

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 5th August, 2025

MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

Also in attendance: Alderman McCullough and Councillor de Faoite.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet,
Open Spaces and Streetscene;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building
Control; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and
Governance Co-ordinator.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 3rd June were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st July.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 2.b) EVAWG - additional in year Local Community Fund allocation, Councillors R-M Donnelly, Doran, and Murray declared an interest in that their employers had applied for the fund and left the meeting whilst this item was being considered.

Councillors Verner, Doran, M. Donnelly declared an interest under item 5.e) Department of Communities (DfC) Letter of Offer Community Support Programme 2025-2026, in that their employers had applied for the support programme. Under the same item, Councillor Canavan declared an interest in that she was a board member of Blackie River Community Group which had applied for the fund. The Councillors left the meeting whilst this item was being considered.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

Financial Reporting - Quarter 4 2024/25

The Committee noted the year-end report and the associated financial reporting pack.

End Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG) - additional in year Local Community Fund allocation

The Committee was provided with an update on the EVAWG contracts from The Executive Office and the Tier 1 grants which had been awarded.

During discussion, Members highlighted the importance of spike testing and requested an overview of the EVAWG work being undertaken across the Council.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. Noted the recipients of Tier 1 grant awards approved under delegated authority by the Operational Director of Neighbourhood Services;
- ii. Noted the potential for further in-year financial support in response to correspondence to TEO seeking additional resources to meet the demand for community led EVAWG local change projects;
- iii. Agreed the proposed approach to allocate any additional Momentum fund, Local Change Fund grant support and additional in-year allocations for the Regional Change Fund;
- iv. Agreed that officers review the current Policing and Community Safety Partnerships programme support of spike testing and whether there was an opportunity/need to increase the provision as part of the draft momentum programme; and

- v. Agreed that a summary of council wide EVAWG activity be provided at a future meeting.

Additional Item - GLL Update

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services advised that notification had been received from GLL Trade Unions in relation to planned strike action.

The Committee noted the information provided and that further updates would be provided to the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum, together with the Member request for the Trade Union to present to the Committee.

Matters referred back from the Council/Motions

(Alderman McCullough was in attendance for this item)

Notice of Motion - Safeguarding Belfast's Playparks

The Committee deferred consideration of the motion to allow further information to be provided to the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum on the consultation and policy process.

Notice of Motion - Support for Endometriosis Patients

The Committee considered the notice of motion which, in accordance with Standing Order 13 (f), had been referred for consideration by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 24th June.

The Committee agreed to adopt the undernoted motion, which was moved at the meeting by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor Groogan:

***“This Council notes that 1 in 10 women suffer from endometriosis: the second most common gynaecological condition. Endometriosis is a chronic and life changing condition. Despite this, waiting times for endometriosis treatment in the North has been labelled ‘shocking’ by Endometriosis UK. Women often have to wait years for an NHS diagnosis and can be waiting up to 7 years for life changing surgery. The Department of Health figures show that the total number of women waiting for a gynaecology outpatient appointment here has more than double in seven years, yet the north remains the only part of the UK and Ireland without a specialist endometriosis centre available through the public health service. Those unable to afford private care are forced to wait years for NHS treatment, enduring avoidable pain that inhibits their quality of life. This Council will write to the Belfast Health Trust and the Health Minister to outline these concerns and request urgent investment to bolster NHS support and reduce waiting times for endometriosis patients. This Council also notes the wider lack of awareness around endometriosis and other female health related illnesses. This Council therefore commits to organising a public workshop in Belfast City Hall to help end the stigma around endometriosis. This Council will invite statutory health bodies, women's health campaign groups, elected members, Council staff and*”**

members of the public to attend and participate in this event, to raise awareness, and build support for patients of this illness.”

The Committee agreed to write to the Belfast Health Trust and the Health Minister as set out in the motion with the additional request for information on patient referrals for treatment in other parts of the UK.

The Committee noted that a subsequent report would be brought to Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Notice of Motion and the potential costs implications.

