

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



**Belfast
City Council**

5th September, 2025

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room, City Hall and remotely via MS Teams on Wednesday, 10th September, 2025 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes
- (c) Declarations of Interest

2. Request to Present

- (a) St. George's Market Traders

3. Restricted Items

- (a) Vacant to Vibrant Programme (Pages 1 - 14)
- (b) Housing-Led Regeneration Update (Report to follow)
- (c) Sandy Row/Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Update (Pages 15 - 20)
- (d) Belfast 2024 Evaluation
- (e) Markets Quarterly Update (Pages 21 - 46)

- (f) Financial Reporting - Quarter 1 2025/26 (Pages 47 - 54)
- (g) Belfast Bikes Quarter 1 2025/26 Performance Update (Pages 55 - 62)
- (h) Belfast Zoo Quarter 1 2025/26 Performance Update (Pages 63 - 70)
- 4. **Positioning Belfast to Compete**
 - (a) Major Events Update
- 5. **Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure**
 - (a) Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition Update
 - (b) Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation Response (Pages 71 - 136)
 - (c) Department for Infrastructure Transport Strategy 2035 - Consultation Response (Pages 137 - 152)
- 6. **Growing Business and the Economy**
 - (a) Feedback on Outcomes of the Belfast Health and Work Steering Group (Pages 153 - 174)
- 7. **Correspondence**
 - (a) US Film Tariff - Responses (Pages 175 - 182)
 - (b) Rent Controls - Department for Communities Response (Pages 183 - 188)
- 8. **Strategic and Operational Issues**
 - (a) Notices of Motion Quarterly Update (Pages 189 - 196)
- 9. **Issues Raised in Advance**
 - (a) Rosetta Quietway (Councillor de Faoite to raise)

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Subject:	Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation Response
Date:	10 September 2025
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Sean Dolan, Senior Development Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

- (i) Information relating to any individual
- (ii) Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
- (iii) Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
- (iv) Information in connection with any labour relations matter
- (v) Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
- (vi) Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
- (vii) Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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☐
☐
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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide an update on the current DfC consultation on their proposed 'Shaping Sustainable Places' programme and to seek agreement on the Council response to the consultation.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to: (i) Note the current DfC public consultation on their proposed 'Shaping Sustainable Places' programme. (ii) Approve the draft Council response to the Shaping Sustainable Places consultation, subject to any further comments from the SP&R Committee. (iii) Note that the response will be brought to the SP&R Committee on the 19th September given the potential financial and resource implications of the programme, and that the response will be submitted to DfC on the 21st September, subject to Council ratification on the 1st October 2025.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	DfC launched a public consultation on the 23 rd June on their proposed 'Shaping Sustainable Places' programme (attached at Appendix B), with consultation responses required by the 21 st September 2025. This programme is proposed to take a similar approach to the DfC led Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme, with DfC, DfI & DEARA working together to provide a long-term regeneration strategy for the region's villages, towns and city centres. The initiative aims to address issues like dereliction, vacancy, and declining footfall by investing in placemaking, adaptive reuse of buildings, and climate-resilient infrastructure.
3.2	Each government department (DfC, DAERA and DfI) are proposing to jointly fund a multi-year approach to enable councils across NI to deliver on departmental/council priorities. Pending approval through DoF, the partners intend to provide £5m each per annum of capital funding to a region wide funding pot for 10 years, totalling £150m with each Department contributing £50million over a ten-year period. At this stage it is not clear how the funding would be allocated per Council area, although some concepts for this are tested within the consultation.
3.3	The funding model proposed assumes a further minimum contribution of 10% (approximately £15 million) from Local Councils, which is important to clarify that such contributions cannot be presumed. It has been highlighted within the attached draft response (Appendix A) that councils operate within defined governance frameworks and statutory processes regarding capital expenditure, and any financial commitment must be subject to formal approval. It is assumed that this will be assessed on a project-by-project basis.

3.4	Officer meetings with DfC have confirmed the types of projects that DfC would expect to come through this programme. The expectation is that the funding would align with the specific funders /departmental normal remit, for DfC this may align with High Street Revitalisation issues such as addressing vacancy/dereliction, place-making & public realm, for DfI it may align to priorities in the emerging Eastern Transport Plan such as active travel provision and pedestrianisation. The DAERA element requires further assessment as currently it is assumed that this funding would be broadly aligned more to rural development rather than urban and rural projects.
3.5	The draft Council response, attached at Appendix A, broadly supports the proposed vision and principles of Shaping Sustainable Places, particularly its emphasis on: • Place-based regeneration • Early and meaningful community engagement • Collaborative delivery models • Long-term, secured funding
3.6	These principles strongly align with the Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, which articulates a shared vision for Belfast as an inclusive, resilient, and thriving city. <u>Key Considerations Contained within the Draft Response</u>
3.7	i) General support for a multi-year approach Belfast City Council welcomes the proposal for a multi-year, secured funding model recognising that this approach would provide greater stability. It would enable council to plan, design and deliver complex projects with appropriate lead in times whilst achieving value for money. However, further clarity is required on the allocation framework specifically how the £150m will be distributed across councils. The draft response calls for a transparent, needs based model that reflects Belfast's scale as a capital city, complexity, population, regional role and strategic importance along with supporting projects with the greatest economic impact.
3.8	ii) Clarification on Departmental aims and additionality It remains unclear how this proposed programme will operate within existing constrained budgets and existing Executive level commitments. The draft response seeks clarification on whether this funding is additional to existing Executive level commitments/budgets/programmes, or whether Councils would be expected to deliver government priorities using this programme, i.e. will Councils be expected to consider,

prioritise and deliver projects such as elements of the Eastern Transport Plan, Belfast Streets Ahead etc or will these remain within the Executive departments, and if so what are impacts of allocating budget to the Shaping Sustainable Places on the delivery timeframes of Executive strategic projects.

The scale of under investment in Belfast is significant, especially when considering that Belfast City Centre is the economic driver for the Region. Belfast currently has multiple major schemes pending funding, primarily via DfC and DfI, for example:

- Belfast Streets Ahead Phases 3 and 5 (DfC).
- Gateway projects at Shankill, Clifton and Fredrick Streets
- Belfast Cycle Network, BRT Phase 2 and other active infrastructure (DfI)
- Under the Bridges, Sailortown Bridge and emerging schemes linked to the Eastern Transport Plan

This is exacerbated by the lack of specific regeneration funding streams that are available to Belfast (and wider NI region) as compared to elsewhere in the UK. As set out in a separate report to this Committee on the Place Based Growth Proposition for Belfast, the city has experienced a regeneration deficit as it historically has not attracted as much funding, investment or spend on regeneration and local growth as other cities in the UK.

A combination of funds not being applicable to the devolved administrations and Northern Ireland receiving relatively lower allocations from funds operating on a competitive basis means that Northern Ireland has amongst the lowest spend on regeneration and local growth per head of population, compared to Scotland, Wales and English regions – nearly half the regional average spend per capita. This outcome is not reflective of need for regeneration in Belfast relative to other cities in England, Scotland or Wales or Northern Ireland more broadly. Arguably the need is greater in a Northern Ireland context. A number of specific regeneration funds available in the rest of the UK have not been available in Northern Ireland which has led to a clear deficit and a missed opportunity for growth and positive economic, regeneration, social and environmental outcomes.

The English Devolution White Paper, published in December 2024, envisions a fundamental change of the relationship between Whitehall and local government in England – with the intent of tackling regional inequality by transferring authority and funding over key policy areas and funding, such as economic development, housing, planning, transport and skills. There is now a presumption in favour of devolution on foot of this White Paper and with the creation of new Strategic Authorities this means funding and legislative powers will be further devolved in other UK cities. The transfer of additional funding and power to these Strategic

	Authorities across the whole of England will allow Councils to set and deliver on priorities that better respond to local needs and drive growth. Increased funding pots and flexibilities are to be afforded to those Strategic Authorities that progress within the devolution framework, with single-pot integrated settlements over 30 years and access to consolidated funding pots covering local growth, place, housing, and regeneration, non-apprenticeship adult skills and transport. These funding agreements provide a 30-year investment promise – by way of example, Cambridge and Peterborough will receive £30m per annum, North of Tyne £48m per annum and West Midlands £36m per annum. Belfast is already facing a regeneration deficit in both powers and funding and could be left even further behind if there are not commensurate levels of funding as with other core cities. This could make it even harder for the city to attract the resources needed to unlock demand and growth. It is therefore essential that Departments clarify whether this new funding stream will replace historic investment programmes or run alongside them and that recognition. Without this clarity, there is significant risk that the ambition of the programme will far exceed its funding capacity. In addition, the Council would ask that DfC, DfI and DAERA support them in their ask for additional place based regeneration funding via Westminster commensurate with the approach and level of funding pots being afforded to other UK cities as a result of the Devolution White Paper proposals
3.9	iii) Council contribution and governance considerations Whilst a minimum 10% contribution is assumed, the draft response makes it clear that financial contributions cannot be assumed and would be subject to Councils own governance and approvals processes.
3.10	iv) Delivery capacity and resources Effective delivery of complex regeneration projects requires not only robust governance but also sufficient resourcing to navigate statutory approvals and technical processes. Where councils are expected to take a leadership role, resources must extend beyond capital allocation and include dedicated funding for inhouse delivery teams, provision for a management fee to support project management functions, and specialist feasibility development support to prepare capital ready pipelines. To enable this, it is recommended that a portion of funding is ringfenced for early-stage activities including feasibility assessment, design development and meaningful community engagement, ensuring that projects are both

	viable and deliverable before significant capital spend is committed. It is also proposed that the requested 10% contribution could be assessed in terms of in-kind contribution in terms of staff and resource to deliver, although as above this will also be subject to Councils own governance and approvals process.
3.11	v) Statutory approvals and processes Current placemaking schemes face lengthy delays due to complex statutory approval requirements and are often hindered by Statutory Consultees ability to adequately allocate sufficient resource, which can significantly slow down delivery. A new model must therefore address this challenge, potentially through streamlining processes or prioritising cross departmental/Council approvals process. If DfI is no longer the direct delivery body, its level of obligation and responsiveness to approval processes should be reviewed to avoid unnecessary setbacks. It is recommended that establishing a co-ordinated statutory approvals framework, supported by strong departmental leadership, is essential to unlocking delivery pace. This should include clarifying roles, simplifying processes and ensuring that all enabling partners including funders and utilities are actively engaged from the outset.
3.12	vi) The role of DAERA in urban regeneration The current document provides limited insight into the potential interventions from the DAERA in Belfast. Whilst DAERA'S remit has traditionally been centred on rural regeneration, the implementation of climate mitigation and risk measures within capital projects is strategically significant for the city's future resilience Further clarity is required on how DAERA'S investment will directly support the outcomes in Belfast, particularly in relation to the delivery of climate mitigation and adaptation infrastructure. Ensuring that Belfast is adequately assessed and resourced within DAERA's framework will be essential to embedding sustainable regeneration practices and meeting long term climate change objectives.
3.13	vii) Support for competitive funding streams The draft response supports the use of thematic competitive funding (e.g. heritage assets, climate resilience, and economic centres) as a means to catalyse targeted investment and unlock place-based economic potential. These thematic streams can stimulate local enterprise, attract co-investment, and accelerate regeneration outcomes when aligned with strategic priorities. However, it is important to highlight that competitive mechanisms must complement and not compromise the foundational funding required to plan and deliver

	coherent programmes at scale. The assessment criteria needs to clearly set out how projects would be evaluated, with a particular focus on the economic impact of the investment to ensure the greatest delivery of benefit.
3.14	viii) Mid-term review and evaluation We recommend that an embedded, structured mid-term review mechanism is established to assess progress, measure impact, and enable course correction where necessary. This approach would reinforce accountability, strengthen transparency and ensure that delivery models remain responsive and adaptable to evolving local contexts. By building in a formal review stage, programmes can better align resources with outcomes and maintain momentum over the full investment cycle. This review would need to be subject to Council input, including through Councils own governance and approval process.
3.15	ix) Alignment with existing plans and programmes We strongly support the use of existing strategic plans (e.g. Belfast Agenda, Local Development Plan) to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue.
3.16	Members are asked to consider and input to the Councils draft response to the Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation, prior to agreeing the final draft. Members are also asked to note that the agreed response from this Committee will be brought to the SP&R Committee on the 19th September for consideration and approval of the elements of the response relating to Council contributions and resource allocation. The draft response will be submitted to DfC following the SP&R meeting, and will be submitted subject to final Council ratification on the 1st October.
4.0	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> The SP&R Committee will be asked to consider and agree the response to the Financial & Resource implications included within this response.
5.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> Equality, Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment have not been undertaken in the drafting of this response, although they have been considered. Detailed assessments will be required should the programme come forward.
6.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
6.1	Appendix A - Shaping Sustainable Places consultation (draft) Corporate Response Appendix B - Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation 2025: https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/Shaping-Sustainable-Places-consultation.pdf

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Shaping Sustainable Places Programme Team

Regional Development Office

Department for Communities

8th Floor, Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast, BT2 7EG

ssp@communities-ni.gov.uk

Issued via email to: ssp@communities-ni.gov.uk

Subject: Submission to Shaping Sustainable Places 2025 consultation

Dear Programme Team,

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Shaping Sustainable Places* 2025 consultation and acknowledges the ambition to foster more sustainable, inclusive and resilient communities across Northern Ireland. The Council is broadly supportive of a multi-year, secured approach to funding, recognising its potential to provide greater stability, improve long-term planning, and enhance the impact of local regeneration and community development initiatives. However, whilst we endorse this direction of travel in principle, there are several areas where further clarity is required to ensure the proposed model is both workable and effective in practice. These points of clarification are essential to enable informed planning and to maximise the benefit of further investment. Please find attached our formal response, which outlines both our support for the overarching vision and a number of key issues that we believe must be addressed to ensure successful programme implementation. Please note that this response will be subject to Council Ratification on the 1st October 2025. Officers will confirm the final response post Ratification

Our submission includes:

1. A corporate written statement setting out our overarching response to the consultation proposals.
2. A detailed cross-reference table mapping our response themes to the consultation questions, where applicable.

We trust this submission will be of assistance as the Department works toward finalising the programme design and implementation framework. We remain committed to working in partnership with the Department for Communities, Department for Infrastructure, and Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to ensure that Belfast and all Northern Ireland's cities, towns and villages benefit from transformative place-based regeneration.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Belfast City Council response to the Shaping Sustainable Places 2025 consultation

Introduction

Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Shaping Sustainable Places 2025 consultation. We support, in principle, the proposal for a multi-year, secured capital funding programme jointly delivered by key government departments; the Department for Communities (DfC), the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) and the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). We recognise the positive potential of a ten-year, £150 million region wide funding pot to drive regeneration, enhance connectivity and deliver high impact place-based change across our communities.

This type of long-term investment is essential to deliver the change required to revitalise our city and tackle the under investment in place-making that Belfast and other areas have experienced.

The Council brings a strong delivery track record aligned to the Belfast Agenda. In addition to delivering its own regeneration and capital programmes, the Council has successfully delivered projects on behalf of central government departments including TEO and DfC. This reflects robust governance, strategic alignment and proven capacity to manage complex regeneration and capital projects. The Council is well placed to act as a trusted delivery partner in shaping and implementing this programme.

However, Belfast City Council has several concerns and areas requiring clarification before we can fully support the approach and prepare effectively for implementation.

A) General support for a multi-year approach

Belfast City Council welcomes the proposal for multi-year secured funding model. This approach would bring much needed stability and enable council to plan, design and deliver complex regeneration and capital projects with appropriate lead-in-times and better value for money.

Further clarity is needed on how funding will be distributed across councils, and whether allocations will reflect the scale, complexity, economic impact and strategic importance of individual areas.

As the capital city and regional economic driver, Belfast faces distinct challenges and opportunities that warrant a proportionate share of investment. The city plays a central role in delivering regional outcomes including strategic economic output and opportunity for growth, housing-led regeneration, connectivity, and climate resilience and any funding model must reflect this. A flat or equal allocation model would risk diluting impact and failing to deliver on programme ambitions.

We recommend that the department engage with councils to co-design an allocation framework that is needs-based, proportionate, and aligned to economic impact and strategic priorities including population density, deprivation levels, impact and capacity to deliver at scale.

To support effective delivery, councils must also have the ability to identify secured funding across multiple financial years. This flexibility is essential to reflect the reality of capital delivery cycles, particularly for public realm and active travel infrastructure schemes, which often span several years and require complex statutory and procurement processes.

It is recommended that a clear implementation process is developed to determine how funding will be rolled out. This should include timelines, governance arrangements, and criteria for project selection and approval. Early engagement with councils will be critical to ensure readiness, alignment with local priorities, and the ability to mobilise delivery at pace.

B) Clarification on departmental aims and additionality

At the recent SOLACE NI meeting, 2 May 2025, Departmental representatives outlined a vision of the fund supporting projects aligned to their existing remits.

However, it remains unclear whether this funding represents new, additional investment, or simply a reallocation of existing departmental budgets to local councils. Further clarity would be required in terms of the departmental delivery plans for strategic projects and how the Shaping Sustainable Places funding would sit alongside this, rather than to compete with this. If the Shaping Sustainable Places programme is designed to enable councils to deliver projects that would normally be delivered by the Executive Departments, then this risks undermining the principle of additionality and passing significant delivery responsibility to councils without an increase in resource or support. Belfast City Council would also question if the level of funding when allocated out among the 11 Council areas would be sufficient to meet the current level of underinvestment.

C) Funding Quantum and Scale

The scale of under investment in Belfast is significant. By way of example, the pre-pandemic cost for Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 3, was c.£30 million. This would equate to three years of the entire regional funding pot, or Belfast's full ten-year allocation.

Belfast currently has multiple major primarily Executive department level schemes pending funding and delivery, for example:

- Belfast Streets Ahead Phases 3 and 5 (DfC).
- Gateway projects at Shankill, Clifton and Fredrick Streets
- Belfast Cycle Network, BRT Phase 2 and other active infrastructure (DfI)
- Under the Bridges, Sailortown Bridge and emerging schemes linked to the Eastern Transport Plan

It is therefore essential that Departments clarify whether this new funding stream will replace historic investment programmes or run alongside them. Without this clarity, there is significant risk that the ambition of the programme will far exceed its funding capacity.

To maximise impact and avoid duplication, it is vital that the Shaping Sustainable Places programme is designed to complement not compete with existing capital commitments. This includes ensuring that funding mechanisms are flexible enough to support co-investment models and that programme criteria recognise the strategic importance of city-led infrastructure delivery. A coordinated approach will enable alignment across government priorities, unlock additional value, and support the delivery of transformational outcomes at scale.

