meeting on 5th August, the Committee had requested that a report be submitted in relation to the above-mentioned matter which would provide data on enforcement activity, prosecutions and a geographical breakdown of the main areas for fly-tipping and house clearances across Belfast. Accordingly, the Committee considered a report and appendices which provided an overview of data recorded by the Council as of August 2025, and which focussed on several issues, together with enforcement and corporate communication, education and awareness relating to fly-tipping.

It was reported that, over the past five-years, there had been 854 court prosecutions brought by the Council for littering, fly-tipping and for failing to respond to an 'Article 20 Notice' for littering. Regarding the fixed penalty notices issued City-wide for littering and fly-tipping, the following data had been recorded:

- South Belfast - 364 fixed penalty notices had been issued in 2022/23; 426 in 2023/24; and 288 in 2024/25;
- East Belfast - 137 fixed penalty notices had been issued in 2022/23; 127 in 2023/24; and 148 in 2024/25;
- North Belfast - 61 fixed penalty notices had been issued in 2022/23; 137 in 2023/24; and 134 in 2024/25;
- West Belfast - 27 fixed penalty notices had been issued in 2022/23; 104 in 2023/24; and 108 in 2024/25;

Regarding the number of reports of fly-tipping recorded by the Council's Customer Hub, it was reported that, in 2021 and 2022, South Belfast had the recorded the highest levels; North Belfast had recorded the highest levels in 2023 and 2024; whilst East Belfast had recorded the highest levels thus far in 2025. The streets which had recorded the highest number of reports for littering and fly-tipping in each area of the city were Tamery Pass in East Belfast, Crimea Close in the North Belfast, the Donegall Road in South Belfast, and Cavendish Street in West Belfast.

Several Members expressed frustration at the number of recorded instances of fly-tipping, particularly in open spaces and alleyways, and its prevalence and persistence across the City. Further Members reported that the number of constituents contacting them with issues relating to fly-tipping and littering had grown significantly in recent years. It was suggested that the Council should seek to become more proactive in publicising, particularly within the most affected areas, the penalties and consequences of fly-tipping and littering. As such, additional leafleting and articles within *City Matters* might be used in this regard to raise awareness of the penalties for those who violated the byelaws in this manner.

After a lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed to note the information which had been provided and officers undertook to examine the suggestions made by Members. The full report and appendices relating to the item can be accessed in the [attached link](#).

Litter Bin Improvement Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To update members on the various elements of our litter bin improvement programme, and to seek approval for its proposed next steps.

1.2 Recommendations

a) to note the update on the SMART compactor litter bin pilot, and approve the recommended next steps;

- b) to note and approve the proposed streets to be considered for additional litter bins as part of the coordinated approach to tackling dog fouling; and
- c) to note the outworkings of the litter bin audit and condition survey, and ongoing work to upgrade litter bin stock.

3.0 **Main Report**

- 3.1 In November 2024, 24 of our standard litter bins were replaced with 10 SMART compactor litter bins within the grounds of the City Hall, as part of a pilot. We subsequently extended the pilot to cover the busy summer months, when usage of the grounds at lunchtime, and throughout the day, is much higher. Therefore, putting a greater demand on the litter bin provision and collections.
- 3.2 Table one below demonstrates the estimated labour time saved on servicing litter bins at City Hall, by installing SMART compactor bins. By reviewing bin fullness reports within the software, our operational team can adapt to reduce the number of collections required throughout the day and attend other priority cleansing operations.

Table One

Belfast City Hall		
	Previous Standard Bins	Big Belly Bin Locations
No. of bins	24	10
Av. empties per day per bin	3	1
Total empties per day	72	10
Emptying time (no of mins)	2	2
Total mins attending bins	2 hrs 24 mins	20 mins

- 3.4 In addition to the labour time savings, the SMART bins technology provides useful insight into individual bin collection volumes over a six-month period. This provides the team with data that can be used to inform better bin placement. Making better use of our litter bin stock and operative time overall.
- 3.5 Our operational teams have noted that on occasion the compactor mechanism jammed, usually due to large pizza boxes, meaning the bin is not usable until this is remedied. In these instances, the software will notify area teams when this occurs. There is also the option of installing a 'pizza belly' bin, which is designed to dispose of all sizes of pizza boxes specifically.

- 3.6 Officers are seeking approval from members to extend the SMART litter bin provision further into the City Centre and propose to install an additional 26 bins at various locations around Donegal Square, Donegal Avenue and Royal Avenue. This extension will also include locations within the BID areas, as agreed with partners.
- 3.7 In addition to this, officers are exploring the option of installing SMART litter bins at various 'hard to reach' locations within the neighbourhoods, as well within our parks and our playparks. For example, Cavehill car park, Upper Hightown road. And hopefully reducing unnecessary down time and fuel costs, when these bins are not approaching the required level of fullness to be emptied. This would be particularly helpful in the winter months when our playpark inspection programme reduces. Table two below provides an indication of the impact on the service in terms of a reduction in daily litter bin emptying time. This reduction means that operatives can be redeployed to other tasks including litter collection and bin maintenance etc.