**Notice of Motion - Stranded Dream
Report – Anaka Women's Collective**

The Committee considered the notice of motion which, in accordance with Standing Order 13 (f), had been referred for consideration by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 24th June.

The Committee agreed to adopt the undernoted motion, which was moved at the meeting by Councillor Murray and seconded by Councillor Bower:

“This Council endorses the Stranded Dreams report launched by Anaka Women’s Collective on the need for targeted education provision for young refugees and asylum seekers in Northern Ireland and agrees to write to the Ministers of Economy and Education to outline our support for the recommendations, including a pilot scheme for the Greater Belfast area.”

The Committee agreed to write to the Ministers of Economy and Education as outlined in the motion.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Dates and Times of Future Meetings in 2025

The Committee was advised that the schedule for meetings in 2025 was unable to be amended. It was reported that the planned meeting dates for 2026 would be presented in due course and officers would identify suitable dates within that schedule to ensure that the Council and Committee meetings would not take place on successive evenings.

Noted.

Notice of Motion Update - August 2025

The Committee were provided with an overview of the progress on those Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which remained open following the February 2025 update, and those Motions and Issues which had since arisen.

It was reported that there were currently 36 active Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which the People and Communities Committee was responsible for and the following motions had been recommended for closure:

Category 1

- Cleansing Task Force (Ref 255)
- Corey Jack Memorial Park (Ref 286)
- Secure Needle/Drug Waste Bins (Ref 345)
- Signage at Finaghy Community Centre (Ref 353)
- Signage at Ruby Murray Park (Ref 362)
- Books for Refugee Children Living Across Belfast (Ref 389)
- Erection of Memorial Tree – Ruby Murray Village (Ref 428)
- Family Parking at GLL Leisure Centres (Ref 430)
- Returning of Black Bins to Properties (Ref 445)

Category 2

- Creating Better Access into the Hills (Ref 145) and Belfast Hills 'Call to Action' Document (Ref 161)
- Memorial at Former Workhouse Burial Site – Donegall Road (Ref 436)

During discussion, Members suggested that two of the motions should remain open so that further work could be undertaken.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- Noted the updates to all Notices of Motion / Issues Raised in Advance that People and Communities Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1; and
- Agreed that the following motions should remain open: Returning of Black Bins to Properties (Ref 445) and Family Parking at GLL Leisure Centres (Ref 430) to allow further reports to be submitted to the Committee on the issues raised;
- Agreed to the closure of the remaining 10 Notices of Motion / Issues Raised in Advance, as recommended in paragraph 3.5 of the report; and
- Requested an update on motion Provision of toilet facilities at Falls Park (Ref 387) to include Woodvale Park provision.

**Consultation Update - proposed new rules
for the sale and supply of puppies and
kittens in Northern Ireland**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To make Members aware that The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has launched a public consultation on proposed new rules for the sale and supply of puppies and kittens in Northern Ireland. The consultation was launched on 2nd June 2025 and closes, for councils, on Monday 15th September 2025.

1.2 Summary of the Proposals

1.3 All persons seeking to:

- sell;
- give away; or
- otherwise transfer ownership

of a puppy or kitten (under six months old) will be required to apply to their local council to be entered onto the Register of Sellers and Suppliers of Puppies and Kittens. Registration will be valid for one year and will have conditions attached.

1.4 Applicants will be required to:

- pay a fee, which will be set by the council and will be nil for the first year (for any non-businesses);
- prove that they are the keeper of the mother of the puppies, by producing proof of a valid dog licence for the puppies' mother, or by producing proof of a valid licence to keep a dog breeding establishment or a pet shop where the mother of the puppy is kept;
- declare that they are the keeper of the mother of the kittens; and
- comply with the conditions of registration.

1.5 Councils:

- will not be required to carry out an inspection;
- will have powers to suspend, vary or revoke a registration;
- will have powers to inspect an address; and
- will have powers to take samples from animals for traceability purposes.