D) Council contributions and governance considerations

While the proposed funding model assumes a further minimum contribution of 10% (approximately £15 million) from Local Councils, it is important to clarify that such contributions cannot be presumed. Councils operate within defined governance frameworks and statutory processes regarding capital expenditure, and any financial commitment must be subject to formal approval through this process. Therefore, while Belfast City Council is committed to working collaboratively with the department and other partners, the programme should reflect an ambition to co-design funding arrangements with councils rather than

assume automatic financial participation. This approach will ensure transparency, respect for local governance, and alignment with council-led investment priorities.

E) Delivery Capacity and Resource Allowances

Effective delivery of complex regeneration projects requires not only robust governance but also sufficient resourcing to navigate statutory approvals and technical processes. Where councils are expected to take a leadership role, resources must extend beyond capital allocation and include dedicated funding for inhouse delivery teams, provision for a management fee to support project management functions, and specialist feasibility development support to prepare capital ready pipelines. To enable this, it is recommended that a portion of funding is ringfenced for early-stage activities including feasibility assessment, design development and meaningful community engagement, ensuring that projects are both viable and deliverable before significant capital spend is committed. It is also proposed that the requested 10% contribution could be assessed in terms of in-kind contribution in terms of staff and resource to deliver, although as above this will also be subject to Councils own governance and approvals process.

Should councils take the lead on these complex projects, resourcing must include:

- Dedicated feasibility and technical development support to prepare capital-ready pipelines. Council recommends that a defined proportion of funding should be ringfenced for early-stage activities, including feasibility assessments, design development and meaningful community engagement prior to the allocation of capital spend.
- Provision for a management fee to support effective delivery.

F) Statutory Approvals Process

Current place-making schemes face lengthy delays due to complex statutory approvals. The new model must address this, potentially through streamlining processes or prioritising cross-departmental/Council approvals. If DfI is no longer the direct delivery body, its level of obligation and responsiveness to approval processes must be reviewed to avoid setbacks.

A coordinated statutory approvals framework, supported by departmental leadership, will be key to unlocking delivery at pace. This includes clarifying roles, streamlining processes, and ensuring that all enabling partners including funders and utilities are actively engaged from the outset.

G) Role of DAERA in urban regeneration

The current document provides limited insight into DAERA's potential interventions in Belfast. Whilst DAERA'S remit has traditionally been centred on rural regeneration, the implementation of climate mitigation and risk measures within capital projects is strategically significant for the city's future resilience

Further clarity is required on how DAERA'S investment will directly support the outcomes in Belfast, particularly in relation to the delivery of climate mitigation and adaptation infrastructure.

Ensuring that Belfast is adequately assessed and resourced within DAERA's framework will be essential to embedding sustainable regeneration practices and meeting long term climate change objectives.

H) Competitive funding streams

We support the use of thematic competitive funding (e.g. heritage assets, climate resilience, and economic centres) as a means to catalyse targeted investment and unlock place-based economic potential. These thematic streams can stimulate local enterprise, attract co-investment, and accelerate regeneration outcomes when aligned with strategic priorities. However, it is important to highlight that competitive mechanisms must complement and not compromise the foundational funding required to plan and deliver coherent programmes at scale. The assessment criteria needs to clearly set out how projects would be evaluated, with a particular focus on the economic impact of the investment to ensure the greatest delivery of benefit.

I) Mid-term review and evaluation

We recommend that an embedded, structured mid-term review mechanism is established to assess progress, measure impact, and enable course correction where necessary. This approach would reinforce accountability, strengthen transparency and ensure that delivery models remain responsive and adaptable to evolving local contexts. By building in a formal review stage, programmes can better align resources with outcomes and maintain momentum

over the full investment cycle. This review would need to be subject to Council input, including through Councils own governance and approval process.

Cross-Referenced Summary of Responses to Consultation Questions

QUESTION	RESPONSE
Q2. To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places Q4. To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places	Agree - We broadly support the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places 2025, particularly its emphasis on place-based regeneration, early community engagement, and collaborative delivery models. These principles strongly align with the ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, which articulates a shared vision of Belfast as a city. The Belfast Agenda prioritises inclusive growth, neighbourhood regeneration, and climate resilience, each of which is echoed in the Shaping Sustainable Places vision. In particular, the commitment to engaging communities at the earliest stages of planning reflects Belfast’s own community planning ethos, which seeks to bring decision-making closer to residents and ensure that regeneration delivers tangible benefits for local people. However, we would emphasise the importance of ensuring that the proposed programme is underpinned by sufficient core funding and long-term delivery mechanisms. This is essential to avoid fragmented interventions and to support the kind of sustained, citywide transformation envisaged in both the Belfast Agenda and the Shaping Sustainable Places framework. To ensure the programme remains on track and delivers meaningful impact, we recommend a structured mid-term review and evaluation

	process. This will be critical in assessing progress against outlined targets, identifying areas for adjustment, and reinforcing accountability throughout the programme's lifecycle.
Q6. Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places	Agree— The ten-year term is welcome, but its success hinges on realistic planning assumptions, early-stage capacity building, and mechanisms for ongoing review and course improvements. We support the ambition of the proposed ten-year timeframe for Shaping Sustainable Places, recognising the value of long-term planning and the opportunity to deliver transformational place-based regeneration at scale. This aligns with the strategic priorities set out in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028</i>, which champions sustained investment in the city centre, neighbourhood renewal, climate resilience, and inclusive growth. A decade-long delivery window also corresponds with Council's experience of managing complex infrastructure and regeneration projects, where realistic time frames are essential for achieving meaningful outcomes. However, we would reiterate the need for a flexible and phased approach to programme implementation. As outlined in our submission, appropriate lead-in time for feasibility studies, statutory approvals, and collaborative design will be critical, particularly where delivery responsibility sits with Local Councils. It is also essential that the programme incorporates a mid-term review, enabling both the department and councils to respond to evolving local contexts and evaluate delivery progress.
Q8. To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places should be developed through a place-making process.	We strongly agree that Shaping Sustainable Places should be developed through a place-making process. This approach is consistent with the council's commitment to community-led regeneration, as articulated in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, the LDP, and the recent Belfast City Regeneration and Investment Stocktake</i> which highlights the critical areas of focus to drive catalytic change including increasing city centre living, delivering a Bolder Vision, unlocking major regeneration schemes and delivering a multi-agency approach to place keeping and city

	management. A place-making process enables early and meaningful engagement with local communities, ensuring that interventions consider the needs, and aspirations of those communities. It also supports integrated planning essential foundation for delivering sustainable, inclusive outcomes at scale.
Q10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places.	We agree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit represents a valuable and innovative approach to planning sustainable places; however its real benefit is contingent upon the Craft Kit being appropriately resourced and tailored to the local context. Local community and business capacity to engage with the Craft Kit, as well as the continued role of DfC as the Regeneration Authority will also be critical to the successful delivery of the Craft Kit. The Craft Kit's emphasis on community-led co-design, asset-based thinking, consistent engagement aligns closely with Belfast City Council's regeneration ethos and the principles set out in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028</i>. It encourages local stakeholders to explore the place making principles fostering a shared understanding of needs and opportunities. This approach has already demonstrated practical value in pilot areas such as Downpatrick, Greater Shankill and the development of the vision for the Newtownards Road, where it supported collaborative visioning and action planning. However, the level of resources, facilitation and capacity within the particular areas are also determining factors. There is also a risk of raising local area expectations in relation to the implementation of plans, particularly in view that these plans are not matched by adequate levels of resource or capital to deliver. To maximise its effectiveness, the Craft Kit must be embedded within a broader delivery framework that includes facilitation support, capacity-building and integration with statutory planning processes, along with a sustainable approach to implementation

Q12. If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a place-making approach.	Strongly Agree –Belfast City Council has invested significant time and resources in developing a range of strategic and community-led plans such as the <i>Belfast Agenda, Local Development Plan, A Bolder Vision</i> and the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Strategy, along with area-specific regeneration frameworks which reflect extensive stakeholder engagement and align with the principles of place-making. Requiring communities or councils to restart planning processes where robust plans already exist would risk duplication, consultation fatigue, and delays in delivery. Instead, the Shaping Sustainable Places programme should adopt a flexible approach that allows existing plans to form the foundation for investment, while still enabling refinement and co-design where appropriate.
Q14. To what extent do you agree or disagree with “ Investing in public realm in village, town and city centre” as an objective when focusing on Place?	We strongly agree that investing in the public realm across villages, towns, and city centres is a critical objective when focusing on Place. High-quality public realm enhances the attractiveness, accessibility, and functionality of our city environments, encouraging footfall, supporting local businesses, and fostering civic pride. This aligns with Belfast City Council’s regeneration priorities. On its own public realm is not enough but needs to be aligned with sustainable and active travel provision, climate mitigation measures and addressing dereliction and vacancy in urban centres.
Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focusing on Place?	We strongly agree with the objective of increasing occupancy levels by bringing vacant buildings and derelict sites back into use. Addressing vacancy and dereliction is essential to reversing decline of buildings, improving perceptions of place, and unlocking underutilised assets for housing and other uses. This objective reflects longstanding council concerns about underinvestment and aligns with our commitment to tackling vacancy and promoting sustainable reuse of the built environment.

	This ambition is directly aligned with the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BICCRIS), which prioritises the revitalisation of the city core through targeted investment, improved connectivity, and the reactivation of underused assets. It also complements the Council’s Vacant to Vibrant programme and the emerging H.O.U.S.E Programmes. The Vacant to Vibrant Programme provides financial and advisory support to bring vacant properties back into productive use whilst the H.O.U.S.E programme is a future programme currently being explored to bring vacant spaces on the upper floors forward for residential use. Together, these initiatives demonstrate Belfast City Council’s proactive approach to tackling vacancy and delivering inclusive, place-based regeneration. Subject to funding these programmes can continue to deliver a substantial return on investment through the Rates, as well as delivering desirable benefits of increasing employment, economic activity, footfall, vibrancy, and delivering on the draft PFG.
Q16. To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?	We agree that creating more productive local economies should be a core objective of place-based regeneration, provided that this approach is taken in tandem with proportionate support for areas of strategic and regional economic output. Supporting local enterprise, enhancing skills, and enabling inclusive economic growth are central to the Belfast Agenda 2024–2028 and the Belfast City Centre Regeneration & Investment Strategy
Q18. To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focusing on People?	We agree that improving safety in village, town, and city centres is a vital objective when focusing on People. A sense of safety is essential for fostering community wellbeing, supporting economic growth, and ensuring inclusive opportunities for all. This aligns with the Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, which prioritises creating a welcoming, vibrant, and connected city where everyone feels secure and valued. Belfast City Council has consistently supported initiatives that enhance public safety—such as

	improved lighting, active travel infrastructure, and collaborative approaches to tackling anti-social behaviour. These efforts are not only about reducing crime but also about fostering environments where people feel confident to live, work, and socialise. To be effective, this objective must be targeted towards the centres with greatest economic return, strengthening our city centres as well as local centres. Funding to support this will be essential, and it will also need to be supported by cross-sectoral partnerships, underpinned by data-informed interventions.
Q19. To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities" as an objective when focusing on People?	We strongly agree that creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities is a vital objective when focusing on people. This aligns with Belfast City Council's strategic priorities, particularly those outlined in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, A Bolder Vision, the LDP, BCRRIS</i> and the <i>Resilience Strategy</i>, which emphasise climate action, health and wellbeing, and inclusive mobility. Active and sustainable infrastructure such as walking and cycling networks, green transport corridors, and energy-efficient community facilities not only supports environmental goals but also enhances quality of life, promotes healthier lifestyles, and improves access to services. These outcomes are especially important in addressing inequalities and ensuring that regeneration benefits all communities. To be effective, this objective must be supported by long-term investment, integrated planning across departments, and strong community engagement. It also requires alignment with existing strategies such as the Belfast Cycle Network and Eastern Transport Plan, ensuring that infrastructure is not only sustainable but also responsive to local needs and aspirations.
Q20. To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Reducing car dominance" as an objective when focusing on People?	We agree that reducing car dominance is an important and necessary objective when focusing on People. This aligns with Belfast City Council's

	strategic priorities around sustainable mobility, climate action, and inclusive access, as outlined in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, A Bolder Vision, the LDP, BCRRIS</i> and the <i>Resilience Strategy</i>. Reducing car dominance supports healthier, more connected communities by encouraging active travel, improving air quality, and reclaiming public space for people rather than vehicles. It also helps address transport inequality by prioritising infrastructure that benefits those without access to private cars. However, this objective must be implemented in a way that is sensitive to local context particularly in relation to transport access, public transport availability, and the needs of residents and businesses. To be effective, this ambition should be supported by investment in active and sustainable transport infrastructure, integrated land-use planning, and behavioural change initiatives. It must also be accompanied by clear communication and engagement with communities to ensure that changes are inclusive, equitable, and widely supported.
Q22. To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focusing on Planet?	We strongly agree that creating or enhancing green spaces should be a core objective when focusing on Planet. This aligns with Belfast City Council’s strategic priorities around climate resilience, biodiversity, and environmental wellbeing, as outlined in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, A Bolder Vision, the LDP, BCRRIS</i> and the <i>Resilience Strategy</i>. Green spaces play a vital role in addressing climate impacts by improving air quality, managing surface water runoff, and promoting biodiversity. They also provide essential benefits for people enhancing mental and physical wellbeing, encouraging active lifestyles, and fostering social cohesion. In Belfast, where access to quality green space is uneven, targeted investment in both the creation of new spaces and the enhancement of existing ones is vital. This objective must be supported by

	long-term funding, community co-design, and integration with wider regeneration and infrastructure strategies to ensure that green infrastructure delivers maximum environmental and social value. However, there needs to be immediate progress made in terms of how this is embedded into the road infrastructure, including ownership, operation and maintenance plans. Failure to address this will lead to a failure to deliver green infrastructure.
Q23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focusing on Planet?	Strongly agree. Building climate resilient infrastructure aligns closely with Belfast City Council’s strategic priorities, particularly its commitments to climate adaptation, sustainable development and creating a more inclusive, low carbon city. Resilient infrastructure is essential to protecting communities, supporting economic growth and ensuring long term environmental sustainability. However, there needs to be immediate progress made in terms of how this is embedded into the road infrastructure, including ownership, operation and maintenance plans. Failure to address this will lead to a failure to deliver green infrastructure.
Q24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focusing on Planet?	Strongly agree. Ensuring that buildings are brought back into use supports Belfast City Council’s strategic priorities around sustainable regeneration, climate action and reducing carbon emissions. Reutilising underused spaces could contribute to the ambitious aims outlined in the Belfast Agenda, <i>A Bolder Vision</i>, <i>the LDP</i>, <i>BCRRIS</i> to increase the city centre population. By way of an example, creating homes from spaces within buildings that are vacant has a number of benefits, not only reducing emissions but reducing housing stress, preservation of buildings, supporting economic revitalisation, enhancing city vibrancy and safety, enhancing community well-

	being and attracting further investment and reducing vacancy right across the city.
Q26. Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes were successful?	Yes, Belfast City Council considers previous partnership working on regeneration schemes to have been broadly successful. Initiatives such as the Covid Recovery Revitalisation Programme and the tri-Departmental collaboration between DfC, DfI, and DAERA have demonstrated the value of coordinated, cross-governmental approaches to place-based investment. These partnerships enabled timely delivery of capital projects, supported local businesses, and enhanced public spaces during a period of significant challenge. The council's experience shows that effective partnership working grounded in shared objectives, clear governance, and sustained commitment can deliver tangible outcomes for communities. However, continued success depends on maintaining strong interdepartmental coordination, ensuring clarity of roles and responsibilities, and embedding local government as a strategic delivery partner from the outset. This includes, for example, streamlining the statutory approval process, along with overcoming the current barriers to delivering climate migration measures and green infrastructure. This collaborative ethos is also reflected in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028</i>, which emphasises co-design, inclusive growth, and integrated delivery as core principles for regeneration. Going forward, it will be essential to build on these foundations and ensure that future programmes like Shaping Sustainable Places are underpinned by the same level of partnership ambition and operational alignment.
Q28. Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?	Yes, Belfast City Council believes that broadening the partnership base is essential to the successful delivery of Shaping Sustainable Places. While the tri-Departmental collaboration between DfC, DfI, and DAERA provides a strong foundation, the complexity and ambition of the programme require a wider cohort of delivery partners.