Table Two

Belfast City Hall & Donegal Place/Sq to Royal Ave.		
	Standard Bins	Big Belly Bin Locations
No of bin	50	26
Average empties per day per bin	2	1
Total empties per day	100	26
Emptying time (no of mins)	2	2
Total mins per day attending bins	3 hrs 20 mins	52 mins

Dog Fouling Hot Spots – Enhanced Litter Bin Provision

- 3.8 Since January 2025 officers have been conducting a dog fouling reduction pilot within OSS North. A report will be brought back to members on the full outworkings of that pilot. Alongside this work an officer's coordination group, aimed at tackling incidents of dog fouling across the City, has been established. As part of the action plan this group has extracted information from the customer hub on the streets with the highest number of dog fouling complaints during the period 01 April 2021 - 01 July 2025. Using this information together with data from our quality monitoring returns and OSS management insight, the streets listed at Appendix B would be the focus for the next phase of targeted

interventions, including increased patrols by dog wardens as well as a review of litter bin provision, to include consideration of a mix of post mounted and standard litter bins, with dog fouling stickers affixed to the sides. All locations are subject to location suitability assessment. Members may have anecdotal information on other streets / areas to be considered, and officers are happy to engage on those areas to consider how provision could be improved.

Litter Bin Condition Survey Update

3.9 The following information is provided by way of update on the standard litter bin upgrade programme:

- Since the litter bin provision contract has been put in place a total of 200 bins have been replaced across the Council area. Members are reminded that those bins that required replacement or installation due to a health and safety issue have been prioritised. Following that litter bins in a poor state of repair are replaced.
- We have a total of 725 bins requiring replacement across the city. These are bins which have a significant amount of rust, have been damaged irreparably and been removed or individual mechanisms have been broken (ash trays/locks etc). We are working with property maintenance unit on a programme of replacement.
- We have 680 litter bins which require general maintenance. This includes painting / graffiti removal. Operational teams are using this information to inform a regular programme of maintenance, which will work in tandem with the new sharps and bin maintenance team.
- Our ability to replace litter bins is dependent upon regular supply and capacity within the property maintenance unit to conduct replacements and or installations. There have been delays with supply due to an issue within the supply chain. This has now been resolved. Replacement and installation are carried out by the property maintenance unit and is dependent upon capacity.

3.10 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications within this report. All actions to date, and proposed actions regarding the SMART bin can be covered within existing service revenue budgets.

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

**There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural
Needs Assessments associated with this report.**

The Committee noted the update provided on the SMART compactor litter bin pilot and approved the recommended next steps; approved the proposed streets to be considered for additional litter bins as part of the coordinated approach to tackling dog fouling; and noted the outworkings of the litter bin audit and condition survey, and ongoing work to upgrade litter bin stock.

Requests to Host an Events in Parks and Open Space

The Committee approved a request submitted by the Orangegrove Athletics Club for the hosting of the CIYMS Boxing Day Fun Run in Belmont Park, subject to the club meeting with and adhering to all of the stipulations outlined within the report.

Neighbourhood Renewal Advice Services Funding

The Committee considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To advise members that the Department of Communities has contacted Council to seek their views on the potential to administer existing Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for Advice Services through the Community Support Plan (CSP) LoO in 2025/26 and 2026/27.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the contents of the report and advise whether they wish to accept the DfC proposal to administer existing Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for Advice Services through the Community Support Plan (CSP) LoO in 2025/26 and 2026/27.**

3.0 Background information

- 3.1 The Council receives funding from the Department for Communities Voluntary and Community Division (VCD) through the Community Support Plan (CSP). This funding is used to fund community support activity and also to fund a range of advice services.**

- 3.2 DfC has contacted council officials to advise that DfC also funds some community-based advice projects through DfC Community Empowerment Division (CED) / Neighbourhood Renewal (NR). The projects were initially identified through Neighbourhood Renewal action plans and have received core funding from Neighbourhood Renewal for more than ten years.
- 3.3 The Department is keen to establish if there is potential to transition the NR funded projects to within the existing council-delivered programmes. This would mean that funding for these projects would be administered by Council through an allocation from the CSP.
- 3.4 DfC has indicated there will not be significant changes to the NR funding in 2025/26 with 2026/27 likely to be a transitionary period within the programme. DfC propose that projects transitioned into the CSP programme would continue to be funded in line with NR funding until 2026/27.
- 3.5 DfC would engage with the impacted organisations during this period to ensure each is aware of the impact on it in respect of funding, how the council-delivered programme operates, and how to engage with the funding mechanisms in place through the existing programme.
- 3.6 Neighbourhood Renewal funding in 2024/25 for projects delivering advice services totalled £286k. DfC would provide this additional amount to be allocated to the affected organisations. Funding is provided to the following organisations through the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme.