- 1.6 Whilst Council would welcome any legislation to improve animal welfare, we do not agree that Councils or other bodies should be required to take on this new legal requirement for puppies and kittens to be registered without a more robust and transparent assessment of the regulatory and financial impacts being assessed and laid out as part of the consultation with Councils or the impacts on rate payers

2.0 Recommendation

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to agree the proposed consultation response as attached in Appendix 5 and to agree to officers forwarding the response to the Department by the closing date of 15th September 2025 and advising it remains draft and subject to full Council ratification after the call in period of the September Council.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (the Department) is seeking views on a proposal to introduce a registration system for persons selling, giving away, or otherwise transferring ownership of puppies and kittens aged under six months old.
- 3.2 A key objective of the Department is to end third-party sales of puppies and kittens. A third-party sale is a sale that occurs when the seller has not bred the animal themselves but has obtained the puppy or kitten from a breeder so that they can sell it onwards.
- 3.3 Whilst we welcome any legislation to improve animal welfare, we do not agree that councils (or other organisations), should be required to take on this new legal requirement for puppies and kittens to be registered without a more robust and transparent assessment of the regulatory and financial impacts being assessed and laid out as part of the consultation with Councils / rate payers.
- 3.4 It is suggested that other alternative organisations should also be explored around the delivery of this new requirement, not excluding the Department themselves. for e.g. USPCA and other animal charities. We also advocate that a centralised register is created and maintained for NI hence one Department (DAERA) or central lead organisation would help facilitate this role. It is noted that the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine are responsible for a registration scheme in ROI.
- 3.5 Furthermore, it is our view that other reforms need to be addressed prior to the introduction of the proposed registration regime, and that the review of dog breeding

legislation and the regulation of rescue and rehoming centres remain the priority.

3.6 Other key points made in the response:

- Officers from Councils have met with DAERA to strongly advise of our concerns of the difficulty of enforcing the proposed legislative provisions, e.g. the possible need for inspections, response to complaints, and possible litigation, criminalising individuals where there are no animal welfare offences. Council feels and legislation is especially difficult to enforce in relation to cats/kittens given their roaming nature.
- Enforcement responsibilities being devolved to local Government without a more robust, transparent and appropriate assessment to rate payers of the corresponding resources, funding assessment and transfer from DAERA, powers or legal protections.
- Costs impacts include need for investment by rate payers in a new IT system, new administration costs and recurring costs, a business support role around servicing a public facing register, new staff costs etc
- Ongoing litigation with the Department on the withdrawal of funding for Animal Welfare to Councils.
- Councils are still dealing with the new legislation on XL bully safeguards and incurring non-budgeted and on going costs, which the Department expected to be absorbed by rate payers, the legislation still impacts on day to day Dog Warden service capacity.

3.4 Financial and Resource Implications

The Department has completed a Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) (See Appendix 2). There are significant concerns about the potential financial and resource implications of these proposals and our concerns have been highlighted throughout our response to the consultation.

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

The Department has completed an Equality and Disability Screening Exercise (See Appendix 3) and a Rural Needs Impact Assessment (RNIA) (See Appendix 4). We have made comments on both in our responses to Questions 15 and 16.”

During discussion, several Members raised concern in relation to lack of funding for the enforcement of the issues raised and the amount of time it has taken for the proposal to come forward after the inception of Lucy's Law.

The following additions were suggested by the Committee:

- Emphasis on the scale of the resource challenge the Council would face;
- A clear and direct call for DAERA to provide dedicated funding for enforcement of the proposals;
- Concern that the emphasis was on the Council to deliver the scheme but did not hold the powers to set license fees;
- Concern that the delivery of such a scheme would impact enforcement resource, thus, mandatory inspections for breeders needed to be funded;
- The difficulty of enforcement across 11 Council areas versus a centralised approach; and
- The issue of the smuggling of kittens and puppies also needed to be emphasised.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Agreed the proposed consultation response (Appendix 5) and the inclusion of the additional aforementioned points raised by the Committee; and
- Agreed that officers forward the response to the Department by the closing date of 15th September, 2025 and advise that it remained a draft response, subject to full Council ratification and call in period of the September Council.