	We recommend the inclusion of: • Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to align regeneration with housing-led renewal and address vacancy and dereliction initiatives. • The Community Planning Partnership to align impact to the Belfast Agenda. • Utility providers (e.g. NI Water, NIE Networks) to ensure infrastructure readiness and support integrated planning. • Community and voluntary sector organisations to embed local knowledge, build trust, and support inclusive delivery. • The role of the Private Sector & other city stakeholders, eg. Universities, also needs to be considered in terms of bringing forward delivery and funding at scale By involving a broader range of partners, the programme can better respond to local needs, unlock additional resources, and deliver more holistic, sustainable outcomes.
Q30. To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centre should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils?	We strongly agree that the regeneration of villages, towns, and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, underpinned by secure, multi-year funding for both the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils, measured against the economic impact of the investment. This needs to be done through an agreed framework for budget allocation which considers need and the economic impact of investment. In the past decade the level of investment in town and city centres has been grossly underfunded in Northern Ireland, further hampered by in year funding constraints. In other regions within the UK local towns and cities are able to plan on a multi-year bases, and have the ability to draw on additional regeneration funding streams that do not translate to Northern Ireland. This has left the region at a distinct disadvantage in attracting investment in comparison to other regions in the UK. In line with the Place Based Growth Proposition securing additional funding beyond the

	normal funding structures will be critical and should become a strategic priority to addressing the current level of underinvestment. This position is firmly aligned with the Belfast Agenda 2024–2028, BCCRIS and ABV, which emphasises inclusive growth, neighbourhood renewal, and sustainable infrastructure as key levers for improving quality of life and economic resilience. Long-term regeneration is not only essential for addressing historic underinvestment particularly in public realm, connectivity, and community assets but also for enabling councils to plan and deliver complex, multi-phase capital projects with confidence and coherence, to enable city centres to deliver on their growth outcomes and to contribute to the draft PfG. As highlighted in Belfast City Council’s response to the Shaping Sustainable Places consultation, the scale of ambition must be matched by funding certainty. This level of funding certainty must be in line with the levels and types of funding that other major UK cities can avail of. Without it, there is a risk of fragmented delivery, missed opportunities for co-investment, and diminished community trust. A strategic, well-funded approach allows for meaningful community engagement, robust design development, and the kind of sustained transformation for Belfast.
Q32. To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?	Council supports the establishment of targeted competitive funding opportunities as a complementary mechanism to core allocations within the Shaping Sustainable Places programme. although the Council supports this within an agreed framework of budget distribution across Councils based on regeneration need, economic impact and ability to deliver. When designed effectively, such funds can stimulate innovation, address place-specific challenges, and unlock co-investment from public, private, and community partners but this should be measured against tangible outcomes and impacts. However, as noted in Belfast City Council’s consultation response, it is essential that these place based opportunities do not undermine the

	base funding required to plan and deliver coherent, long-term regeneration programmes at scale. The assessment criteria needs to clearly set out how projects would be evaluated, with a particular focus on the economic impact of the investment to ensure the greatest delivery of benefit.
Q34. Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?	In the Belfast context, several regeneration issues and themes could be well-suited to competitive funding, including: • Vacancy and Dereliction • Reactivation of historic buildings and vacant upper-floor space – to support heritage-led regeneration, to revitalise the city centre and the wider area, and to increase city centre population. • Unlocking major regeneration schemes as identified within the BCCRIS Stocktake. • Sustainable and Active Travel Delivery, Public Realm and Connectivity • Adaptation infrastructure – to enhance climate resilience and support the delivery of the Resilience Strategy, supported by a cross-departmental and statutory authority agreement in terms of how this infrastructure can be delivered, and maintained on a long-term sustainable basis.
Q35. Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criteria when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places	Based on Belfast City Council’s strategic priorities and the themes outlined in the <i>Belfast Agenda 2024–2028</i>, the following five criteria are considered most important when prioritising places for intervention through <i>Shaping Sustainable Places</i>: 1. High levels of vacancy and dereliction – Addressing underutilised assets, land and buildings is essential to reversing decline, improving perceptions of place, unlocking regeneration potential and reducing housing stress through the adaptive reuse of assets for economic purposes. 2. Need for improved infrastructure – Investment in transport and green

	infrastructure is critical to enabling inclusive growth and climate resilience. 3. Measuring Economic impact and return on investment. 4. Access to opportunity for residents of surrounding areas – Enhancing connectivity across the city and removing barriers supporting wider regional development and social inclusion. 5. Potential to leverage private sector investment – Targeting areas with co-investment potential maximises the impact of public funding and supports long-term sustainability.
Q36. To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First Policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?	We support the adoption of a Centre First Policy to encourage development in central urban areas to support vibrant, accessible and economically active cores. A Centre First Policy could discourage the spread of out-of-town retail, commercial or residential development. It would support the revitalisation of the city centre and address vacancy and dereliction that could be a catalyst for further investment. In Belfast this this could help drive footfall, support local businesses, and enhance the vibrancy and resilience of the city core. For Belfast, this approach complements ongoing efforts to revitalise the city centre, reduce vacancy, and promote sustainable travel patterns by concentrating activity in accessible, well-connected locations. However, successful implementation will require coordinated planning across departments, alignment with transport and infrastructure strategies, and consideration of local context to ensure that the policy delivers inclusive benefits across all settlement types. When embedded within a broader place-making framework, a Centre First approach can act as a powerful lever for economic regeneration and spatial equity.



Consultation on Shaping Sustainable Places

Contents

1.	Joint Ministerial Foreword	3
2.	Executive Summary	4
3.	Introduction	6
4.	Strategic Context	7
5.	Data Protection	12
6.	Who are you?	13
7.	Vision and Principles	14
8.	Placemaking	16
9.	Ambitions and Objectives	18
10.	Funding and Prioritisation	22
11.	Centre First for Public Services	24
	Annex A – Summary of questions	26
	Annex B - Landing Page Text	33
	Annex C – Privacy Notice	34

1. Joint Ministerial Foreword

In an era of uncertainty and change, the sustainability of our village, town and city centres has never mattered more. We understand the power of place, not just as a location, but as the living heart of our communities, giving us a sense of belonging, meeting local needs, and providing jobs and services.

Yet many places are under pressure from the rapid changes in retail, the rise of online commerce and the legacy of the Covid pandemic. The result has been an increase in vacancy, dereliction and neglected places that once thrived as centres of community life.

We cannot afford to let our village, town and city centres become symbols of decline. This is not just an economic issue; it is also about local identity, social cohesion and opportunity. When high streets are hollowed out, so too are the spaces where people connect, local businesses grow, and public life unfolds.

We are proposing Shaping Sustainable Places as a joined-up and strategic response to these trends. We want to put communities

at the centre of reimagining their place for living, learning, working, culture and play.

We want to tackle vacancy and dereliction head-on through interventions that promote adaptive reuse. We want to give places back to people by creating spaces where they can gather and spend time. We want to deliver practical solutions that make communities stronger, safer and better prepared for the future. Our departments have been working closely because we understand the scale of the challenges faced and we know that by working together, we can maximise the impact of our collective investment.

The future of our communities depends on how we nurture, shape and invest in our villages, towns and cities. This consultation document seeks your views on a community-focused approach to re-creating and sustaining vibrant and resilient villages, towns and cities.

We are committed to creating places that work for everyone – alive with purpose, pride of place and rooted in the communities they serve. We encourage you to play your part by completing this consultation to help us guide and shape the future.



Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities



Liz Kimmins MLA
Minister for Infrastructure



Andrew Muir MLA
Minister of Agriculture,
Environment and
Rural Affairs

2. Executive Summary

Whilst no two places are the same, many are dealing with similar problems, including lower occupancy rates and footfall due to economic headwinds and changing consumer preferences.¹ Longer term trends of development away from town centres have removed many village, town and city centre activities and reduced reasons to visit and dwell.²

Shaping Sustainable Places aims to create a flagship programme of interventions to arrest the decline in our valued village, town and city centres. Through more strategic interventions lead by communities we hope to stimulate places and catalyse private sector activity to further protect them.³

Shaping Sustainable Places lays the foundation for new ways of delivering regeneration outcomes. We aim to engage communities at the earliest stages of planning for change, developing solutions to specific place-based challenges through funding local physical and infrastructure interventions.

The Programme has been developed by the Department for Communities working in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, and the Department for Infrastructure.

We are building on the successes and

learning from our collaborative delivery of two recent regeneration programmes. The Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme⁴ funded Local Councils to deliver measures to help provide a safe environment for visitors, shoppers and workers within town and city centres. The Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme,⁵ supported projects in small settlements with a population of less than 5,000 people.

It is proposed that the three departments will co-fund the Programme over a 10-year period, contributing a minimum of £5m each per year for investment in capital projects. A further minimum contribution of 10% (£15m) will be requested from Local Councils, creating an initial fund of £165m. However, the Programme would be scalable, and able to utilise additional funds for regeneration if they became available.

The Northern Ireland Executive is operating in an acutely constrained financial environment; by pooling our limited resources, we hope to maximise the impact of the interventions that can be made, and demonstrate that by working in partnership, we can provide a mechanism to deliver for other funders and partners in future.

We will also seek over the life of the programme to drawdown alternative, non-Executive funding sources, through

1 The Government Response to the House of Lords Built Environment Committee Report on High Streets: Life beyond retail? at pg. 1.

2 A New Future for Scotland's Town Centres

3 The existential crisis of traditional shopping streets the sun model and the place attraction paradigm at pg. 30.

4 Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

5 Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

leveraging private sector investment and working with other non-Executive funders on established and new approaches.

It is recognised that the available funding will fall far short of the need of all village, town and city centres. This means it will be important to focus interventions and prioritise places to achieve the transformative impact we wish to see. Whilst it is envisaged there will be core allocations made to each Local Council area, this consultation also explores the use of competitive funding streams for particular types of intervention. We hope to develop opportunities for funding to tackle defined themes or specific challenges and select those proposals that offer the greatest potential benefits.

Our first objective is to improve the places we love by ensuring they are sustainable into the future; to create places where people want to live, work, invest and visit.⁶ We recognise that for places to thrive, they also need strong local leadership and decision-making. This consultation will ask for your views on how to deliver participative, collaborative development of plans in which communities are at the heart of decisions made about their places.

Our second key objective is to prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of people through regeneration and creation of people-centred accessible and inclusive places. We recognise

that addressing dereliction or vacancy to stimulate local economies cannot be just about retail consolidation.⁷ Creating economically sustainable places will depend on increasing the number of people for whom village, town and city centres are safe and attractive gathering points,⁸ as well as commercial centres.

Our third objective is to shape places to become more resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change. Across many built environments, there are well understood susceptibilities to extreme weather which can be mitigated and adapted through design and innovation, to protect people, businesses, homes and livelihoods, and to invest in long-term sustainable solutions for the future.

The final objective is that by working collaboratively across departments and through Local Councils, we will be able to deliver a programme that is greater than the sum of its parts. Through Shaping Sustainable Places, we aim to coordinate more strategic and transformative capital investments, focussed on delivering outcomes and positive change. We will deliver flexibly, learn from best practice and adapt to changes in the market and operating environment.

If we succeed, the interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places should be key to sustaining places economically, socially and environmentally for people long into the future.

6 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 7

7 High Street: How our town centres can bounce back from the retail crisis: Rudlin, Payne and Montague at pg 211.

8 Draft ISNI Strategy - 2050

3. Introduction

This document sets out draft proposals for Shaping Sustainable Places, a long-term programme of regeneration interventions that aims to reshape village, town and city centres. We are carrying out a public consultation on the draft proposals to test our new approach and to invite fresh insights and perspectives. We aim to develop a final programme for Ministerial and Executive Committee consideration by the end of 2025.

Impact assessments

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality between all Section 75 groups. Without prejudice to these obligations, the Department is also required, in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Equality screening of the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places Programme has identified no adverse impacts, and the screening documentation has been published alongside this consultation document. On this basis, the

decision is that the Programme should not be subject to a full equality impact assessment.

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 introduced a duty on Northern Ireland departments, Local Councils and other public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, or when designing and delivering public services. There is also a requirement to monitor and report on how the due regard duty has been exercised.

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment recording these considerations has been published alongside this consultation document.

In line with The Data Protection Act (DPA) and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Department for Communities is committed to building trust and confidence in our ability to process your personal information and protect your privacy. Our Privacy Notice at Annex C of this document outlines how we process your data. A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) screening exercise was carried out, which determined that a full DPIA is not required for this consultation.

4. Strategic Context

Regeneration and Placemaking

The existing Department for Communities Urban Regeneration Policy Framework defines regeneration as “activities that reverse economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do this without the support of government.”⁹

Shaping Sustainable Places proposes to build on this framework to fund strategic interventions that deliver wider benefits.

Placemaking is impacted both directly and incidentally by many policies and actions across government, the private and the Voluntary and Community sector. Each place is different, has different characteristics, needs and strengths that are understood best by the people who live in and use that place.

Our approach in developing Shaping Sustainable Places has been to reflect and build on the three sponsoring Departments’ organisational goals, existing arrangements and business needs, and to combine this with emerging best practice around the role of communities in placemaking and regeneration.

The Department for Communities’ current programme of urban regeneration

interventions is delivered in the 41 urban towns and cities across Northern Ireland.¹⁰ Until 2020, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, administered the European Union Rural Development Programme.

In leading the delivery of the Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme¹¹ and the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme¹², the Department for Communities stepped outside of its core policy focus on urban settlements. This was enabled by working in partnership with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for Infrastructure.

An additional 24 intermediate settlements and 69 villages with populations of over 1000 people were eligible for funding through the two partnership programmes.¹³ The programmes also delivered active and sustainable travel interventions and enablers.

Spatial and Planning Policy Context

Shaping Sustainable Places will be delivered within the context of regional planning policy and Local Councils’ Local Development Plans. All Local Councils are preparing

9 Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework at pg.5.

10 An urban town or city is defined as one located within a settlement with a population of 5,000 or more The Northern Ireland Town Centre Database Background Paper

11 Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

12 Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

13 An intermediate settlement has a population of 2,500 - 4,999 and a village has a population of 1,000 - 2,499. For the full list of NI villages, intermediate settlements, towns and cities see Review of the Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements | Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

Local Development Plans for their areas which set out a clear vision, typically over a 15-year period, for the type, scale and location of development that should be encouraged. It is within this context that initiatives that provide support to Local Councils can be considered to enable them to deliver local solutions to local issues.

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement¹⁴ sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas, and the Programme for Government commits to the continued implementation of a planning improvement programme to make our planning system work for businesses, people, and the environment.¹⁵ Improving health and wellbeing is one of the five Core Planning Principles set out in the Strategic Planning Policy Statement.

Community Planning

Each Local Council also has a Community Planning Partnership which brings together a range of partners including public bodies, government departments, agencies, businesses and community and voluntary organisations.¹⁶

Community Planning Partnerships work together to identify long-term objectives to improve the social, economic and environmental well-being of the area. Each Partnership develops a Community Plan.

A Community Plan is a document telling people the outcome or shared vision of each Community Planning Partnership.

The Plan describes how the partners will work together to deliver interventions and actions locally. Community Planning involves all aspects of public services—from education, health, housing and the environment to arts, culture and heritage. The partners also work with residents and community groups directly.

The Shaping Sustainable Places interventions proposed by Local Councils should align with local Community Plans.

Revenue Generation

Regeneration, where it is successful in catalysing increased tenancy or commercial activity in the locality, can help to sustain the local rates taxbase. Revenue generated from the rates system comprises 78% of local government revenue¹⁷ and supplements around 4%¹⁸ of the Northern Ireland Executive's spending power. This demonstrates the direct link between the sustainability of places and the funding of local services.

Programme for Government Framework: Key Priorities

The Programme for Government Framework sets out three key missions related to People, the Planet and Prosperity.¹⁹ These missions are underpinned by a number of key priorities which Shaping Sustainable Places will support:

14 Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

15 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 10

16 Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014

17 Local government facts and figures: Northern Ireland - LGIU – NILGA 2021

18 The Public Finance in Northern Ireland: a comprehensive guide – Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

19 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 67.

Grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy

Shaping Sustainable Places aims to create the right interventions which will create the foundations for a more productive and prosperous economy; for better rural and urban communities; and for healthier and greener lives.²⁰

Provide More Social, Affordable and Sustainable Housing

Shaping Sustainable Places recognises the importance of housing as essential to health and wellbeing and the wider Programme for Government aim of enabling access to affordable, sustainable and quality housing.²¹ Through regeneration and placemaking we hope to create more attractive places both to live and invest in housing.

Safer Communities

Shaping Sustainable Places will ensure that safety is at the forefront of design consideration and all interventions will enable people to have the confidence they need to live productively and engage fully in society.²²

Reform and Transformation of Public Services

Shaping Sustainable Places offers opportunities for cross Departmental transformative approaches to deliver the public services people rely on.²³

Since 2021, Northern Ireland has set a new ambition to decarbonise our economy.

This included the adoption of the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 which sets a legal requirement to reduce emissions by 48% by 2030, as well as 100% reduction in net emission by 2050.²⁴ Activities to achieve this are already underway, but huge challenges remain.²⁵

The Act also includes a Just Transition principle to ensure that the benefits of moving to a green economy are shared widely. We believe that Shaping Sustainable Places can help contribute to a Just Transition through having due regard to the desirability of using and supporting nature-based interventions.²⁶

High Street Taskforce Report and Recommendations

An independent High Street Task Force appointed by Executive Ministers in 2020 carried out a call for evidence²⁷ and delivered a report²⁸ and recommendations on the future of high streets in Northern Ireland. Although the report has not been formally adopted by the Executive Committee, Shaping Sustainable Places could deliver on elements of two of the 14 recommendations; Recommendations 2 and 5.

20 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 15.

21 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 42.

22 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 46.

23 Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 55.

24 Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 at sections 2-4 and 7 (1).

25 Professor Dave Reay Skills and Net Zero at page 4

26 Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 at section 30 (2) (b).

27 High Street Task Force Call for Evidence Report 2022

28 High Street task Force - Delivering a 21st Century High Street

Recommendation 2 endorses the Living High Streets Craft Kit²⁹ and recommends that it is rolled out with the necessary support for implementation in each high street, village, town and city centre that is prioritised for action by the relevant Local Council. The Department for Communities undertook to carry out pilots of the Living High Streets Craft Kit to test this Recommendation. The first pilot was conducted in Downpatrick and resulted in the launch of the Downpatrick Living High Streets Framework in September 2023.³⁰

The second pilot project, to create the Shankill Living High Streets Framework, commenced in September 2024. To date it has delivered an intense series of community ‘Place’ and ‘Imagining’ workshops; seeking to understand the positive and negative aspects of the Greater Shankill area and how it can be improved. It is expected that the process will conclude in June 2025, when all findings will shape a Physical Development Framework and Action Plan. These ‘living’ documents will be ‘owned’ by the community who will oversee the implementation of the recommendations in the years to come.

This consultation will ask for your views on using the Living High Streets Craft Kit through Shaping Sustainable Places, where possible and appropriate, to develop community-led plans. Initial pilots have reported that the approach requires an intensive period of engagement, resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership.

There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative **website**.

Recommendation 5 urges the Executive to prioritise the delivery of placemaking by developing and implementing an investment programme for blue-green infrastructure, cleaner and greener public realm and sustainable transport, and would require a significant capital budget to allow for implementation.

Whilst the Recommendations have not been adopted, or any budget allocated to this, Shaping Sustainable Places could go some way to delivering on Recommendation 5, and this consultation asks for your views on the proposals for a cross-departmental regeneration programme.

Types of Intervention

The Department for Communities has at its disposal a range of interventions which it deploys to improve the attractiveness and competitiveness of environments and to stimulate private sector investment.³¹

- Revitalisation Projects
- Public Realm Improvements
- Environmental Improvement Schemes
- Comprehensive Development Schemes
- Creation of Business Improvement Districts
- Urban Development Grants

29 MAG - Living High Streets initiative | Department for Communities

30 Downpatrick Living High Streets Framework

31 Urban Regeneration and Community Development Policy Framework at pg.43.

It is proposed that Shaping Sustainable places interventions could include, but not be limited to, those that:

- Improve the quality and accessibility of footpaths and streetscapes
- Change streetscapes to create more room for pedestrians
- Improve streetlighting
- Improve signage
- Create or grow green spaces
- Provide shop front grants to local businesses
- Provide grants to bring buildings back into use
- Provide to create village, town or city-centre housing in mixed-use developments
- Deliver public art
- Provide grants which enable third party or private sector investment
- Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change
- Restore heritage assets

Further Strategic Context

Other government policies that have impacted on the development of Shaping Sustainable Places, include Vital and Viable,³² Living Places Urban Stewardship and Design Guide, the Regional Development Strategy,³³ Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2022, the Housing Supply Strategy³⁴ and ³⁵ the Department for Infrastructure's Strategic Framework.³⁶

We have also sought to incorporate the Adapting to climate change – Progress in Northern Ireland,³⁷ the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework,³⁸ Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation,³⁹ the draft Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland,⁴⁰ the Sub-Regional Economic Plan 2024,⁴¹ Planning for the Future of Transport – Time for Change⁴² and Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns⁴³.