Organisation	Project Title	Constituency	2023/24 Amount	2024/25 Amount
North Belfast Advice Partnership Vine Centre, BCF, Ligoniel.	Welfare & Benefit Support	North Belfast	£116,846.88	£124,335.82
Upper Springfield Development Company Limited	Advice Services	West Belfast	£107,907.20	£113,302.56
CCRF - North Belfast Senior Citizens Forum	Advice Services	North Belfast	£11,077.04	£11,077.04
Springfield Charitable Association	Social Environment	West Belfast	£35,301.90	£37,732.14
Total			£271,133.02	£286,477.56

- 3.7 Members should note that DfC have advised that they will only provide the additional allocation through the CSP Letter of Offer until 26/27 to the organisations listed above. After that time, there will be no allocation from the DfC NR Team as it is expected that new arrangements for Neighbourhood Renewal will be in place by that time.
- 3.8 Members should consider that the provision of funding for these organisations may create an expectation that this support will be provided by Council after 26/27, however, since this funding is 100% funded by the DfC NR team there would be no budget to do this. Officers would highlight the risk associated to council of this increased expectation and also the value of implementing a new funding arrangement for such a short period of time.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 4.1 The administration of this fund would have to be carried out by existing staff, there is no immediate financial impact for council as 100% funding is being provided by DfC. However, there is a risk that an expectation to maintain this funding would be created.

The Committee agreed, given the anticipated volume of work associated with the administration of the fund; together with the fact that a consultation exercise was ongoing in the matter; and the lack of clarity on the level of funding to be provided after 2026/27, to reject the Department for Communities' proposal that the Council administer the existing Neighbourhood Renewal Funding for Advice Services through the Community Support Plan Letter of Offer in 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Applications for Dual Language Street Signs with Potential for an Adverse Impact

The Committee considered the following report:

- 1.0 **Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
- 1.1 To consider if a street survey of occupiers will be carried out for eight applications for the erection of dual language street signs in Irish within the City where potential adverse impacts have been identified by the initial assessments and/or elected member objections
- 2.0 **Recommendation**
- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the report and matters raised in relation to the applications for dual language street signs in Irish received for Knock Eden Crescent, Willowfield Gardens, Wynchurch Road, Sicily Park, Upper Knockbreda Road, Annandale Crecent, Kingsberry Park, Ardenlee Court and either:

- a) agree that surveys of occupiers of these streets be carried out; or
- b) agree that no surveys will be carried out on the grounds of the potential adverse impacts identified and that these applications are closed.

3.1 Key Issues

The power for the Council to consider applications to erect a second street nameplate in a language other than English is contained in Article 11 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order 1995.

Initial Assessments

- 3.2** The Dual Language Street Sign policy states that *“each application will be subject to an initial assessment for any potential adverse impacts on equality, good relations and rural needs and where any adverse impacts are identified that information will be brought to Committee.”*
- 3.3** The initial assessments were carried out for all the streets listed and potential adverse impacts were identified in relation to the following streets: -
- Knock Eden Crescent
 - Willowfield Gardens
 - Sicily Park
 - Upper Knockbreda Road
 - Annandale Crecent
- 3.4** Draft equality screenings were therefore carried out, assessing the request for dual language street signs in Irish for Knock Eden Crescent, Willowfield Gardens, Sicily Park, Upper Knockbreda Road and Annandale Crecent for equality and good relations issues.
- 3.5** The screenings have identified that the carrying out of surveys and the erection of Irish language street signs in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension. Conversely the screenings also identified that the process could assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity. The findings are outlined in the equality and good relation section below.

Objections from Elected Members

3.7 Details of the objections are as follows: -

Wynchurch Road - Councillor Davy Douglas, member for Lisnasharragh raised an objection stating: -

“Wynchurch is a mixed area close to the Cregagh estate and Flush Park, both traditional unionist areas. It is an area where people of both denominations live side by side without issue. I feel that the adoption of Irish street signage could be seen as divisive and have an adverse impact on good relations within the community, creating division where none currently exists. This has already been seen recently in Wynchurch Avenue where the street was surveyed twice, resulting in an increasing majority rejecting the proposal each time. Despite this, the views of the people who live in the street were ignored and dual language street signage was imposed against their wishes, damaging community relations in the process”.