**Forth Meadow Community Greenway Opening
Hours and Opening Hours Pilots (5 Park Sites) -
Consultation Findings**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To update Members on key findings of two community consultation exercises - Forthmeadow Community Greenway Opening Hours Consultation, and Opening Hours Pilots (5 park sites) consultation exercise and agree next steps.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note key findings for both consultation exercises and consider and approve next steps as follows.**

Forthmeadow Greenway

- Note resident feedback and opening hours preference for each section/site
- Note comments on programming or further physical enhancements to the FMG
- Consider trialling alternative gate opening hours (24/7 or other) for any of section/sites within the Greenway for a one-year period; or alternatively agree to officers formalising standard dawn-to-dusk opening hours into the Greenways By-Laws

Opening Hours Pilots

- Note resident feedback on each of the 5 park sites, including combined feedback on Falls Park from both consultation exercises
- Note the need for artificial lighting and additional security to ensure park safety were highlighted as barriers/concerns to extended opening hours across all five park surveys.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 Members will recall that at P&C Committee on 14th January 2025 [see Appendix 1] officer's updated on planned consultation exercise into residents views on the opening hours of the Forth Meadow Greenway, as well as a separate consultation exercise - Opening Hour Pilots at 4 park sites (Botanic gardens, Falls Park, Ormeau Park and Woodvale Park). The inclusion of a further site, Belmont Park, was agreed at this time.**
- 3.2 Since its construction the Forthmeadow Community Greenway, as well as the 5 Park sites that are the focus of the Opening hours consultation follow Council's standard 'dawn (7.30am at earliest) to dusk (10pm at latest)' opening hours pattern with times changing throughout the seasons as daylight lengthens or shortens. This report sets out the findings of both consultation exercises on extending Greenway gates/ parks opening, and sets out associated recommendations for Member's further consideration and agreement.**

3.3 Forthmeadow Community Greenway Opening Hours Consultation

3.3 Officers ran an open survey on Council's Your Say platform from 15th January to 27th February 2025 and held three drop-in sessions in late January at Highfield Community Centre, Springfield Park (Dam) and Falls Park Bowling Pavilion. The aim of the consultation was to capture residents' views on 24 hour /7 day a week (24/7) opening of 14 gates across the Greenway that connect on to its main lit spine, as well as any other suggestions relating to the opening hours of individual gates. It was also an opportunity to get view on concerns/ barriers to supporting and suggested programming/activities and further physical improvements required to facilitate extended hours of use.

3.4 The consultation was promoted through Council's social media pages and communications to a range of stakeholders including local resident groups, environmental groups, community groups and elected members. In addition to the erection of posters (that included QR codes linking to the survey) in the local community facilities and at entrances to the Greenway, at Member's request, an additional leaflet drop took place within residential areas in proximity to the Greenway. Whilst only two of the drop-in sessions were well attended, the online survey inviting views on 24/7 opening of 14 gates on the Greenway that connect directly onto its lit spine/pathway, attracted 156 responses.

3.6 Findings

Consultation feedback confirmed community preference for existing operational hours pattern to be retained for all sections, with the exception of Glencairn Park to Forthriver Linear Park Section (Forthriver Crescent and Forthriver Road gate) where views on 24/7 opening were mixed. The overwhelming reason given by respondents for not supporting of 24/7 opening was anti-social behaviour and safety concerns.

3.7 14 alternative suggestions were made in relation to opening the various sections of the Greenway 24/7. These included retaining existing dawn to dusk opening (5), and closing later in the evening [during wintertime] 9pm (4), 9/10pm (1) and 8pm (3). 85 comments on programming or further physical enhancements were received ranging from cycling, (dog) walking/ running groups to enhanced lighting to improve safety and exercise/outdoor gym facilities.