32 Vital and Viable

33 Regional Development Strategy 2035

34 Housing Supply Strategy - A Home for Everyone

35 Air Pollution in Northern Ireland 2022

36 DfI Strategic Framework

37 Adapting to climate change – Progress in Northern Ireland - Climate Change Committee

38 EVAWG Strategic Framework

39 Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation – A New Framework

40 A Green Growth Strategy for Northern Ireland

41 Sub-Regional Economic Plan

42 Planning for the future of Transport

43 Heritage Enabled Regeneration in Towns

5. Data Protection

Privacy, Confidentiality and Access to Consultation Responses

For this consultation, we may publish all responses except for those where the respondent indicates that they are an individual acting in a private capacity (e.g. a member of the public). All responses from organisations and individuals responding in a professional capacity may be published in full, however we will remove email addresses and telephone numbers.

For more information about what we do with personal data please see our consultation privacy notice. Your response, and all other responses to this consultation, may also be disclosed on request in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. However, all disclosures will be in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation (UK) 2016/679.

If you wish your response to be treated as confidential it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential, so that this may be considered if the Department should receive a request for the information under

the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

No personal data is asked for or required during the survey. While we do not ask survey respondents to personally identify themselves; it may be possible, in a small number of cases, for individuals to be identifiable from a combination of responses. There is the potential that responders may in error disclose personal data in the free text boxes. For this reason, the Department for Communities will treat this data as personal data to be disregarded. The consultation will ask consultees if they are responding on behalf of an organisation and request the name of this organisation.

The answers submitted will be collated by Department for Communities employees to form a report which will be used to inform decisions on the shape and remit of the proposed Shaping Sustainable Places programme. It is intended that Consultation responses made will be published or made publicly available as part of a wider report unless a responder identifies themselves as responding as an individual acting in a private capacity.

6. Who are you?

Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.

- Individual
- Organisation

7. Vision and Principles

Vision

Shaping Sustainable Places will contribute to Executive commitments to grow a globally competitive and sustainable economy, provide more housing, create safer communities and reform and transform public services.

Our vision is:

To work with communities to address local challenges through funding interventions that deliver sustainable, people-centred places providing economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q3: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?

Principles

These principles will support our vision and guide the interventions that will help transform places.

Strategic	Ensure interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places focus on long-term impact rather than short-term fixes.
Sustainable	Respond to the changing needs of places by delivering interventions that address the economic, social and environmental sustainability of a place.
Integrated	Building partnerships, collaboration across and outside government to deliver the best possible interventions.
Participative	Empowering people and communities to be part of the regeneration of their place.

Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q5: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?

Timeframe

We believe that Shaping Sustainable Places needs to give a sufficiently long-

term commitment to enable partners, stakeholders and communities to engage, plan and invest in interventions to realise our vision. We have proposed an initial 10-year budget commitment to the Programme, with a midpoint review after 5 years.

Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No, it should be shorter
- No, it should be longer

Q7: If you did not select 'yes' above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?

8. Placemaking

Shaping Sustainable Places would require Local Councils, in partnership with local communities, to develop detailed plans for its prioritised places. These plans would be required to take a placemaking approach.

An effective placemaking process capitalises on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and should result in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being.⁴⁴

Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q9: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?

The Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland has co-designed a community-led approach to placemaking. This participatory approach brings people together to consider their local high streets, tackle common issues and enable places and communities to thrive.

The **Living High Streets Craft Kit** has two

parts: Part 1 which sets out the approach and Part 2 which has the tools to use this community-led approach. There are different ways to tailor using the Craft Kit to address variables such as: what stage you are at in making a plan, local capacity, and the scale and complexity of the place. The Ministerial Advisory Group can provide guidance and training to those using the Craft Kit. There is also other guidance available on the **Living High Streets Initiative webpage**.

Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q11: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?

A Placemaking approach will try to involve the Local Council, residents, representatives of statutory bodies, elected representatives, local business organisation representatives, local charity representatives, business owners and residents, in developing the plan for a place. It will also try to engage with a wide range of people in terms of their age, level of interest and perspectives.

⁴⁴ What is Placemaking? – Project for Public Spaces

Most of this activity is done on a voluntary basis, and can take several months, or longer, to complete. Initial pilots have reported that the approach requires an intensive period of engagement, resourcing to support the process and the willingness of effective community leaders equipped to encourage participation and take ownership. There are further insights included on the Living High Streets Initiative **website**.

Q12: If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q13: If your Local Council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or intervention for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.

- Leaflet campaign to invite survey response
- Townhall style meeting
- Focus group of residents
- Online consultation and promotion
- Newspaper advertisement and promotion
- Drop-in clinic
- I would not want to be consulted
- Other

9. Ambitions and Objectives

Shaping Sustainable Places is focussed on Place, People, Planet and Partnership.

Place

The Strategic Planning Policy Statement⁴⁵ sets out regional planning policies for Northern Ireland on town centres and retailing, economic development and development in rural areas.

Improving the places we love and ensuring they are sustainable into the future is the first and primary objective of the programme; to create places where people want to live, work, invest and visit.⁴⁶

Addressing dereliction or vacancy can help to stimulate local economies and regenerate places for other uses. We recognise that renewal cannot be just about retail consolidation.⁴⁷ Creating economically sustainable places will depend on increasing the number of people for whom village, town and city centres are safe and attractive gathering points,⁴⁸ as well as commercial centres and safe neighbourhoods.

Our ambition is to make places more attractive by working with local communities to create people-centred, shared spaces through sustainable development, refurbishment and reuse of underutilised or unused assets, creating places that people want to live, work visit and invest.

We hope to achieve our ambition for Place through:

- Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres
- Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use
- Creating more productive local economies

Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

⁴⁵ Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

⁴⁶ Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most – at pg. 7

⁴⁷ High Street: How our town centres can bounce back from the retail crisis: Rudlin, Payne and Montague at pg 211.

⁴⁸ Draft ISNI Strategy - 2050

Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?

People

Our second key objective is to prioritise the safety, health and wellbeing of people through regeneration and creation of people-centred accessible and inclusive places. Fundamentally we believe places are for people.

Our ambition is to shape places for human interaction making them accessible to more people, delivering safer streets, improving connections and enabling healthier habits and lives.

We hope to achieve our ambition for People through:

- Improving safety in village, town and city centres
- Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities
- Reducing car dominance

Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q21: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?

Planet

Our third objective is to shape places to become more resilient to the risks and impacts of climate change. Across many built environments, there are well understood susceptibilities to extreme weather which can be mitigated and adapted through design and innovation, to protect people, businesses, homes and livelihoods, and to invest in long-term sustainable solutions for the future.

Our ambition is to shape sustainable and secure village, town and city centres and communities by investing in regeneration projects that mitigate against and adapt places to the impacts of climate change.

We hope to achieve our ambition for Planet through:

- Creating or growing existing green spaces
- Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change
- Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient

Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating or growing existing green spaces” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient” as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q25: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?

Partnership

Our fourth objective is that by working collaboratively across departments and through Local Councils, we will be able deliver a programme that is greater than the sum of its parts.

The Department for Communities (DfC), the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) have worked collaboratively to develop Shaping Sustainable Places. Since 2020, these three departments have worked in partnership with Local Councils to deliver two other major regeneration programmes:

- Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme⁴⁹
- Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme⁵⁰

Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

Q27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with Local Councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?

Through Shaping Sustainable Places, we hope to coordinate more strategic and transformative capital investments, focussed on delivering outcomes and change. We hope to deliver flexibly, to learn from best practice and adapt to changes in the market and operating environment. If we succeed, the interventions delivered through Shaping Sustainable Places should be key to sustaining places economically, socially, environmentally and for people long into the future.

Our ambition is to work in partnership with Local Councils, other Departments, the voluntary and community sector, local communities and the private sector to deliver improved outcomes and share and benchmark best practices, funding, risks, responsibilities and opportunities.

Q28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No

Q29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners do you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

⁴⁹ Capital Covid-19 Recovery Revitalisation Scheme | Department for Communities

⁵⁰ Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme

10. Funding and Prioritisation

If approved, Shaping Sustainable Places would deliver a minimum of £150m of Executive funding over 10 years, £50m from each contributing department, i.e. DfC, DAERA and DfI. This would be allocated across all 11 Local Councils to deliver individual in partnership with the Department for Communities acting as the lead department. Local Councils will be asked to contribute a minimum of an additional 10% of the funding they receive.

Shaping Sustainable Places is intended to be scalable, so that if additional capital funding became available for regeneration, Local Councils could be asked to take forward additional plans to draw this funding down. We also hope to pursue opportunities to secure funding from non-Executive funders and will require match funding for some types of interventions from the private sector.

Feedback from Local Councils has indicated that more strategic regeneration interventions would be achievable if Executive departments could give security on indicative budget allocations in advance.

This contrasts with current arrangements, where it can be difficult to guarantee funding for specific projects into future years when annual budgets are uncertain.

Q30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q31: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q30 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?

In addition to the core funding provided to all Local Councils to deliver Shaping Sustainable Places interventions, it is also proposed that there could be separate, complementary funding opportunities developed to tackle specific regeneration issues.

Local Councils would then bid to a specific fund through an application process, and the applications would be assessed, with the highest scoring applications funded. The ambition for a competitive funding approach is that it would encourage the development of creative and innovative solutions to the challenges faced.

One example could be a competitive fund to support regeneration initiatives for built-heritage assets in town and city centres.

Q32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q33: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q32 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?

Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?

It is recognised that the proposed funding for Shaping Sustainable Places will fall far short of the need of all villages, towns and city centres. It is proposed that Local Councils should be asked to consider the need across their areas in collaboration with local communities, and prioritise settlements for focused, strategic interventions in line with Shaping Sustainable Places ambitions and objectives.

Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criteria when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Length of time since previous capital investment in public space
- Levels of vacancy
- Road safety
- Economic activity data
- Addressing economic market failure
- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas
- Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- Potential to leverage private sector investment
- Potential for people to meet and spend time
- Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- Population size
- Air quality
- Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)
- Other

11. Centre First for Public Services

In relation to Town Centres and Retailing, the Strategic Planning Policy Statement notes its aim to support and sustain vibrant town centres across Northern Ireland through the promotion of established town centres as the appropriate first choice location of retailing and other complementary functions.⁵¹

Regeneration, where it is successful in catalysing increased tenancy or commercial activity in the locality, can help to sustain the local rates taxbase. Revenue generated from the rates system comprises 78% of local government revenue⁵² and supplements around 4%⁵³ of the Northern Ireland Executive's spending power. This demonstrates the direct link between the sustainability of places and the funding of local services.

The High Street Task Force⁵⁴ strongly supported proposals to put important public services and amenities on the high street which are accessible by sustainable forms of transport. Whether these are libraries, healthcare facilities, places for education and community use, or simply more and better housing, these investment choices could help to create vibrant, people-focused places.

It has been stated that the withdrawal of public sector organisations and businesses has contributed to the decline

of high streets and centres.⁵⁵ Changes in retail behaviours and the use of office accommodation require us to think about how to use our centres differently to support and sustain remaining occupiers.

The Northern Ireland Executive departments and their delivery bodies and partners have a significant footprint of buildings and facilities across Northern Ireland, where people travel to for employment, services and support. At present, there is no requirement to consider the potential regeneration impacts on a place when making decisions about where to (re)locate public services outside of normal planning requirements.

DfC is interested in promoting the adoption of a Centre First Policy for the location of public sector jobs and services. The strategic location of these in centres could generate increased footfall and economic activity, whilst also creating better access to public transport for commuting employees and customers. This in turn may support a more resilient retail sector as well as creating demand for other services and restarting cycles of inward investment to existing and new businesses.⁵⁶

The adoption of a Centre First for Public Service policy for the location of public services does not need to feature as an essential component of the Shaping

51 Strategic Planning Policy Statement for Northern Ireland (SPPS)

52 Local government facts and figures: Northern Ireland - LGIU – NILGA 2021

53 The Public Finance in Northern Ireland: a comprehensive guide – Northern Ireland Fiscal Council

54 High Street task Force - Delivering a 21st Century High Street

55 Town centres: Position Statement, Welsh Government

56 Town centres: Position Statement, Welsh Government

Sustainable Places proposals. The concept is being included as part of this consultation due to its potential to deliver significant complementary regeneration benefits alongside Shaping Sustainable Places.

Questions 36 and 37 relate to a policy in development which is not central to the Shaping Sustainable Places Programme.

Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.

Annex A – Summary of questions

Q1: Please tell us if you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation. If you are responding on behalf of a business or organisation, please tell us the name of the organisation.

- Individual
- Organisation

Q2: To what extent do you agree with the proposed vision for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q3: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q2 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would expect to see in the vision statement?

Q4: To what extent do you agree with the proposed principles for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q5: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ at Q4 above, please tell us why and/ or what principles you would expect to guide interventions to help transform places?

Q6: Do you agree with the timeframe proposed for Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No, it should be shorter
- No, it should be longer

Q7: If you did not select ‘yes’ above, please tell us why you think the timeframe should be shorter or longer?

Q8: To what extent do you agree that Shaping Sustainable Places plans should be developed through a placemaking process?

Strongly Agree

- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q9: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q8 above, please tell us why and/ or how do you think plans should be developed?

Q10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that the Living High Streets Craft Kit would be a good approach to use to plan sustainable places?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q11: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q10 above, how do you think plans should be developed?

Q12: If your Local Council or community has already developed a plan for your place, to what extent do you agree or disagree that this existing plan should be used instead of developing a new plan using a placemaking approach?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q13: If your Local Council wanted to assess the level of community support for a plan or a project for your local place, how would you expect them to engage with you? Pick as many options as apply.

- Leaflet campaign to invite survey response
- Townhall style meeting
- Focus group of residents
- Online consultation and promotion
- Newspaper advertisement and promotion
- Drop-in clinic
- I would not want to be consulted
- Other

Q14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Investing in public realm in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Increasing occupancy levels by vacant buildings or derelict sites coming back into use” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more productive local economies” as an objective when focussing on Place?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q17: If you answered ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ to Questions 14-16 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Place?

Q18: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Improving safety in village, town and city centres” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q19: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Creating more active and sustainable infrastructure and facilities” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with “Reducing car dominance” as an objective when focussing on People?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q21: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to Questions 18-20 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for People?

Q22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Creating or growing existing green spaces" as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Building infrastructure that is more resilient to the effects of climate change" as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q24: To what extent do you agree or disagree with "Ensuring buildings brought back into use are more energy efficient" as an objective when focussing on Planet?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q25: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' to Questions 22-24 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as alternatives for objectives for Planet?

Q26: Do you feel the partnership working to deliver these previous regeneration schemes was successful?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Know

Q27: What, if any, are your views on how these three departments worked collaboratively in partnership with Local Councils to deliver the previous regeneration schemes outlined above?

Q28: Do you think other partners should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Yes
- No

Q29: If you answered yes to Q28 above, please tell us which other partners do you think should be involved in delivering Shaping Sustainable Places?

Q30: To what extent do you agree that the regeneration of villages, towns and city centres should be a long-term strategic priority, with security of funding, for the Northern Ireland Executive and Local Councils?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q31: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q30 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal for investing the limited funds available for regeneration?

Q32: To what extent would you support the establishment of competitive funding opportunities to tackle specific regeneration issues?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q33: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q32 above, please tell us why and/ or what you would suggest as an alternative proposal to drive innovation in regeneration?

Q34: Are there any specific regeneration issues or themes in your local area you feel could be tackled most effectively by the establishment of a competitive funding opportunity?

Q35: Please select from the list below your top 5 preferences that you consider to be the most important criterion when prioritising places for intervention through Shaping Sustainable Places?

- Length of time since previous capital investment in public space
- Levels of vacancy
- Road safety
- Economic activity data
- Addressing economic market failure
- Access to services for residents of surrounding areas
- Potential to attract visitors and tourism
- Potential to leverage private sector investment
- Potential for people to meet and spend time
- Potential for increasing pedestrian areas
- Population size
- Air quality
- Impacts of extreme weather (eg flooding)
- Other

Q36: To what extent would you support the adoption of a Centre First policy for the location of public sector jobs and services in Northern Ireland?

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q37: If you answered 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree' at Q36 above, please tell us why.

Annex B - Landing Page Text

How to respond

This consultation will be hosted online at the following website: **<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfc/shaping-sustainable-places-public-consultation>**. The Citizen Space website has been specially designed to be as user-friendly and welcoming as possible for those who wish to complete the consultation. It also allows DfC to rapidly collate results. For this reason, we would encourage anyone who is interested in responding to this consultation to utilise Citizen Space as the method of their response.

If this is not possible, you can however respond to this consultation via email to **ssp@communities-ni.gov.uk** by completing the Word template on the Department's website or you can respond in writing to the following address:

Shaping Sustainable Places Programme Team

Regional Development Office

Department for Communities

8th Floor, Causeway Exchange

1-7 Bedford Street

Belfast

BT2 7EG

When responding via email or in writing, please state whether you are responding as an individual, or representing the views of an organisation (please state the name of the organisation). Please also quote the following reference in your response: "Shaping Sustainable Places Consultation".

Responses must be received by 23.59 on Sunday 24 August 2025.

Annex C – Privacy Notice

Data Controller Name: Department for Communities (DfC)

Address: Causeway Exchange, 1-7 Bedford Street, BELFAST, BT2 7EG

Email: **prs@communities-ni.gov.uk**

Telephone:

02890829129

Data Protection Officer Name: Karen McMullan

Telephone: 02890829200

Email: **DPO@Communities-ni.gov.uk**

Being transparent and providing accessible information to individuals about how we may use personal data is a key element of the **Data Protection Act (DPA)** and the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). The Department for Communities (DfC) is committed to building trust and confidence in our ability to process your personal information and protect your privacy.

Purpose for processing

The Department is publishing an Equality Impact Assessment for consultation. The aim of the consultation is to seek evidence to inform the drafting of Regulations on circumstances where longer notice to quit periods would not apply (also referred to as exceptions).

We will process personal data provided in response to consultations for the purpose of informing the development of our policy, guidance, or other regulatory work in the subject area of the request for views. We will publish a summary of the consultation responses and, in some cases, the responses themselves but these will not contain any personal data. We will not publish the names, email addresses or contact details of respondents but will include the names of organisations responding.

If you have indicated that you would be interested in contributing to further Department work on the subject matter covered by the consultation, then we might process your contact details to get in touch with you.

Lawful basis for processing

The lawful basis we are relying on to process your personal data is Article 6(1)(e) of the UK GDPR, which allows us to process personal data when this is necessary for the performance of our public tasks in our capacity as a Government Department.

We will only process any special category personal data you provide, which reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious belief, health or sexual life/orientation when it is necessary for reasons of substantial public interest under Article 9(2)(g) of the UK GDPR, in the exercise of the function of the department, and to monitor equality.

How will your information be used and shared

We process the information internally for the above stated purpose. We don't intend to share your personal data with any third party. Any specific requests from a third party for us to share your personal data with them will be dealt with in accordance the provisions of the data protection laws.