3.8 Annandale Crecent, Kingsberry Park and Ardenlee Court – Councillor Bradley Ferguson member for Lisnasharragh raised an objection stating: -

“While I fully respect the cultural traditions and identities of all communities in Northern Ireland, I believe the introduction of bilingual signage in Lisnasharragh is divisive, unnecessary, and does not reflect the wishes of the majority of residents in the area. Lisnasharragh is a diverse and shared space and introducing street signs that are strongly associated with one particular political and cultural identity risks undermining community cohesion and alienating those from a different background.

Public consultation should play a central role in decisions of this nature. However, I have serious concerns about the consultation process, particularly around the weighting of responses, the level of local engagement, and whether it genuinely reflects the majority opinion in each affected street. The interests of the whole community must be considered – not just those of activists or lobby groups.

The Irish language is, for some, a deeply valued part of their cultural heritage. However, for others, it is seen – fairly or not – as a political symbol. As such, I strongly believe that street signage should remain

neutral and inclusive to foster a shared future for everyone in Belfast.

I urge the council to prioritise policies that promote inclusivity and mutual respect rather than those that risk increasing division”

- 3.9 These applications are therefore being brought to Committee to determine if surveys of residents of these streets will take place, considering this information.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.10 If it is decided to carry out surveys, the resulting tasks are included within existing resources and budgets for the process.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

- 3.11 An EQIA was carried out on the main Dual Language Street Signs policy in 2021-22. This confirmed the initial assessment process to be carried out, which may indicate the requirement for equality screening.
- 3.12 The applications for dual language street signs (with the second language in Irish) at Knock Eden Crescent, Willowfield Gardens, Sicily Park, Upper Knockbreda Road and Annandale Crecent were assessed for equality of opportunity and good relations issues through the initial assessment process. This process identified that the potential for adverse impact existed and recommended further screening prior to referral to committee for authority to proceed to survey.
- 3.13 The draft screenings have identified that the carrying out of a survey in itself in these areas has the potential to give rise to community tension, as could the erection of the street signs and therefore has the potential to give rise to adverse impact on the grounds of good relations. It is acknowledged; however, the process could alternatively assist in promoting cultural and linguistic diversity.
- 3.14 The applications were also presented to elected members as part of the elected member notification procedure and objections were received from Cllr Davy Douglas with regard to Wynchurch Road and from Cllr Bradley Ferguson with regard to Annandale Crecent, Kingsberry Park and Ardenlee Court. The members were concerned about the potential for adverse impacts on good relations with full details of their objections in paragraphs 3.5 - 3.15 above.

- 3.15 The council retains ‘residual discretion’ in relation to these applications. In effect this gives elected members the option to not proceed to survey and/ or halt the erection of an Irish language street sign in this street where, in the view of elected members considering the agreed criteria, this action would be considered inappropriate.**

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor Doran,

That the Committee agrees, given the potential for an adverse impact on community relations, that no surveys on the erection of a second street sign in Irish be carried out on the residents of Knock Eden Crescent, Willowfield Gardens, Wynchurch Road, Sicily Park, Upper Knockbreda Road, Annandale Crecent, Kingsberry Park and Ardenlee Court.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor R-M Donnelly,

That the Committee agrees that surveys in respect of the erection of a second street sign in Irish be carried out on the residents of the aforementioned streets.

On a vote, fourteen Members voted for the amendment and six against and it was declared carried.

The amendment was thereupon put to the Committee as the substantive motion and carried by fourteen votes to six.

Proposals for Dual Language Street Signs

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at Deerpark Gardens, Grasmere Garden, Ravensdene Crescent, Ardilea Court, Kingsmere Avenue and St. Judes Parade.

Proposals for the Naming of New Streets

The Committee approved the naming of Hopewell Gardens.

Dilapidations Bill - Consultation Response

The Committee approved a [draft response](#) to the above-mentioned consultation exercise and agreed that it be submitted, in accordance with the deadline for submissions, to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in advance of the Council meeting on 3rd November, subject to any amendments being notified to DEARA.

Item Raised in Advance

Use of the Cutts Recycling Centre

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor McCann addressed the meeting and suggested that the Council should consider entering into a short-term agreement with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) to enable the use of the Cutts Recycling Centre by Belfast residents whilst the Blackstaff Recycling Centre was closed for repair work. The Operational Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reported that, since the item had been added to the agenda, officers from LCCC had contacted him to advise that its Environment and Sustainability Committee, and, in turn, its full Council, would, given the timing of its committee meetings, be unable to consider any request within the timescale anticipated for the temporary closure of Blackstaff Recycling Centre.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and noted also the comments of several Members in relation to the matter, particularly the inability of Belfast residents living in the Twinbrook, Poleglass and Lagmore areas to use the Cutts Recycling Centre. It was pointed out that the issue dated back to the Reform of Local Government in 2014 and that the Council should seek again to raise the matter formally with LCCC with a view to finding a mutually beneficial resolution.

Chairperson