- 3.8 An overview of the consultation findings for each section are summarised in the table below, and a detailed analysis of feedback on each gate within is within 'Appendix 1 – Forthmeadow Greenway Consultation – Detailed Analysis'

Section Gates Consulted Upon	Consultation Finding
Section 1 - Glencairn Park to Forthriver Linear Park	Overall respondents were not opposed to both pedestrian gates consulted upon remaining open 24/7 (over 56% in favour or undecided for each gate); however out of those recorded as living in close proximity to this Section (5 minutes' walk or less away) – half (50%) were against Forthmeadow Crescent gate remaining open 24/7.
Section 2 - Ballygomartin Road to Springfield Road	Respondents overall, and those living in close proximity to the section, were marginally against the two pedestrian gates consulted upon in this part of the Greenway remaining open 24/7. (48% of respondents overall & 56% of those living 5 mins walk away from the Section were against)
Section 3 – Springfield Park (Dam) to Falls Park	<p><u>Springfield Dam</u> Respondents overall, including those living in close proximity to Springfield Dam, were against the three pedestrian gates and one vehicular gate within the site remaining open 24/7.</p> <p><u>Falls Park</u> Respondents overall, including those specifically living in close proximity to Falls Park, were against the two pedestrian and one vehicular gate consulted on within the Falls Park site remaining open 24/7. <i>Note: Falls Parks gate opening hours were subject of both consultation exercises.</i></p>
Section 4 - Bog Meadows Nature Reserve	Respondents overall, including those living in close proximity to the section, were against the two pedestrian gates and one vehicular gate in this section remaining open 24/7 (59% against); however the 31 residents recorded as living in close proximity to this section (5 minutes' walk or less away) – were marginally in favour or undecided (52%) about the Donegall Road (Broadway) pedestrian gate remaining open 24/7.

3.9 Opening Hours Pilots Consultation (5 park sites)

Officers ran an open survey on Council's Your Say platform from 19th February 2025 to 16th April 2025 and held five drop-in engagement sessions - one at each of the park sites throughout March and April. The aim of the consultation was to capture residents' views on extending opening hours of the parks. Similarly to the previous consultation exercise, it was also an opportunity to get views on concerns/ barriers to supporting, suggested programming/activities and further physical improvements required to facilitate extended hours of use.

- 3.10** The consultation was promoted on Council's social media pages and through communications to a range of stakeholders including local resident groups, environmental groups, community groups and elected members. In addition to the erection of posters in the local community facilities and at entrances, (all included QR codes linking to the survey) - a leaflet drop took place within residential areas in close proximity to each of the park sites and banners were erected within the parks.
- 3.11** The 5 online surveys inviting views on extending opening hours at each of the park sites attracted a total of 1678 responses overall, which are broken down as follows: Botanic Gardens (652), Ormeau Park (593), Woodvale Park (308), with smaller levels of interest for both Belmont Park (51) and Falls Park (47) - however the combined number of responses for Falls Park across both consultation exercises was 203.
- 3.12** Consultation feedback has confirmed community support for extended park opening hours at Botanic Gardens (70% in favour, 4% undecided), Ormeau Park (70% in favour, 3% undecided), and Belmont Park (71% in favour 6% undecided). Across these sites the most favoured opening hours pattern was overwhelmingly 24/7 opening however there were a number of concerns were raised in relation safety and ASB and the need for more security to facilitate extended use. The need for artificial lighting to ensure park safety was highlighted as the main physical barrier to extended opening hours across all park surveys. Concern over the impact of artificial lighting on wildlife was a theme across all park surveys, with the need for ecological assessments and use of wildlife/bat friendly lighting suggested by a number of respondents.
- 3.13** Although there was support for Fall Parks' opening hours being extended, this was not in line with the views of the majority of overall respondents for both consultation

exercise including to the more detailed Forthmeadow Greenway (FMG) consultation. Overall circa 58% of the 203 respondents for both consultation exercises were against changes to opening hours of specific gates/ park in general. There was no clear support for extending the opening hours of Woodvale Park (65% against) at this time with the main reason being ASB concerns. Detailed analysis of all park surveys are found in Appendix 3 – ‘Parks Opening Hours Consultation – Detailed Analysis (5 sites)’, and an overview of Falls Park’s finding in Appendix – 4 ‘Falls Park Combined Analysis’.