How long will we keep your information

We will retain consultation response information until our work on the subject matter of the consultation is complete, and in line with the Department's approved Retention and Disposal Schedule (which can be accessed through: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/dfc-disposal-records-schedule>

What are your rights?

- You have the right to obtain confirmation that your data is being **processed, and access to your personal data**
- You are entitled to have personal data **rectified if it is inaccurate or incomplete**
- You have a right to have personal data **erased and to prevent processing**, in specific circumstances
- You have the right **to 'block' or suppress processing** of personal data, in specific circumstances
- You have the right to **data portability**, in specific circumstances
- You have the right to **object to the processing**, in specific circumstances
- You have rights in relation to **automated decision making and profiling**.

How to complain if you are not happy with how we process your personal information

If you wish to request access, object or raise a complaint about how we have handled your data, you can contact our Data Protection Officer using the details above.

If you are not satisfied with our response or believe we are not processing your personal data in accordance with the law, you can complain to the Information Commissioner at:

Information Commissioner's Office

Wycliffe House

Water Lane

Wilmslow

Cheshire SK9 5AF

casework@ico.org.uk

Available in alternative formats.

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Subject:	Dfl's Transport Strategy 2035 – Consultation Response
Date:	10 September 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

Restricted Reports											
Is this report restricted?	Yes	No	X								
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. Insert number - Information relating to any individual - Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) - Information in connection with any labour relations matter - Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained - Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction - Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime											
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? <table> <tr> <td>After Committee Decision</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>				After Committee Decision	☐	After Council Decision	☐	Sometime in the future	☐	Never	☐
After Committee Decision	☐										
After Council Decision	☐										
Sometime in the future	☐										
Never	☐										

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the Department for Infrastructure's (DfI) draft Transport Strategy 2035 and seek agreement on a Council response to the public consultation.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that the Committee: • Notes the main highlights of the DfI's draft Transport Strategy 2035; and • Approve the consultation response, attached at appendix 1 for submission to the DfI by the deadline of 16th December, noting that it is subject to council ratification at its meeting of 1st October 2025.
3.0	Main report
3.1	The Department for Infrastructure has prepared a draft Transport Strategy to 2035. They launched a 12-week public consultation exercise to gather the views of stakeholders, which closes on 16 September 2025. The Transport Strategy sets out a new vision and strategic priorities for our transport system through to 2035. It articulates the role of transport as a social, economic and environmental enabler and establishes a set of transport priorities for the Department to deliver against. The vision of the strategy is <i>"To provide a sustainable, safe, accessible and effective transport system which meets the region's climate change requirements, serves the needs of urban and rural communities, and supports economic growth"</i>. This strategy is developed around four Strategic Priorities for Transport, each of which contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. These Strategic Priorities for Transport reflect the contribution that the transport system can make to the improvement of people's everyday lives, and to our society in general. The strategic priorities are as follows: 1.Transport Is Resilient and Sustainable - Going forward, it will not be sufficient to simply show that our transport decisions avoid emission increases. Decisions will need to proportionately demonstrate how they contribute to the wider transport decarbonisation programme as well as delivering other sustainability objectives, to deliver net zero by 2050 as set out in the Climate Change Act. The Department has a duty to "exercise its own functions, so far as is possible to do so, in a manner that is consistent with the achievement" of net-zero. 2. Transport Supports Connected and Inclusive Communities - The Department recognises that the current design of some of our transport system and spaces can create

	barriers for disabled people and others with reduced mobility. The Department will build in accessibility as a condition of public investment in our transport system and spaces. A sustainable and low carbon transport system requires the opportunity for people to move from one mode to another easily. 3. Transport Is Safe and Healthy - Improving road safety underpins all aspects of the Department's work. Improving safety (and perceived safety) is critical to increasing the percentage of journeys made by active travel and public transport. It is also central to good placemaking and for creating an inclusive transport system. 4. Transport Supports Green Growth - Companies in NI are looking towards delivering innovative sustainable growth that creates both commercial and societal value while lowering their carbon impact. These companies can deliver significant impacts on clean energy and low carbon technology. Their expertise and passion for innovation and engineering will create opportunities to deliver lasting generational transformation in NI.
3.2	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> There are no financial implications attached to this report.
3.3	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1: DfI's draft Transport Strategy 2035 - Belfast City Council Response

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3. To what extent do you agree with the Transport Strategy's vision?

Belfast City Council agrees with the vision.

4. To what extent do you agree with the reasons for change set out in the Strategy?

- Traffic Congestion.
- Climate Change.
- Health and Wellbeing.
- Road Safety.
- Equality.

Belfast City Council agrees that these appear to be legitimate and evidence-based reasons for a new approach to transport within the region. However, it is important to highlight the need for strategic alignment with local policy.

To be effective, the Transport Strategy 2035 must be explicitly aligned with the city's statutory and strategic frameworks, including:

- The Belfast Agenda, which prioritises city centre living, connectivity, resilience, and wellbeing, all of which depend on a shift to cleaner, people-focused transport.
- Belfast's Local Development Plan, a strategic document setting out policies for the city's physical development until 2035, with a vision of a globally successful, resilient, and vibrant city.
- The Net-Zero Carbon Roadmap for Belfast, which identifies a 66% reduction in transport emissions as essential to achieving 2050 targets carbon emissions.
- The Belfast City Climate Action Plan, which identifies sustainable mobility and active travel as critical interventions to achieve net-zero by 2050, in tandem with air quality improvements and reducing car dependency.
- Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS), which supports reduced car dominance and increased access to city centre opportunities; and
- A Bolder Vision for Belfast is built on the following guiding principles:
 - promoting wellbeing for all.
 - prioritising walking, cycling and public transport.
 - creating lively, safe and green streets.
 - removing barriers to movement between the city centre and surrounding communities.

Belfast City Council encourages the Department to treat these frameworks as core reference points for the implementation of the Transport Strategy and to embed them into delivery plans, investment priorities and spatial policy.

5. To what extent do you agree with Strategic Priority 1 (Transport is Resilient and Sustainable)?

Belfast City Council agrees with this priority. The Climate Change Act (NI) 2022 (CCA) sets the legal target of net zero greenhouse gas emissions (carbon emissions) by 2050, with challenging bridging targets for 2030 and 2040. After agriculture, domestic transport is the second largest emitting sector in NI, accounting for 18% of all emissions.

The growth of new electric vehicles will play a pivotal role in decarbonising the transport sector here, supported by a change in behaviours and a recognition that it will need to be implemented in a 'just' manner.

6. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to reducing the Carbon Impact of Transport?

Belfast City Council agrees with the Strategy's approach and a combination of behaviour change and technological solutions is essential. Transitioning from Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicles to low emission vehicles (LEVs) forms part of the solution but will take time as many ICE vehicles have a remaining productive period and the relatively high cost of LEVs limits uptake.

The council advocates the sustainable travel hierarchy framework and therefore supports the ambition to reduce the number of journeys taken and increase the relative proportion of journeys that are taken using public transport. Switching fuels is critical to our transport decarbonisation pathway. However, simply transitioning to alternative fuels is insufficient to deliver a sustainable transport system.

Accordingly, whilst there is an acknowledged need to transition to lower emissions fuels, and to zero emission vehicles, the Strategy should nevertheless seek to prioritise increased use of sustainable transport modes, and a transition away from reliance on the private car, in accordance with the sustainable travel hierarchy, in order to meet environmental, economic and social objectives related to emissions, congestion and car-dependency, and to contribute towards improving ambient air quality, with an emphasis on addressing emerging air pollutants of concern such as PM_{2.5}.

Under the Belfast Climate Action Plan, the council will aim to decarbonise business travel emissions. We will also review our Business Travel Policy to align with the sustainable travel hierarchy i.e. promotion of active travel, public transport, shared travel over private car use and air travel. Belfast must make a strategic shift away from the car as the predominant mode of transport, and this will in turn boost our climate resilience, and make our city a healthier, cleaner more enjoyable.

The 2019 Air Quality Expert Group's (AQEG) report to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), "Non-Exhaust Emissions from Road Traffic" advises that non-exhaust particles arise from a range of vehicle-related sources, the main contributors being brake wear, tyre wear, road surface wear and resuspended road dust. Non-exhaust emissions from road traffic contribute to airborne concentrations of both fine and coarse particles and hence to PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀.

The UK Informative Inventory Report, "Emissions of Air Pollutants in the United Kingdom from 1990 to 2023" (March 2025) advises that emissions for the road transport sector accounted for 21% of PM_{2.5} emissions in 2023, and that the trend is influenced by a variety of factors. Regulation of vehicle emissions, such as through the introduction of Euro Standards on diesel vehicles has contributed to emissions reductions. However, the benefits have been countered by the growth in diesel vehicles, which despite contributing to fewer emissions for other pollutants (e.g. CO₂), contribute more particulate matter emissions per vehicle kilometre than petrol vehicles. More stringent emissions legislation now means that the latest Euro standard diesel vehicles are fitted with diesel particulate filters, which result in emissions of particulate

matter that are broadly comparable to petrol engines. However, further reductions in road transport emissions are now being restricted by increases in non-exhaust sources of particulate matter from vehicles, through tyre and brake wear and road abrasion. Emissions have grown with increases in traffic to the point where, overall, these now exceed particulate matter emissions from vehicle exhausts.

7. Integrated Transport and Land Use Planning has a key role to play in supporting our transport objectives. What can the Department do to promote more sustainable patterns of transport and travel?

Belfast City Council supports the retention of this established policy approach which seeks to ensure the integration of transport and land use planning. As such, this approach is identified as a key element in Belfast's Local Development Plan (LDP) as well as being evident in other council plans and strategies such as the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy and A Bolder Vision. The effective implementation of this policy approach will play an important role in sustainably delivering the growth ambitions for the city as set out in the Belfast Agenda.

As referenced in section 23 of the strategy, it will be important that the Department continues to work together with councils' Planning services to ensure that planning policies, land use allocations and key site requirements contained within LDPs fully consider and are aligned with the transport policies, proposals and investment identified in the Department's Transport Plans. To this end it is crucial for Belfast that the Eastern Transport Plan and the Council's Local Policies Plan are prepared in parallel and that the Transport Plan doesn't delay the progress of the LDP.

In seeking to promote more sustainable patterns of transport and travel, the Department and DfI Roads in particular, will continue to have an important role as a statutory consultee in the Development Management process providing their expertise in assessing the relevant travel elements of planning applications submitted to the Council, and making suggestions as to how proposed development can best align with sustainable travel objectives. This will include providing input into the preparation of Section 76 planning agreements.

The successful promotion of more sustainable patterns of transport and travel will also be influenced by the effective and timely delivery of infrastructure and other interventions identified in existing and future Department plans and strategies. Promotion should be easier for the Department if they are able to demonstrate that schemes and other measures are being delivered on schedule, providing viable travel options for users which are sustainable, safe, accessible and effective. One such example is the Belfast Cycling Network Delivery Plan 2022-31, where schemes can spend a significant amount of time in the Feasibility and Design stages. Belfast City Council remains keen to work with the Department on securing the delivery of planned schemes and other interventions.

It is also important to highlight the value of the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) - Glider network and service and the need to build upon this success to further extend the BRT network to North and South Belfast. There is willingness within Belfast City Council and with Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) partners to work at pace with government partners to progress delivery of BRT Phase 2 (BRT2). BRT2 and other infrastructure developments planned within the BRCD area to promote sustainable transport and travel.

8. Do you agree with the Vision and Validate approach to Transport Planning?

Given the issues associated with the previous 'predict & provide' approach it would appear reasonable for the Department to adopt an alternative approach which has the potential to identify and plan for more sustainable transport outcomes. The Council supports an approach which focuses on the movement of people and goods rather than vehicles but recognises that ultimately it is the delivery and implementation of the associated interventions and other measures which will lead to the Strategic Priorities for Transport being met.

9. Do you have comments on the Place and Movement Framework?

Belfast City Council broadly supports the concept a 'People and Movement Framework' (PMF) which can be used to describe and categorise roads and streets depending on the character of the area, how it prioritises place and movement accordingly, and identifies the types of transport measures that support the vision and objectives of the Transport Plan. Work to date on the Eastern Transport Plan has demonstrated to the council how the PMF could be applied, such as in the case of Local Centres which will be designated through the LDP – the council is keen to see the outworkings of this process from a planning, placemaking and movement perspective.

10. What do you consider is the best way to engage with people to encourage them to change their travel behaviours?

Behavioural change must be informed by research into the current patterns and barriers with solutions developed to address the findings. These are likely to include a combination of providing adequate facilities and infrastructure, combined with relevant legislation and building social norms around travel choices to raise general awareness of the Sustainable Travel Hierarchy and the benefits that it can bring.

11. What are the main Travel Demand Management measures that the framework should consider?

No comment

12. The reallocation of road space in our urban areas is seen as a key measure to support the Department's Strategic Priorities. Do you agree with this approach?

Belfast City Council strongly endorses the transformation of the civic spine linking Ulster University's city centre campus and Queen's University Belfast. This corridor (which includes Royal Avenue, Donegall Place, City Hall, Dublin Road and Botanic Avenue) is identified as a focal point for sustainable regeneration under *A Bolder Vision for Belfast* and reflects the city's ambition to become climate-resilient, people-centred and better connected to edge-of-city communities. To support this, the Transport Strategy should:

- Recognise the civic spine as a strategic movement and place corridor, prioritising pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport.
- Commit to reallocating road space for widened footways, segregated cycling, and improved green infrastructure.
- Support the delivery of integrated active travel links to surrounding communities, particularly in North, West and South Belfast.

- Embed inclusive design principles to ensure the space is accessible to all, regardless of age or ability.
- Invest in placemaking that enhances the cultural, civic, and economic vibrancy of the city core.

This corridor should be designated as a flagship transformation area, backed by cross-departmental funding and co-delivery mechanisms.

The council also strongly supports the principle, as set out in *A Bolder Vision for Belfast* that the inner ring road must be rebalanced to enable a modal shift toward more active and sustainable transport options. Currently, the inner ring road acts as a physical and psychological barrier to active travel and urban regeneration. It fragments the city, constrains access, and prioritises vehicle throughput at the expense of place quality and climate objectives. The Transport Strategy must explicitly commit to:

- Reallocating road space on the inner ring in favour of segregated cycleways, wider footpaths, and public transport priority lanes.
- Redesigning junctions to improve safe crossings for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Integrating the inner ring with a green active travel network that connects neighbourhoods and enables direct, safe access to the city centre.
- Creating opportunities for placemaking, greening and civic spaces along and across the ring road.
- Exploring traffic restraint tools such as filtered permeability, modal filters, and urban boulevard designs to reduce private vehicle dominance and severance.

Reimagining the inner ring is a necessary condition for delivering a connected, low-carbon and people-friendly city centre and should be identified as a strategic priority within the strategy.

13. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to the transition to zero and low emission fuels?

The limited public charging infrastructure for electric vehicles across Northern Ireland is a significant barrier to wider uptake with the average provision per 100,000 population across the United Kingdom standing at 108, compared with Northern Ireland's provision at 36 (the lowest of all UK regions). Source: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electric-vehicle-public-charging-infrastructure-statistics-january-2025/electric-vehicle-public-charging-infrastructure-statistics-january-2025>

The council is supportive of ambitions to grow the LEV infrastructure and recognises the leadership role that councils can play. The exclusion of Northern Ireland councils from accessing resources made available to councils across the rest of the United Kingdom severely hampers their ability to lead by example.

The council welcomes the progress made through the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Action Plan in 2022 and would welcome clarity on future strategic actions as well as setting targets for future uptake and tracking of both EV vehicle purchase and installation of publicly accessible charging.

To realise the ambitions within the council's Corporate Plan, A Bolder Vision and Climate Action Plan, the city centre must shift away from car dominance. The council strongly endorses

the transformation of the civic spine linking Ulster University's city centre campus and Queen's University Belfast. This corridor (which includes Royal Avenue, Donegall Place, City Hall, Dublin Road and Botanic Avenue) is identified as a focal point for sustainable regeneration under *A Bolder Vision for Belfast* and reflects the city's ambition to become climate-resilient, people-centred and better connected to edge-of-city communities. Currently, the inner ring road acts as a physical and psychological barrier to active travel and urban regeneration. It fragments the city, constrains access, and prioritises vehicle throughput at the expense of place quality and climate objectives.

14. Do you have any other comments on the Resilient and Sustainable section of the Strategy?

Belfast City Council welcomes the Department's commitment to investing in the collection of evidence and robust data-led decision-making tools and notes the intention to use transport modelling tools as the default evidence base for many of their decision-making processes (Measure RS07). In the interest of transparency, it is anticipated that the council will have access to the suite of strategic transport modelling tools referred to in section 62 and that the Department (in its role as a statutory consultee) will continue to provide input to the evaluation of transport assessments submitted as part of a planning application.

15. To what extent do you agree with Strategic Priority 2 (Transport supports connected and inclusive communities)?

Belfast City Council welcomes the commitment to a transport system that facilitates sustainable and inclusive connections with a quality urban environment. The council agrees with the proposed direction; We very much welcome the major investment in Grand Central Station but note that Northern Ireland has experienced under investment for many years to support a proper connected transport system. We would be fully supportive of this strategic priority regarding better provision or design, of infrastructure which creates barriers for disabled people and others with reduced mobility.

The council regularly receives complaints from residents concerning cluttered footways, the absence of dropped kerbs, a lack of accessible crossing points or crossing points that are blocked by inconsiderate drivers. Complex and confusing streetscape can make every day journeys challenging for residents with disabilities, visual impairments or people with prams/buggies.

To support the delivery of Connected and Inclusive communities the council urges the Department to strengthen the strategy's position on:

- Reducing general traffic access and through-movement within the city centre core.
- Commit to reallocating road space for widened footways, segregated cycling, and improved green infrastructure.
- Embed inclusive design principles to ensure the space is accessible to all, regardless of age or ability.
- Invest in placemaking that enhances the cultural, civic, and economic vibrancy of the city core.
- Supporting the development of a city centre parking reduction strategy, to enable modal shift.

- Introducing low-traffic neighbourhoods, demand management and traffic restraint measures in line with net-zero and public health objectives.
- Facilitating smarter, more sustainable freight and servicing models, including Mobility as a Service (MaaS) integrated transport and cargo storage centres and timed access windows.
- Expanding pedestrianised and car-free zones in areas of high footfall and civic value.
- Seek to engender active travel choices from an early age, for example through funding cycling proficiency training and cycling/scooting infrastructure in schools.

These interventions must be supported by clear legislative powers, delivery structures, and capital funding.

16. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to creating an inclusive transport system?

Whilst the council welcomes this refreshed cohesive approach, we note with some caution the principles of good design where both disabled people and non-disabled people can use space, transport and travel generally in the same way. There is a limited understanding of people's needs in the screening document, for people with or without a disability. There is very limited data on the different types of disability, where a person who is a wheelchair user will have very different needs compared to a blind person.

17. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Transport Integration?

Belfast City Council agrees with the approach to Transport Integration but suggests it requires significant investment. Further development of Park and Ride facilities is an opportunity for the installation of electric vehicle charging points to build the very limited infrastructure within Northern Ireland and encourages a blend of modal shift with fuel shift. Further integration is required between cycle and sustainable transport modes such as buses and trains with the current provision being very limited.

18. Do you agree that the maintenance and improvement of the Regional Strategic Transport network (road, interurban bus and rail) should remain a key priority for the Department?

Belfast City Council is supportive of the fact that the strategy intends to take account of the NI Executive's commitments to City and Growth Deal transport projects.

19. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Active Travel?

Belfast City Council is supportive of the strategy's approach to Active Travel. It is important for the city to promote this concept, not only for the reduction of congestion and the subsequent pollution, but also for the health benefits of increased physical activity. Encouraging a shift to active travel will make the city a more pleasant place to live and traverse. It is necessary that the cycling network receives the required investment to encourage people to cycle within a safe segregated space.

The council welcomes that "education programmes and robust enforcement of traffic regulations" will complement the improvement of the networks and assist with compliance.

Furthermore, the council would emphasise the need for accelerated delivery and sustained investment, particularly within urban centres. To this end, clarity on the implementation timeframe is required. The Council also recommends that the strategy:

- Fully commits to implementing the Belfast Cycle Network Plan, with priority given to segregated routes, ensuring the delivery of safe routes and missing links.
- Provides dedicated, ring-fenced funding for walking and cycling infrastructure, including maintenance, monitoring, and engagement.
- Promotes bus priority corridors and supports the expansion of zero-emission fleets, in alignment with both city and regional climate goals.
- Ensures active travel infrastructure is delivered to universal design standards and integrated with public transport hubs, including Belfast Grand Central station.
- Recognises the importance of partnership with local authorities in planning, engaging and co-delivering schemes, as set out in our Corporate Plan.

20. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Micro Mobility?

No comment

21. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Motorbikes?

No comment

22. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Bus and Coach?

No comment

23. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to the Rail Network?

Belfast City Council agrees with the approach to the Rail Network but suggests it requires significant investment.

24. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Community Transport?

Community transport is an important service for those who are isolated within our society or have difficulties in accessing transport, either public or private. The council would support any developments to ensure that "its future potential can be realised, funded, and resourced".

25. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Private Operators?

No comment

26. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Taxis?

Belfast City Council notes that the strategy doesn't provide outputs, only measures which are quite vague. Therefore, it is unclear what improvements will be made to meet the needs of people with disabilities and their carers. There is no detail on accessible taxis that will be

available and whether there will be funding to support private companies to purchase accessible taxis. An action plan may provide more detail given the length of the delivery period.

27. Would you like to add any further comments on public and shared transport?

Belfast City Council would again take this opportunity to highlight that public and shared transport requires significant investment.

28. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to the Road Network?

Belfast City Council agrees with the strategy's approach to the Road Network but suggests it requires significant investment including the serious backlog of road potholes. The council welcomes any proposals that "improve road safety, resilience, decarbonising transport (particularly through modal shift) and placemaking". We would agree with the proposal to reduce reliance on private cars to help tackle congestion and improve air quality, especially within the city centre, where there is good access to public transport.

29. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Parking?

Belfast City Council welcomes any proposals that "improve road safety, resilience, decarbonising transport (particularly through modal shift) and placemaking". The council would agree with the proposal to reduce reliance on private cars to help tackle congestion and improve air quality, especially within the city centre, where there is good access to public transport. The Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) identified the need for a parking strategy and action plan to ensure appropriate provision and location of parking to support the vitality of the city centre.

30. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Enforcement?

Belfast City Council recognises the need to keep the public and road users safe on the network and would welcome the Department's continued work with all their stakeholders in keeping people safe, either through enforcement or increased education. Enforcement is also important to ensure compliance with the Highway code and other road traffic legislation to ensure proper use of the public roads and pathways network.

31. Do you have any other comments on the Supports Connected and Inclusive Communities section of the Strategy.

Belfast City Council notes that blocking or ICEing of electric vehicle charging points continues to increase as the infrastructure grows. Consideration should be given to appropriate solutions at a national as well as a local policy level.

The council welcome's the Department's commitment to improve accessibility and in particular the measure, 'The Department will ensure people with disabilities and additional mobility needs are reflected in the design and management of the transport system.' We would recommend that the Department engages with the Department for Communities on the forthcoming Disability Strategy, on the many different facets of public policy and how they connect to understand disabled people's lived experience, e.g. to get a job you need transport.

The draft strategy is a positive step in terms of addressing inequality, promoting inclusion and access.

Belfast City Council's Disability Advisory Panel have liaised with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) and are aware that similar accessibility issues are faced by other people with disabilities. We look forward to working in partnership with the Department to resolve these long-standing issues in Belfast.

The council welcomes any interventions that reduce the levels of poor parking or parking nuisance within residential areas. This would also assist Council with delivering its services unhindered e.g. waste collection and other cleansing services. We would encourage the continued enforcement by the PSNI, for those causing a general obstruction on the networks.

32. To what extent do you agree with Strategic Priority 3 (Transport is Safe and Healthy)?

Belfast City Council agrees in principle.

33. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Road Safety?

No comment

34. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Rail Safety?

No comment

35. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Improving Air Quality?

Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the United Kingdom, as long-term exposure to air pollution can cause chronic conditions such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases as well as lung cancer, leading to reduced life expectancy. Northern Ireland has 17 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) declared because of NO₂ emissions from road traffic. These primarily occur in urban areas experiencing high volumes of traffic. (four of which are located within the Belfast City Council area).

Particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}) arises as a by-product of the combustion of petrol and diesel and from physical processes, such as brake pad, tyre, and road surface wear. Although no objectives for particulate matter are exceeded in Northern Ireland, there is still a need to address what levels there are, as there is 'no safe level'. For AQMA that have transport related issues, the Department works with local councils as they prepare and implement their Air Quality Action Plans (AQAPs). These AQAPs contain actions that the Department, alongside other 'Competent Authorities' are taking to address air quality issues. Part III of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 places a duty on councils to periodically review and assess ambient air quality within their districts in order to determine whether air quality standards and objectives for the protection of human health are being achieved or are likely to be achieved within the relevant time period.

Where, as a result of an air quality review and assessment, it appears that air quality standards or objectives are not being achieved or are unlikely to be achieved within the relevant period,

the district council is required to designate, by order, all or any part of its district as an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA). The council is subsequently required to prepare an Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) for exercise by the council, in pursuit of the achievement of air quality standards and objectives within the AQMA. Competent or relevant authorities, as defined within the Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, are additionally required to provide details of actions that they will undertake in order to comply with, or in pursuit of the achievement of air quality standards and objectives.

Belfast City Council has designated four AQMAs across the city for exceedances of annual and 1-hour mean objectives for nitrogen dioxide, associated principally with road transport emissions. The current Belfast City AQAP (2021-2026) draws therefore on those actions substantially provided by the Department and by other competent or relevant authorities and partner organisations involved in transport provision in order to improve ambient air quality within our AQMAs, and across Belfast generally, over the period 2021-2026. The current AQAP can be viewed at:

<https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/belfast-city-air-quality-action-plan-2021-2026>

36. Do you have any other comments on the Safe and Healthy section of the Strategy?

No comment

37. To what extent do you agree with Strategic Priority 4 (Transport supports green growth)?

No comment

38. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Transport and the Green Economy?

Consideration and development of future rail freight options would be welcome to reduce roads related travel and reduce the associated carbon emissions.

39. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Freight Movements and Economic Growth?

No comment

40. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Ports and Airports?

No comment

41. Do you agree with the Strategy's approach to Sustainable and Innovative Technologies?

No comment

42. Do you have any other comments on the Supports Green Growth section of the Strategy?

No comment

43. Do you have any comments on the Investment and Delivery section of the Strategy?

Finally, the Council calls for greater clarity in the final strategy regarding governance, delivery, and funding. We note that financing remains unclear and many vital initiatives, especially public transport, EV infrastructure, and cycling networks lack detailed funding commitments. It is imperative that the strategy has independent oversight and clearly identified Key Performance Indicators to ensure accountability and timely delivery. The success of the strategy will depend on the ability of the Department to work in genuine partnership with councils, regional stakeholders and communities.

Belfast City Council is keen to ensure that strategic transport network upgrades also contribute to improved placemaking, and we have articulated this position particularly in respect of the proposed York Street Interchange scheme with a view to creating thriving liveable places and communities, responding to the climate emergency and simultaneously connecting people and opportunities. The council recommends:

- The establishment of a city-region level delivery board with representation from local government.
- A dedicated funding programme for urban sustainable mobility aligned to the Local Development Plan and community priorities.
- Annual reporting mechanisms and Key Performance Indicators aligned with net-zero, health, and inclusivity outcomes.

44. Do you have any comments on the Monitoring and Delivery section of the Strategy?

Belfast City Council recommends an annual reporting mechanisms and Key Performance Indicators aligned with net-zero, health, and inclusivity outcomes. The Delivery Plan needs to include measurable targets for Public Transport to shape enjoyable, safe & people-focused places. In this regard more ambition is required from the Department in the delivery. Furthermore, there needs to be clarity and detail on the 10% Active Travel funding to prioritise and sequence areas for development as an enabler for progressing placemaking.

45. Do you have any comments on the Equality Impact Assessment screening?

Belfast City Council welcomes the clear commitment to improving infrastructure and developing its role in removing barriers and creating opportunities for interaction and engagement between groups. The monitoring and evaluation framework will need to be central to all of the actions delivered under the Transport Strategy to realise the intention that 'Inclusive Transport' is part of the whole strategy and is not confined to any one section.

The screening provides key data that should steer the actions which will be developed and delivered if the rationale for not undertaking a EQIA is realised. Central to this will be the need for ongoing engagement with all disabled people to understand the many different needs, to understand the diverse needs of people with different types of disability.

46. Do you have any comments on the Rural Proof Assessment?

No comment



Subject:	Feedback on outcomes of Belfast Health and Work Steering Group
Date:	10 September 2025
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Lisa Toland, Senior Manager, Economy Sinéad O'Regan, E&S Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☒

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐
☐
☐
☐

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

☒

No

☐

1.0	Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to: • Update members on the work of the Belfast Health & Work Steering Group, established through the Belfast Labour Market Partnership • Identify the key recommendations of the group, the likely next steps and implications for Belfast City Council and our partners.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	Members are asked to: • Note the key recommendations of the Belfast Health and Work Steering Group • Note the next steps and implications for the work of the council and partners.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<u>Background</u> A key focus of the Belfast Labour Market Partnership (BLMP) has been to consider how we can improve outcomes for our residents by meaningfully tackling inter-connected issues such as health, skills levels and employability in a more integrated way. As wider government policy in this space evolves, and in the context of a changing funding landscape, the LMP agreed to undertake a time-bound piece of work to focus on the interplay between health and work. In Belfast, around 40% of economic inactivity is due to health-related issues.
3.2	A steering group was established under the auspices of the BLMP. It included senior representation from Department for Communities, Department for the Economy, Department of Finance, Public Health Agency (and through this the Department of Health), Belfast H&SC Trust, Belfast City Council, Belfast Metropolitan College, NICVA, CBI and Belfast Works Connect. The group worked together over a period of six months, supported by independent research and analysis and informed by good practice visits to other locations that have been trying to address this challenge. While the initiative is Belfast-focused, its findings and solutions are intended to inform and benefit other areas across the region. Regular updates have been shared with LMPs regionally to encourage broader engagement and collaboration and the involvement of the regional government departments means that the wider application of these lessons has been considered from the outset.

3.3	With a limited time-bound lifespan, the aims have been to: • Identify health and work-related challenges affecting economically inactive residents • Define target groups within the economically inactive population for inclusion • Develop and promote approaches and proposals that support people along their health and employability journey • Make recommendations to the successor of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) – the Local Growth Fund (LGF) – to avoid past funding disruptions such as that during the transition from ESF to UKSPF and to shape future employability, skills and health services through a more collaborative, cohesive and joined up approach both within LGF projects and with the wider employability, health and skills systems • Longer-term recommendations to influence policy decisions at a regional level, creating greater integration and proactive collaboration across employability, health and skills systems. Beyond funding, this involves structural reform across public services to reduce economic inactivity through shaping future government policy and embed joined-up service delivery across the region.
3.4	The Steering Group has engaged with key stakeholders – including those with lived experience, government departments, employability and skills providers, community and voluntary sector organisations and employers to generate innovative ideas, proposals and identify ‘what works’ (or does not). This has ensured broad and inclusive participation into the design of how we support those who are ‘economically inactive’ and experiencing socio-economic exclusion to improve health and wellbeing; develop employability skills and secure meaningful and sustainable work.
3.5	<u>Health & Work Steering Group Recommendations</u> An overview of the key recommendations from the Health & Work Steering Group is attached as Appendix 1. These reflect the need for a twin-track strategy to address immediate funding needs and maximise the impact of investment (Phase 1) while driving long-term reform across health, employment, and skills systems (Phase 2).
3.6	For Phase 1 (2026-2029), the proposed model integrates Work & Health Coaches and Multi-Disciplinary Teams within Health to deliver personalised, holistic support. Structured outreach and referral pathways connect individuals to financial, health, education, and community services. This integrated, trauma-informed approach ensures tailored interventions that promote wellbeing, confidence, and sustained employment. In parallel, there is a very deliberate focus on priority target groups including young people, women and carers and those

	with specific health conditions. From a funding perspective, the primary focus is the emerging Local Growth Fund (replacement for Shared Prosperity Fund).
3.4	Short-term recommendations (2026-2029) include: Recognition of Complex Needs in Commissioning Approaches - Economically inactive individuals face multifaceted challenges that require long-term, personalised support including health issues, low skills and caring duties.. Current commissioning models often prioritise cost-efficiency and rapid job outcomes, leading to exclusion of those with deeper barriers. The report calls for inclusive, flexible systems that reward progress along the employability continuum (not just measuring “into employment”) and enable meaningful, person-centred interventions Tiered Funding Model - An evidenced-based tiered funding model is proposed to reflect varying support needs among economically inactive groups. Categories range from light-touch to intensive support, ensuring resources match complexity, with differentiated participant funding (low, medium, high support bands). This approach incentivises providers to engage those furthest from the labour market and supports flexible, co-designed delivery tailored to evolving individual circumstances. Focus on Quality Assurance - Delivering high quality services requires a focus on building and using robust data and insights, including gathering participant feedback. Providers should be accountable to agreed local governance structures, with risk management protocols and quality assurance in place. A robust framework combining differentiated funding, clear targets, and strong accountability will ensure LGF and comparable interventions deliver equitable, impactful support and that there is no duplication of investment. Integrated Programme Delivery - Align health and employability services with Local Growth Fund (LGF) projects through coordinated leadership at a local level – including through LMPs Programme Design and Delivery

	• Transform how and where service delivery happens – including co-location of services (health; employment support) enabling warm referrals, and normalising employability as part of holistic wellbeing conversations • Employ qualified specialists as Work & Health Coaches to deliver personalised support, maintain manageable caseloads, and promote continuity. Frame all activities as steps toward paid work, enabling sustainable employment for those furthest from the labour market • Embed employment as a core goal from day one, providing tailored job support and promote access to good jobs. Prioritisation of fair pay, progression, and inclusive workplaces will enhance wellbeing and long-term stability when in employment • Provide ongoing, personalised aftercare to ensure job retention and progression. Strategic Employer Engagement • The Steering Group acknowledged the need for more coherent employer-facing services to address business concerns (among SMEs in particular) about their ability to navigate the complex employability support offer. There is an opportunity to work towards the creation of Employer Hubs as a one-stop shop for employer-facing services. In the context of Belfast City Council, this could include our employability and skills support as well as interventions such as Go Succeed.
3.5	In the short term, Steering Group members are undertaking targeted engagement to influence early discussions on the new Local Growth Fund where possible. It remains difficult to understand where these key points of influence are located, given the ongoing uncertainty around lead roles on the new funding. What has been particularly encouraging is that those partners that are likely to be involved to some extent at least in the development of the new approaches under Local Growth Fund can see how these recommendations can enhance delivery and are keen to use the insights generated to inform and shape what comes next. Officers understand that, in parallel, a number of key government departments are looking at a more collaborative approach to addressing economic inactivity and are receptive to considering how these findings can direct their work (which remains subject to funding). In the interim, the Belfast LMP is exploring some practical ways in which it can “walk the walk” – including widening access to its quality assurance framework to support service improvements and consistency of approach.
3.6	With regard to longer-term changes (2029 onwards), key recommendations focus on the systems changes required to address health-related economic inactivity, aligning services,

	funding, and accountability across sectors, laying the groundwork for coordinated, person-centred delivery through strategic reforms, workforce development, and long-term planning. Key recommendations for this phase include: Better Aligned Policy Framework • Need for a new strategy to be jointly led by DoH, DfC, and DfE, feeding into the next Programme for Government, with a 5-10 year vision of making a real and lasting impact on economic inactivity Integrated Service Delivery • Flowing from the joint strategic framework, employability, health and skills services should be integrated at a local level. Place-based pilots should co-locate support services in trusted community settings. Sustainable delivery requires formal referral protocols, shared digital infrastructure, and vocational training access for underserved individuals. These are critical foundation pillars required to make these commitments work in practice Co-commissioning and Shared Funding • Shifting funding mechanisms from short-term, siloed models to long-term, outcome-based frameworks. Over time, commissioning should evolve into a co-commissioning framework, with shared responsibility across government, health trusts, councils, and the voluntary sector. This integrated approach will align resources and embed employment support within a broader ecosystem of support services such as mental health, housing, childcare, and skills. Consolidating the Employer Hubs • Solidifying a cohesive single access-point for employers that navigates through a complex range of supports on offer. Integrated and cohesive employer-facing services will include training, incentives and practical support for inclusive practices, ensuring workplaces are accessible and supportive, both for the employer and their employee.
3.7	To take forward Phase 2 of the report, NI Executive Departments are utilising the evidence-base, intelligence and recommendations generated and are already beginning to seek to have a better aligned policy framework. While the opportunity to align these activities to a likely focus through the next Programme for Government, the departments are actively exploring other opportunities to work together in a much more meaningful way and there is senior-level

	commitment to this approach. If possible, we expect that the work of the Health & Work Steering Group will be submerged into this new approach, offering the opportunity to test new approaches as a 'proof of concept' and consideration of mechanisms such as LMP as a conduit for place-based solutions as a means of improving outcomes.
4.0	Financial and Resource Implications
	No specific financial considerations at this point. This work is supported by the Department under the auspices of the Belfast Labour Market Partnership.
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
	No specific equality or good relations implications. If successful, this approach can improve the outcomes for specific target/under-represented groups.
6.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1: Bridging Employability, Health & Skills Systems – Overview of key proposals

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Bridging Employability, Skills & Health Systems

Summary Report of the Belfast Health & Work Steering Group

August 2025

BELFAST

Labour Market Partnership
Working Together



CONTENTS

1. Background.....	2
2. Overview.....	2
3. Economic Inactivity in NI: The Challenge	3
4. Health and Work: A Two-Way Relationship	5
5. Mapping Existing Services & Delivery.....	6
6. Evidence & Learnings from Our Research	6
7. Recommendations.....	8
7.2 Phase I: Local Growth Fund and beyond	8
7.2 Phase II: Driving Long-Term System Change.....	11

1. BACKGROUND

The Belfast Labour Market Partnership (LMP) established the Belfast Health & Work Steering Group bringing together government departments, health agencies, education providers, and community organisations to design a joined-up, inclusive employability and skills ecosystem which better embeds health provision, thereby ensuring that future services are responsive to the needs of economically inactive individuals facing socio-economic exclusion. This report identifies the challenges, defines priority groups, and develops innovative, evidence-based proposals to support individuals in improving health, building employability, and securing meaningful work. Operating until late summer 2025, the group was tasked with producing recommendations aligned with policy agendas and shaped by diverse perspectives. While the initiative is Belfast-focused, its findings and solutions are intended to inform and benefit other areas across the region. Regular updates are shared with LMPs to encourage broader application and collaboration. Ultimately, the ambition is to create a more integrated, person-centred approach to tackling economic inactivity, ensuring long-term impact and inclusive growth.

2. OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

Established to create the conditions of enabling better outcomes by tackling fragmented service delivery, the Steering Group promotes a collaborative, evidence-based model for future interventions aimed at targeting those who are economically inactive. It seeks to ensure services are co-designed, locally aligned, and capable of delivering sustained outcomes for economically inactive individuals across Belfast and the wider region. With a limited time-bound lifespan, the aims have been to:

- Identify health and work-related challenges affecting economically inactive residents.
- Define target groups within the economically inactive population for inclusion.
- Develop and promote approaches and proposals that support people along their health and employability journey.
- Make recommendations to the successor of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) – the Local Growth Fund (LGF) – to avoid past funding disruptions such as that during the transition from ESF to UKSPF and to shape future employability, skills and health services through a more collaborative, cohesive and joined up approach both within LGF projects and with the wider employability, health and skills systems.
- Longer-term recommendations to influence policy decisions at a regional level, creating greater integration and proactive collaboration across employability, health and skills systems. Beyond funding, this involves structural reform across public services to reduce economic inactivity through shaping future government policy and embed joined-up service delivery across the region.

MEMBERSHIP AND STRUCTURE

The Steering Group was made up of senior representatives from Department for Communities, Department for the Economy, Department of Finance, Public Health Agency (and through this the

Department of Health), Belfast H&SC Trust, Belfast City Council, Belfast Metropolitan College, NICVA, CBI and Belfast Works Connect. Supported by Belfast City Council, the group worked together over a period of six months, underpinned by independent research and analysis and informed by good practice visits to other locations that have been trying to address this challenge. While the initiative is Belfast-focused, its findings and solutions are intended to inform and benefit other areas across the region. Regular updates have been shared with LMPs regionally to encourage broader engagement and collaboration and the involvement of the regional government departments means that the wider application of these lessons has been considered from the outset.

INFORMING THE SUCCESSOR TO THE UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND (PHASE I)

The group's immediate priority was influencing the design of UKSPF's successor, avoiding past funding disruptions. It advocates for co-designed, evidence-led programmes aligned with local needs to ensure continuity and effectiveness in supporting economically inactive individuals.

DRIVING LONG-TERM SYSTEM CHANGE ACROSS PUBLIC SERVICES (PHASE II)

Beyond funding, the group calls for structural reform across public services. It urges better integration of health, employment, and skills systems to reduce economic inactivity. This long-term ambition aims to shape future government policy and embed joined-up service delivery.

3. ECONOMIC INACTIVITY IN NI: THE CHALLENGE



NI has persistently higher inactivity rates than UK average (+4-8%), driven by ageing population & shrinking workforce.



Health is the main driver – 38% of inactive due to long-term sickness (122k people), including mental health, musculoskeletal & chronic illness.



Caring responsibilities affect women disproportionately; childcare shortages restrict participation.



Education & skills gaps (below Level 2) limit access to growth sectors; early disengagement from education heightens risk.



Geographical disparities – highest in deprived urban areas (North/West Belfast) & rural regions with smaller job markets.



Demographics matter: high inactivity in 16–24 (esp. NEETs), 25–49, 50–64; 87% of 65+ inactive; disabled people face major barriers.

UNDERSTANDING ECONOMIC INACTIVITY

This region faces persistently high economic inactivity, driven by health issues, caring responsibilities, low educational attainment, and regional deprivation. Long-term sickness, mental health conditions, and disability are major contributors, especially among men and older adults. Women face barriers due to caregiving and limited childcare. Inactivity is highest in deprived and rural areas, and among those with low qualifications. Young people not in education or training are at risk of long-term disengagement. Addressing this complex issue

requires coordinated, inclusive strategies across health, education, and employment systems, highlighting the need for a health and work approach.

DISABILITY & LONG-TERM HEALTH CONDITIONS

Nearly one in four adults locally live with a limiting long-term condition, with Belfast and Derry & Strabane showing the highest rates. Common conditions include chronic pain, mobility issues, and respiratory problems. Mental health, hearing, and learning difficulties also affect large numbers. Multimorbidity is rising, especially in deprived areas. Disability rates are higher than in England and Wales, with factors like gender, education, and mental health influencing prevalence. These figures underscore the need for sustained, localised support for individuals facing hidden health barriers to employment.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Mental ill health is a leading cause of economic inactivity regionally. One in five adults and one in eight children are estimated to experience mental illness, with higher rates in deprived areas. Poverty, housing instability, and adverse childhood experiences worsen outcomes. Suicide rates remain high, especially among men. Many affected individuals do not access clinical services, remaining outside health and employment systems. This silent, underserved group must be prioritised in any integrated response to economic inactivity, especially given the post-pandemic rise in mental health-related disengagement.

BRIDGING GAPS: THE CASE FOR TARGETED AND INTEGRATED SUPPORT

Our economic inactivity is deeply linked to health inequalities, chronic illness, disability, and trauma. Traditional employment programmes are insufficient. A strategic, person-centred approach is needed, one that integrates health, social care, and employment support. This model must reflect local realities and address the complex barriers faced by inactive populations, ensuring inclusive, coordinated solutions that promote long-term wellbeing and economic participation.

4. HEALTH AND WORK: A TWO-WAY RELATIONSHIP



Strong evidence base, recognising that economic and health policy goals are interdependent and growing evidence base including WorkWell Partnerships, Individual Placement & Support, Trailblazers etc.



Recognising the health–work link which is a core strand of welfare-to-work policy in UK, recognising the complex and systemic factors contributing to long-term detachment from work



Health as both barrier and enabler with consensus from both policy and evidence that health and work must be addressed together if inactivity is to be reduced.



Lessons from existing interventions on the limitations of siloed systems, scale, narrow eligibility criteria, lack of employer engagement and insufficient community delivery with top-down approaches.



Implications at a regional level: higher baseline inactivity and health inequality, existing community infrastructure, cross-departmental appetite for reform and devolution opportunity.

STRONG EVIDENCE BASE

Robust research shows secure employment improves health, while economic inactivity worsens mental and physical wellbeing with strained health services and uneven outcomes, highlighting the need for integrated approaches. Combining employment support with health services—like therapy and condition management—offers tailored, iterative pathways to recovery and work. UK models such as WorkWell and IPS demonstrate success through joint assessments and shared data, reinforcing the value of collaborative, person-centred interventions.

RECOGNISING THE HEALTH–WORK LINK

Modern welfare-to-work policies now recognise health as central to employment outcomes. Initiatives such as the Work and Health Programme and the Joint Work and Health Unit within GB aim to prevent job loss due to illness, support re-entry for those with long-term conditions, and improve employer capacity. These initiatives reflect a shift from punitive approaches to holistic, recovery-focused strategies that treat work as a key component of health and wellbeing.

HEALTH AS BOTH BARRIER AND ENABLER

Employment benefits health, but poor health, especially mental illness, is a leading cause of economic inactivity. Across the region, long-term sickness affects half of inactive adults, with higher rates in deprived areas. Programmes offering psychological and occupational health support show promise. Addressing health and work together is essential to reduce inactivity for those who want to work.

LESSONS FROM EXISTING INTERVENTIONS

Despite policy support, integrated health and work programmes face challenges: siloed systems, limited scale, narrow eligibility, weak employer engagement, and poor community reach. Top-down models often fail to connect with marginalised groups. In contrast, community-led approaches, such as Greater Manchester’s Live Well Centres, build trust and deliver better outcomes. We need locally embedded, multi-partner models that reflect lived experience and foster collaboration.

IMPLICATIONS WITHIN A LOCAL CONTEXT

Our high inactivity and health inequality demand a tailored, integrated policy response. Strong community infrastructure and cross-departmental interest offer a foundation for reform. Devolution provides flexibility to design locally responsive models, but success depends on investment, leadership, and political will. Aligning health and employment strategies is vital to address regional challenges and improve outcomes.

5. MAPPING EXISTING SERVICES & DELIVERY

As a region, NI provides a broad spectrum of health, employability, disability, and community services, but siloed delivery limits impact for economically inactive individuals with complex needs. Health and Social Care services, especially primary care and mental health, are vital but poorly integrated with employment pathways. Public health initiatives and employability programmes often target those already close to work, leaving gaps for those facing health or social barriers. Community and voluntary organisations play a key role in high-deprivation areas, offering trusted, localised support through health hubs, vocational training, and trauma-informed services. While the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has funded promising community-led projects, duplication and poor alignment with wider policy persist. Integration across sectors remains weak, with limited referral systems, shared data, and unified outcomes. To improve support for those furthest from the labour market, future programmes such as the proposed Local Growth Fund must embed health and wellbeing services, enable flexible access, and strengthen community partnerships. A coherent, place-based model with strategic coordination and investment in shared infrastructure is essential to deliver holistic, inclusive, and person-centred support that addresses the full spectrum of barriers to employment.

6. EVIDENCE & LEARNINGS FROM OUR RESEARCH

DESK BASED FINDINGS

A review of six UK programmes highlights a growing policy focus on integrating health, employment, and social support to tackle economic inactivity. Initiatives like the Work & Health Programme, IPS, NHS Talking Therapies, WorkWell, Connect to Work, and Get Britain Working Trailblazers target individuals with complex barriers—especially health-related—through personalised, multidisciplinary interventions. These models emphasise early engagement, employer collaboration, and in-work support, with IPS showing particularly strong outcomes for people with severe mental illness. Despite progress, challenges remain in scaling services, coordinating across sectors, and addressing social determinants like poverty. The Trailblazers aim to build scalable, place-based models to drive inclusive economic growth.

LONDON VISIT, MAY 2025

During a two-day visit to London in May 2025, the Belfast Health & Work Steering Group engaged with UK government, local authority, and voluntary sector leaders to explore integrated approaches to tackling economic inactivity. Key insights included the Department for Work & Pensions' Get Britain Working strategy, which promotes personalised, place-based employment

support through initiatives like WorkWell, Connect to Work, and IPS. Shaw Trust showcased successful models combining health and employment services, while London's boroughs and Integrated Care Boards demonstrated coordinated delivery aligned with productivity and inclusion goals. The Local Government Association and NHS Confederation stressed the need for long-term investment, devolved planning, and cross-sector collaboration.

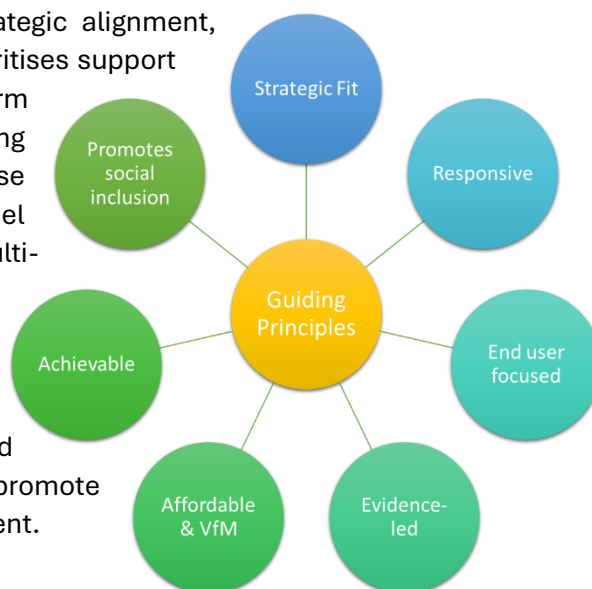
STAKEHOLDER INSIGHTS

Economically inactive individuals face complex, overlapping barriers including mental health issues, low confidence, childcare shortages, and fragmented services. Jobs & Benefits Offices offer tailored coaching, peer support, and employer engagement, but systemic gaps persist. Community organisations provide trusted, flexible support, especially for young people, yet struggle with visibility and funding constraints. Health professionals emphasise the need for integrated, person-centred models aligned with public health goals. Area Integrated Planning Boards and initiatives like IPS show promise in bridging health and employment systems. Cross-sector collaboration, sustained investment, and recognition of community expertise are essential to improving outcomes and reducing economic inactivity. Survey respondents cited health issues, caring duties, and lack of flexible work as key barriers to employment. Many felt unsupported post-assessment and unaware of available services. Despite challenges, most want to work and seek tailored help—especially in mental health, training, transport, and inclusive job opportunities—to make re-entry possible.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Belfast Health & Work Steering Group adopted a twin-track strategy to address immediate funding needs while driving long-term reform across health, employment, and skills systems. Their evidence-based, person-centred approach aims to reduce economic inactivity and shape future programmes beyond the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Core principles are opposite and include strategic alignment, inclusivity, and value for money. The group prioritises support for key populations including those with long-term health conditions, those with disability, young people with mental health challenges and those facing multiple barriers. The proposed model integrates Work & Health Coaches and Multi-Disciplinary Teams to deliver personalised, holistic support. Structured outreach and referral pathways connect individuals to financial, health, education, and community services. This integrated, trauma-informed approach ensures tailored interventions that promote wellbeing, confidence, and sustained employment.



7.2 PHASE I: LOCAL GROWTH FUND AND BEYOND

While these recommendations were developed with a focus on the short-term funding landscape, particularly with the implementation of the Local Growth Fund (Economic Inactivity Priority) expected in April 2026, they are also focused on the design and delivery of employability interventions targeting the most socially and economically excluded within society and experiencing significant barriers to employment.

RECOGNITION OF COMPLEX NEEDS IN COMMISSIONING APPROACHES

Economically inactive individuals face multifaceted challenges that require long-term, personalised support including health issues, low skills and caring responsibilities. Current commissioning models often prioritise cost-efficiency and rapid job outcomes, leading to exclusion of those with deeper barriers. The report calls for inclusive, flexible systems that reward progress along the employability continuum (not just measuring ‘into employment’) and enable meaningful, person-centred interventions

TIERED FUNDING MODEL

An evidenced-based tiered funding model is proposed to reflect varying support needs among economically inactive groups. Categories range from light-touch to intensive support, ensuring resources match complexity, with differentiated participant funding (low, medium, high support bands). This approach incentivises providers to engage those furthest from the labour market and supports flexible, co-designed delivery tailored to evolving individual circumstances.

FOCUS ON QUALITY ASSURANCE

Delivering high quality services requires a focus on building and using robust data and insights, including gathering participant feedback. Providers should be accountable to agreed local governance structures, with risk management protocols and quality assurance in place. A robust framework combining differentiated funding, clear targets, and strong accountability will ensure LGF and comparable interventions deliver equitable, impactful support and that there is no duplication of investment.

INTEGRATION AND ALIGNMENT

Align health and employability services with Local Growth Fund (LGF) projects through coordinated leadership at a local level – including through LMPs. Build community-based platforms to create cohesion across statutory, voluntary, and private sector efforts—ensuring services work together to reduce economic inactivity through joined-up, accessible support.

PROGRAMME DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Working Well NI: 2026-2029



Transform how and where service delivery happens – including co-location of services (health; employment support) enabling warm referrals, and normalising employability as part of holistic wellbeing conversations. The model proposed integrates Work & Health Coaches and Multi-Disciplinary Teams within Health to deliver personalised, holistic support. Structured outreach and referral pathways connect individuals to financial, health, education, and community services. This integrated, trauma-informed approach ensures tailored interventions that promote wellbeing, confidence, and sustained employment. In parallel, there is a very deliberate focus on priority target groups including young people, women and carers and those with specific health conditions. Recommendations within programme design and delivery include:



Employ qualified specialists as Work & Health Coaches.



Community-led outreach engagement and induction.



Work and Wellbeing Profile, with agreed diagnostic assessment, triage and action planning.



Embedded visible health offer.



Embed employment as a core goal from day one, providing tailored job support and promote access to good jobs with fair pay and inclusive workplaces.



Personalised aftercare, helping people thrive and employers maintain inclusive, resilient workplaces.

STRATEGIC EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

The Steering Group acknowledged the need for more coherent employer-facing services to address business concerns (among SMEs in particular) about their ability to navigate the complex employability support offer. There is an opportunity to work towards the creation of Employer Hubs as a one-stop shop for employer-facing services. In the context of Belfast City Council, this could include our employability and skills support as well as interventions such as Go Succeed.

DRIVING PROVIDER BEHAVIOUR

To ensure high-quality delivery, the group recommends transparent performance data, participant feedback, and independent oversight. Providers should be accountable to local governance, with risk management protocols and quality inspections in place. A robust framework combining differentiated funding, clear targets, and strong accountability will ensure LGF programmes deliver equitable, impactful support.

7.2 PHASE II: DRIVING LONG-TERM SYSTEM CHANGE

As a region we need a system-wide strategy to address health-related economic inactivity. A Regional Health and Work Strategy should align services, funding, and accountability across sectors, laying the groundwork for coordinated, person-centred delivery through strategic reforms, workforce development, and long-term planning.

Working Well NI: 2029+



A Regional Health and Work Strategy, embedded in government policy, must align funding, delivery, and collaboration to build an inclusive, outcomes-driven support ecosystem across

BETTER ALIGNED POLICY FRAMEWORK

A new strategy should be jointly led by DoH, DfC, and DfE, feeding into the Programme for Government with a 5–10 year vision. Co-designed with stakeholders, it must include shared priorities, measurable outcomes, and a cross-departmental taskforce to oversee implementation and ensure accountability.

INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY

Employability and health services must be integrated through co-designed, flexible models. Place-based pilots should co-locate support services in trusted community settings. Sustainable delivery requires formal referral protocols, shared digital infrastructure, and vocational training access via a Skills Fund for underserved individuals.

CO-COMMISSIONING AND SHARED FUNDING

Funding should shift from short-term, siloed models to long-term, outcome-based frameworks. Joint commissioning and pooled resources across sectors are essential, supported by independent evaluation to measure impact and scale effective practices. Delivering an effective health and employment support model in this region requires a shift toward flexible, inclusive

commissioning strategies that reflect local needs and complex individual barriers. Traditional short-term, cost-driven funding must be replaced with value-based, outcomes-focused approaches that support long-term, person-centred pathways. Programmes should allow in-programme innovation, support specialist providers, and prioritise inclusion over standardisation. A hybrid model combining open procurement and grant funding can balance scale and responsiveness. Over time, commissioning should evolve into a co-commissioning framework, with shared responsibility across government, health trusts, councils, and the voluntary sector. This integrated approach would align resources and embed employment support within a broader ecosystem of wraparound services—such as mental health, housing, childcare, and skills—creating a resilient, joined-up system capable of driving lasting change.

CONSOLIDATING EMPLOYER HUBS

Solidifying a cohesive single access-point for employers that navigates through a complex range of supports on offer. Integrated and cohesive employer-facing services will include training, incentives and practical support for inclusive practices, ensuring workplaces are accessible and supportive, both for the employer and their employee.

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Subject:	US Film Tariff - Correspondence from the Executive Office, Minister for the Economy and the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport
Date:	5th September, 2025
Reporting Officer:	Keith Forster, Director of Economic Development
Contact Officer:	Craig Mealey, Committee Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. Insert number 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never 	

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update Members on responses received from the Executive Office, the Minister for the Economy and the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport to correspondence from the Committee in relation to potential US tariffs on films produced outside of the US.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the responses received from the Executive Office, the Minister for the Economy and the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport in relation to potential US tariffs on films produced outside of the US.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At the City Growth and Regeneration Committee meeting on 7th May, 2025, Councillor de Faoite raised an issue in advance expressing concern in relation to an announcement by the US President that he would authorise the US Department of Commerce and the US Trade Representative to immediately begin the process of imposing a 100 percent tariff on films produced outside of the US.
3.2	At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Committee agreed to write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister, the Minister for the Economy, the UK Minister of State for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism and the Irish Minister for Arts, Culture, Communications, Media and Sport to highlight the importance of the local film and creative industries to Belfast and its concern in relation to the potential impact of any proposed US tariff on films produced outside of the US.
3.3	To date, responses have been received from the Executive Office (Appendix 1), the Minister for the Economy (Appendix 2), and the UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Appendix 3).
4.0	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None associated with this report.
5.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None associated with this report.
6.0	Appendices - Document Attached
	Appendix 1 – The Executive Office – US Film Tariff Appendix 2 – Minister for the Economy – US Film Tariff Appendix 3 – UK Department for Culture, Media and Sport – US Film Tariff

Room ED22, Stormont Castle
BELFAST
BT4 3TT
Email: lynsey.moore@executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk

Craig Mealey
Committee Services Officer,
Belfast City Council,
Legal and Civic Services Department City Hall,
Belfast BT1 5GS

mealeyc@belfastcity.gov.uk

Date: 29 July 2025
Our Ref: COR 0389/2025

Dear Craig,

US Film Tariff

Thank you for your letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister dated 24 June in respect of the US Administration's 4 May announcement of 100% tariffs on "foreign" films. The Ministers have noted the issues you have raised and asked me to respond.

Ministers recognise that Northern Ireland has become a major hub for US film and TV productions and is globally recognised as a highly desirable filming location, attracting major film and television series due to our skilled people and diverse landscapes. Ministers share your concerns about the potential impact on our local economy of any tariffs that might be introduced by the US administration on all films produced outside of the US.

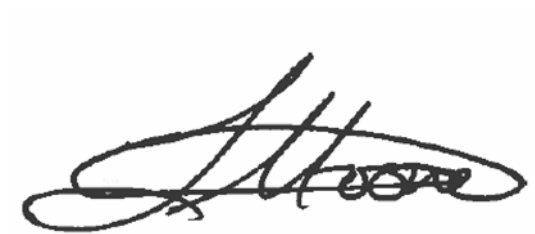
Following the initial announcement by the US Administration in May, Ministers met with the UK Secretary of State for Business and Trade to explain their concerns on the impact on our local film industry, and economy in general, and ask that their concerns are fully considered in their negotiations with the US.

At present there is no clarity or detail on the criteria and parameters of how this tariff, if implemented, will be determined, or timeframe for its introduction.

At an official level we continue to engage on this matter with UK Government officials, and the Economy Minister has established the Tariff Working Group to develop intelligence on the potential impacts of the tariffs for our economy.

Ministers will be revisiting their position once more clarity emerges.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lynsey Moore', with a stylized, cursive script.

LYNSEY MOORE
DIRECTOR, EUROPE STRATEGY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**From the Office of the Minister
DR CAOIMHE ARCHIBALD MLA**

Craig Mealey
Belfast City Council
Legal and Civic Services Department
MealeyC@belfastcity.gov.uk



Department for the
Economy
An Roinn
Geilleagair
www.economy-ni.gov.uk

Adelaide House
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD
02890 529333
Private.Office@economy-ni.gov.uk

Our ref: COR-0442-2025

Date: 02 July 2025

Craig a chara

US Film Tariff

Thank you for your letter dated 24 June 2025 regarding the proposal by US President Trump to initiate a 100% tariff on all films produced outside of the United States. I appreciate the City Growth and Regeneration Committee's proactive engagement on this issue.

I have been very clear from the outset that the imposition of tariffs creates significant uncertainty for our economy. Ultimately, tariffs are bad for business and the volatility that has ensued from the US tariff policy has been unhelpful.

At present, you may be aware that the US administration has placed a 90 day pause on the imposition of further tariffs, subject to negotiations with other countries. On the 8 May, the British Government announced the Economic Prosperity Deal with the US, covering a variety of sectors including steel and automotives. The film sector was not covered in this deal, but negotiations continue on the potential for further tariff reductions.

Since the original tariff announcement, I have been proactive in this space, appointing a number of industry representatives as part of a Tariff Working Group which reports to me on emerging tariff issues and potential mitigations. In addition, I have had good engagement with both the Irish and British Governments on the matter of tariffs and I continue to highlight the specific needs of our unique trading position in the North here and our integrated all island supply chains.

Despite these challenges, it is important to highlight the continued strength and resilience of our screen sector.

- Creative industries contributed £1.6bn to the local economy in 2022

- The sector employs over 39,000 people, with a growing skills pipeline supported by NI Screen's training initiatives.
- Our reputation as a world-class filming destination has attracted blockbuster films such as How to Train your Dragon.
- The recent opening of the world leading Studio Ulster has the potential to take the industry to the next level by capitalising on the enormous potential of virtual production.

It is an exciting and thriving sector which is critical to delivery of my economic vision. I assure you we are continuing to monitor developments closely and are working with NI Screen, Invest NI, and other stakeholders to ensure that our interests are robustly represented.

Thank you again for raising this important issue.

Is mise le meas

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C Archibald', written in a cursive style.

DR CAOIMHE ARCHIBALD MLA
Minister for the Economy



Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Ministerial Support Team
1st Floor
100 Parliament Street
London SW1A 2BQ

E: enquiries@dcms.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/dcms

15 July 2025

Mr Craig Mealey
MealeyC@belfastcity.gov.uk

Our Ref: TO2025/06308/CR

Dear Mr Mealey,

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 June to the Minister for Creative Industries, Arts and Tourism, Sir Chris Bryant MP, regarding concerns about potential US tariffs on films produced outside of the US. I am replying as a member of the Ministerial Support Team.

There are no tariffs on the UK's film industry, but we recognise the seriousness of the concerns you raise and can reassure you that we continue to monitor the situation closely. We are in contact with a range of film industry representatives from across the sector, including figures from UK and US film companies, trade bodies and unions, to discuss these issues.

The deep ties between the US and UK film industries provide mutual economic and cultural benefits to both countries, including of course in Belfast where so much world-leading production occurs.

Belfast's thriving film and TV sector is one of the reasons why the recently published Creative Industries Sector Plan spotlights the city as a high-potential cluster for creative industries growth and a unique investment offer. The Sector Plan contains ambitious proposals to bolster growth in the creative industries across the UK. Given support for culture and the creative industries is devolved, the department will continue to work with the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure creative businesses across the UK are able to thrive.

Thank you again for your letter, and I hope this response reassures you about the government's commitment to ensuring the UK's film sector continues to thrive and create good jobs right across the country.

Yours sincerely,

Ministerial Support Team

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Subject:	Rent Controls - Department for Communities Response
Date:	5th September, 2025
Reporting Officer:	Cathy Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration & Development
Contact Officer:	Craig Mealey, Committee Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes ☐ No ☒
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. Insert number 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/> <input style="width: 40px; height: 25px;" type="checkbox"/>	

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes ☒ No ☐

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update Members on a response received from the Department for Communities in relation to rent controls.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the response received from the Department for Communities in relation to rent controls.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	At its meeting in February 2023, the City Growth and Regeneration Committee passed the following motion in relation to rent controls: Moved by Councillor Beattie, and Seconded by Councillor Duffy, “That the Committee notes 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 Committee: Wants to see costs for renters reduced; Acknowledges that legislation is required to protect renters from unfair rents, improve housing standards and end unfair letting fees; Recognises 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.”
3.2	The Committee agreed to write to the Department for Communities Permanent Secretary and the Head of the Civil Service requesting engagement 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.
3.3	In its response of March 2023, the Department for Communities advised 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. 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. However, as already noted by your

	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.”
3.4	A further letter was sent on behalf of the Council in May 2025 to the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA, regarding the actions outlined in the motion, including engagement with the Council and other key stakeholders in relation to rent controls in Belfast.
3.5	A response from the Department for Communities has now been received and is attached at Appendix 1 for the Committee’s consideration.
4.0	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None associated with this report.
5.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None associated with this report.
6.0	Appendices - Document Attached
	Appendix 1 – Department for Communities Response – Rent Controls

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**Level 4
Causeway Exchange
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG**

e-mail: prs@communities-ni.gov.uk

Our ref: TOF-0578-2025
Date: 5 June 2025

Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator, Belfast City Council. Via email. democraticservices@belfastcity.gov.uk

Dear Eilish,

Thank you for your correspondence, dated 29 May 2025, to the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons. As head of Private Rented Branch, your email has been passed to me for reply.

You begin by referring to the Council's letter to the Permanent Secretary for DfC and the Head of the Civil Service in March 2023. These letters detailed the motion, passed by the Council in February 2023, which noted that rents had risen significantly making it increasingly unaffordable for many people, particularly those on low incomes and young families. The ask from the Council was for engagement with the Permanent Secretary and Head of the Civil Service concerning rent controls as one way to help renters combat affordability issues.

The Department issued a response to you on 28 March 2023. This correspondence advised 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/cut, and that a report was subsequently laid in the Assembly and published on the Department's website.



The research report highlighted potential unintended consequences of these types of measures, including landlords exiting the private rental market resulting in greater shortage of properties in an already stretched market. It also noted that evidence gathering included an engagement session with council representatives, and that there was some apprehension about such rent controls, including in relation to how such legislation would be enforced.

The correspondence further advised that decisions on rent controls were within the remit of an incoming Minister.

Since the Council's last letter, the primary power to freeze or cut rents, as provided for by the Private Tenancies Act has expired. The power however remained to restrict the frequency of rent increases. This restriction was commenced by the Minister from 01 April this year, and from this date private sector rents can only be increased once in every 12-month period, with a 3-month notice.

Commencing this legislation will assist low-income tenants by providing assurances that they will not face multiple or unexpected rent increases over a short period of time. It also allows landlords to increase rents to meet their costs which have also increased in recent years.

I trust you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Julie Lavery
Private Rented Branch



Subject:	Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update
Date:	10 September 2025
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy
Contact Officer:	Jamie Uprichard, Business Research and Development Manager

Restricted Reports											
Is this report restricted?	Yes	No	X								
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. Insert number - Information relating to any individual - Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) - Information in connection with any labour relations matter - Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained - Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction - Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime											
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted? <table> <tr> <td>After Committee Decision</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td>☐</td> </tr> </table>				After Committee Decision	☐	After Council Decision	☐	Sometime in the future	☐	Never	☐
After Committee Decision	☐										
After Council Decision	☐										
Sometime in the future	☐										
Never	☐										

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

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance allocated to the City Growth & Regeneration (CG&R) Committee.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that the Committee: • Notes the updates to all Notices of Motion/ Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1; and • Agrees to the closure of two Notices of Motion, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in paragraph 3.3 below.
3.0	Main report
3.1	At the SP&R Committee meeting on 25th October 2019 , members agreed <i>“that this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting.</i>
3.2	It was subsequently agreed that quarterly updates would be brought to the council’s statutory committees providing a regular update on the progress of each motion for which the committee is responsible for. At the SP&R Committee on 20th November 2020, members approved the arrangement for the future management of motions, which included recommendations that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons: • Category 1 – Notice of Motion contained an action that has been completed. All Notices of Motion within this category contained a specific task that has since been complete. It is worth noting that, when Committee agree to action a Motion, there are sometimes additional actions agreed alongside the Motion. As these are not technically part of the Notice of Motion, they are taken forward through normal committee decision making processes. The Notice of Motion can therefore be closed, but additional actions related to it will continue to be progressed and reported to the committee. • Category 2 - Notice of Motion has become Council policy or absorbed into a strategic programme of work. These Motions did not contain a specific task that could be completed but rather they are more strategic in nature and require changes in Council policy and/ or strategy for long term outcomes. Those listed within this category have all been agreed by Committee and are now either Council policy or are currently being implemented through a Council strategy that is managed by a Standing Committee through the corporate planning process.
3.3	There are presently eight Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which the CG&R Committee is responsible for. Members are asked to approve the recommendation to close two motions (detailed below) and note status updates for the remaining six motions which remain open. Additional information is included at Appendix 1. Category 1 Recommended Closures: • 309 - Rent Controls. • 450 - Proposed US Tariff on Films Made Outside of the US.
3.4	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u> There are no additional financial implications attached to this report. Finance and resource implications are considered by Committee when taking decisions on the specific Notices of Motion and Issues Raised by Members.

3.5	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents attached
	Appendix 1: Notices of Motion Live Database – CG&R Committee

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City Growth & Regeneration Notice of Motions

Notices of Motion and Issued Raised in Advance that remain OPEN:

ID	Date	Notice of Motion	Proposed By	Referral Route	Lead Officer	Latest Status Update
208	04/10/2021	Belfast City Nightlife and Night-time Economy	Cllr S de Faoite	Notice of Motion – straight to CG&R	Damien Martin	Following engagement by the City Centre All Party Working Group (CCAPWG) with the Night Tsar in December 2024, it has been agreed that ongoing engagement and closer working arrangements are established between Elected Members and the Purple Flag Steering Group (PFSG). The Night Tsar has agreed to provide ongoing updates to the working group, while enhanced elected member engagement on Belfast's nightlife and nighttime economy will be facilitated by the Chair of the CCAPWG joining the PFSG. Research by DfE, TNI and the three BIDs into NI's Night-Time Economy will be launched at a business breakfast event on 17th September . The event will also be used to present findings from the CARD consumer survey; and the first annual update from the Belfast Night Czar.
217	01/11/2021	Tourism Street Signage (Enlightenment Period)	Cllr M Long	Notice of Motion - referred by S&B Committee	Keith Forster	Officers have undertaken initial desk-based research on the Belfast Enlightenment Period, its potential tourism appeal and a list of proposed options. Further work on the motion has been delayed due to other priority work areas however consideration and audit of associated tourism experiences will form part of the ongoing Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDP) development work.
289	01/12/2022	Translink - Night-time provision of services	Cllr D Lyons	Notice of Motion – debated at council	Cathy Reynolds	This motion remains open at the request of members. The activity included within the motion has been mainstreamed and included within the Belfast Agenda action plans: "Expand the timetable with a greater service in the evenings and funding for the provision of night-time services", for which Translink are the lead partner. Council has had positive engagement with relevant Ministers and continue to work with Translink and other interested stakeholders to respond to the increased calls for the extension of night-time public transport services. A report will be submitted to SPR Committee following receipt of correspondence from Ministers seeking support and financial contributions from a number of Executive Departments and from Council for a pilot scheme that would span both the 2025-26 and 2026-27 financial years, with an anticipated start date of November 2025.

425	15/01/2025	Gary Moore Statue	Cllr B Smyth	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Sinead Grimes	This motion will be considered at the next meeting of the City Hall/ City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group, scheduled for November 2025. A group called the Wild Frontier Memorial Project are leading the project and are aiming to fundraise the estimated costs of £80,000.
431	05/02/2025	Bristol Music Fund	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	Officers have met with counterparts in Bristol City Council in April 2025, in relation to the establishment of the Bristol Music Fund. Further information will be brought back to a future committee meeting.
465	06/08/2025	Artist and Creative Studio Space	Cllr A Groogan	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Keith Forster	NEW: No update yet available

Notices of Motion and Issued Raised in Advance recommended to CLOSE

ID	Date	Notice of Motion	Proposed By	Referral Route	Lead Officer	Update / Latest Status
309	22/02/2023	Rent Controls	Cllr C Beattie	Issue Raised in Advance (Special CG&R)	Nora Largey	<u>Recommend to close (Category 1)</u> A letter was sent to the Minister for Communities on 29 May 2025 to engage with the Council and other key stakeholders concerning rent controls in Belfast. A response was received on 5 June 2025 and is included on the agenda for the September meeting of CG&R. The Department's response advised that Section 7 of the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 placed a duty on them to research and consult on the implications of a rent freeze/cut, and that a report was subsequently laid in the Assembly and published on the Department's website. The response also highlighted that since the council's initial correspondence, the primary power to freeze or cut rents, as provided for by the Private Tenancies Act has expired. Nevertheless, the power to restrict the frequency of rent increases has remained and was commenced by the Minister from 01 April this year. From this date, private sector rents can only be increased once in every 12-month period, with a 3-month notice. This legislation will assist low-income tenants by providing assurances that they will not face multiple or unexpected rent increases over a short period of time.
450	07/05/2025	Proposed US Tariff on Films Made Outside of the US	Cllr S de Faoite	Issue Raised in Advance (CG&R)	Damien Martin	<u>Recommend to close (Category 1)</u> Letters to each Ministerial office regarding US Film Tariffs were sent on 24th June. To date, responses have been received from TEO, DfE and the UK Government and are included on the agenda for the September meeting of CG&R.

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