- 3.14 The requirement for artificial lighting to facilitate extended park use and ensure safety during darker hours was raised a total of 956 times across all surveys. Members are reminded that the installation of any new lighting infrastructure would require significant capital investment, and that any requests for lighting schemes to be considered for any sites must be directed through to Council’s Capital Programme for progression through standard stages. This will also be an opportunity for ecological assessments to be carried out in respect to potential gate/route options, and for wildlife friendly lighting options and any associated path improvements that may be required to be explored.

3.15 Financial and Resource Implications

There is currently no revenue budget in place to support any potential animation and patrolling of the Forthmeadow Community Greenway or any of the pilot parks should their opening hours be extended. There is currently no budget in place to fund any requests for lighting schemes at the park sites or any other physical enhancements along FMG. These would be required to be taken through the Council’s capital process.

3.16 Equality or Good Relations Implications /
Rural Needs Assessments

There are no Equality or Good Relations Implications /Rural Needs Assessments associated with this report. Both consultation exercises have been equality screened.”

Proposal

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

In relation to the recommendation of the Forth Meadow Greenway, the Committee agrees to the trialing alternative gate opening hours (24/7 or other) for any of section/sites within the Greenway for a one-year period.

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

During discussion of the Opening Hours pilot for Botanic Gardens, Ormeau Park, Woodvale Park, Belmont Park, Falls Park, a range of concerns were raised by the Committee in relation to the survey results, proposed lighting, the protection of wildlife and the need to consider each park separately.

Accordingly, the Committee noted the key findings for both consultation exercises and approved the following next steps:

Forth Meadow Greenway(FMG)

- Noted the resident feedback and opening hours preference for each section/site;
- Noted the comments on programming or further physical enhancements to the FMG;
- Agreed to the trialing alternative gate opening hours (24/7 or other) for any of section/sites within the Greenway for a one-year period.

Opening Hours Pilots

- Deferred consideration of the recommendations to allow further information to be submitted on each park to the Committee in September.

Heritage Lottery Nature Towns and Cities Funding Award

The Committee was reminded that, in October 2024, invitations had been issued for local authorities and other partners to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for funding to build capacity and partnerships, peer networks to share learning and practical solutions and schemes to attract new investment. The total funding pot across the UK was £15 million with a funding limit of £250,000 - £1,000,000 per application.

It was reported that Ulster Wildlife, in partnership with the Council and other key stakeholders, submitted an Expression of Interest and the Belfast bid had been successful at stage 3.

Subsequently, in July 2025 the project was awarded £850,514 through the initiative. This was 92% of the total approved Project cost of £924,418, with in kind contributions from the Council and Ulster Wildlife totalling £73,904 (£59,531 Council funding and £14,373 Ulster Wildlife funding) made up of in kind staff time to manage the project and oversee recruitment.

The Committee considered the Project Overview to develop a shared, co-designed vision and associated set of plans and mechanisms for nature's recovery for the city of Belfast and key surrounding areas, including the Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Belfast Hills. The project would build on existing initiatives, such as the Future of Northern Ireland's Urban Green Spaces' report, work undertaken on Nature Recovery Networks (NRNS) and Belfast 2024.

During discussion, the Committee welcomed the Heritage Lottery Nature Towns and Cities Funding Award.

The Committee:

- noted the contents of the report;
- agreed to the signing of the letter of offer; and
- noted that a further report would be submitted for approval outlining the scope of the project.

Operational Issues

Food Service delivery plan

The Committee was reminded that the Food Standards Agency, in their monitoring and oversight role, required all NI District Councils to prepare an annual Food Service Delivery Plan which sets out the Council's key functions and planned activities for delivery of food hygiene, food standards and other food safety related responsibilities.

The Committee considered the [City Council's draft Food Service Delivery Plan](#) for the 2025/26 year to be submitted to the Food Standards Agency for review.

The Committee approved the draft Belfast City Council Food Service Delivery Plan 2025-2026.

Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 **Members will be aware that the council is required, as a consequence of the cycle of reporting for Northern Ireland, established via Table 1-2 of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Local Air Quality Management Technical Guidance LAQM.TG(22), to provide either an**

annual Progress Report or Updating and Screening Assessment (USA) to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), detailing the status of ambient air quality for the Belfast City Council area, together with progress on implementation of the local air quality management regime, and on achieving or maintaining ambient air pollution concentrations below the respective air quality objective levels for human health, as detailed within the 2007 Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and Air Quality Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003.

- 1.2 Members are advised that for 2025, the council was required to provide a Progress Report to DAERA by 30th June 2025. An extension to the submission deadline until mid-August 2025 has, however, been obtained to allow the 2025 Progress Report to be considered at the People and Communities Committee and for any necessary revisions to be made, prior to the Progress Report being submitted to DAERA for technical appraisal. Accepted 2025 Progress Reports will be made available to the public later this year on the DAERA NI Air website, via the following weblink: <https://www.airqualityni.co.uk/reports/district-council-reports-1>
- 1.3 By way of clarity, Defra have advised that Progress Reports are intended to provide continuity within the local air quality management system, filling gaps between the three-yearly requirement to undertake an Updating and Screening Assessment, whereas Updating and Screening Assessments are intended to identify any significant changes in local ambient air quality that may have occurred since the previous rounds of Review and Assessment were completed.
- 1.4 Accordingly, Members are advised that this Committee report serves to provide context to, and an overview of the Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report.
- 2.0 Recommendation
- 2.1 The Committee is requested to review the attached Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report (Appendix A) and to recommend that the Report be submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' (DAERA) independent technical appraisers by the revised submission deadline of mid-August 2025.
- 3.0 Main Report
- 3.1 Members are advised that to ensure standardisation of approach, and in accordance with requirements detailed within LAQM.TG(22), the Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality

Progress Report has been developed by populating the Defra 2025 Northern Ireland Progress Report Template.

3.2 Accordingly, the Defra 2025 Northern Ireland Progress Report Template requires councils to report on:

- New ambient air quality monitoring data, to include a summary of all monitoring undertaken and a comparison of monitoring results with the air quality objectives (Section 2);
- New local developments that are of a scale or function such that may have an effect on ambient air quality (to include road traffic or other transport sources, industrial sources, commercial and domestic sources, and new developments that comprise fugitive or uncontrolled sources) (Section 3);
- Recent planning applications that the council has been consulted upon by the Planning Authority, where some form of planning condition or other control may have been necessary in order to manage ambient air quality impacts (Section 4);
- Planning policies designed to manage ambient air quality (Section 5);
- Local transport plans and policies (Section 6);
- Climate change strategies (Section 7);
- Progress with implementation of the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021 – 2026 (Section 8) and;
- Conclusions and proposed actions (Section 9).

3.3 Members will be aware that Belfast City Council continues to maintain four Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) across the city, declared for exceedances of nitrogen dioxide annual and 1-hour mean objectives, and encompassing major arterial road transport routes into and out of the city. Details of these AQMAs and their declarations are provided within ‘Section 1.4 Summary of Previous Review and Assessments’ of the 2025 Progress Report.

3.4 With regard to new ambient air quality monitoring data, the Committee is advised that Section 2 of the 2025 Progress Report presents and considers new monitoring data for the 2024 monitoring year. During 2024, the council continued to operate four automatic roadside monitoring sites for nitrogen dioxide at Stockmans Lane, the A12 Westlink at Roden Street, the Ormeau Road and the Upper Newtownards Road at Ballyhackamore. There is a further automatic urban background monitoring site operated by the Environment Agency, located in Belfast city centre at Lombard Street. There were no exceedances of the nitrogen dioxide annual,

or 1-hour mean objectives recorded at any of these monitoring sites during 2024. Indeed, monitored annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentrations during 2024 were comfortably below the 40 mgm⁻³ objective level at all of these monitoring sites, with the highest nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration of 33.3 mgm⁻³ recorded at the Stockmans Lane roadside monitoring site. Moreover, annual and 1-hour mean concentrations have now been below the respective objective levels for a number of years at all of these sites, as evidenced in Table 2.3 of the 2025 Progress Report.

- 3.5 In addition to its automatic monitoring sites for nitrogen dioxide, the council has also placed 80 nitrogen dioxide diffusion tubes at 72 human health receptor locations across the city during 2024. 2024 monitoring data for these diffusion tubes is summarised in Table 2.5 of the 2025 Progress Report, along with preceding years historical data, where available, in Table 2.6.
- 3.6 During 2024, there was only 1 monitored exceedance of the 40 mgm⁻³ nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective, recorded at diffusion tube monitoring site No. 106 (41.3 mgm⁻³), situated adjacent to new residential student accommodation, located at the junction of the M3 Motorway off slip with Nelson Street and the A12 Westlink. However, when this annual mean concentration was corrected for distance to the façade of the residential student premises, the resultant annual mean concentration of 31.4 mgm⁻³ was determined to be in compliance with the 40 mgm⁻³ nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective. Members will appreciate that for the purposes of local air quality management, regulations state that exceedances of ambient air quality objectives should be assessed in relation to the quality of air at locations that are situated outside of buildings or other natural or man-made structures, above or below ground, and where members of the public are regularly present. Accordingly, examples of where air quality objectives should apply are detailed in Box 1.1 of LAQM.TG(22).
- 3.7 Diffusion tube monitoring site No. 70 at Henry Place, located further along the A12 Westlink, which had exceeded the 40 mgm⁻³ nitrogen dioxide annual mean objective in previous monitoring years, returned a 2024 annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentration of 39.1 mgm⁻³; in compliance with the objective. Other elevated monitored nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentrations in 2024 were recorded at Stockmans Lane roundabout (36.2 mgm⁻³) and further along Stockmans Lane (35.2 mgm⁻³). These sites were also in

compliance with the 40 mgm⁻³ annual mean objective. All other roadside and kerbside diffusion tube monitoring sites across the city were generally within the nitrogen dioxide annual mean concentration range of 20 – 30 mgm⁻³ during 2024.

- 3.8 No monitored exceedances of any of the objectives for other ambient pollutants, under consideration within the 2025 Progress Report were recorded across the city during 2024, including for particulate matter (PM₁₀ and PM_{2.5}), sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and benzene (C₆H₆).
- 3.9 Accordingly, and on the basis of our 2024 monitoring data, the council is content that there are no requirements to either extend or amend the boundaries of any of our four AQMAs at this time.
- 3.10 Within Section 3 of the 2025 Progress Report, we have considered relevant new local developments across the city, to include new road traffic and other transport sources, new industrial sources, new commercial and domestic sources, and new developments with fugitive or uncontrolled emissions. We have consequently concluded that for 2024, there are no new, or newly identified local developments, which may have an appreciably adverse impact upon ambient air quality within the Belfast City Council area.
- 3.11 Within Section 4 of the 2025 Progress Report and in terms of planning applications considered, screening or detailed ambient air quality impact assessments were requested for 16 major developments proposed during 2024, that in the council's view, had the potential to have an adverse impact upon ambient air quality. Table 4.1 of the 2025 Progress Report provides summary details of those planning applications, together with information on any actions taken or mitigation measures introduced.
- 3.12 Section 5 of the 2025 Progress Report provides an overview of local planning policies that may be applied to manage ambient air quality for the city, including the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP), and associated supplementary planning guidance.
- 3.13 Section 6 of the 2025 Progress Report provides details of local transport plans and associated strategies that may have an impact on local ambient air quality, including the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) 2035. DfI have acknowledged that a review of economic, social and environmental challenges for the new

eastern plan area has confirmed that a number of key overarching themes, reiterated throughout local, regional and national policy documents, are to be reflected within the ETP 2035, including that pollution from vehicles contributes to poor local ambient air quality and the construction of roads and railways can harm the built or natural environment.

- 3.14 Section 7 of the 2025 Progress Report provides details of local climate change strategies and initiatives that may also have beneficial impacts upon ambient air quality, including formation of a Climate and City Resilience Committee, launch of the Belfast Local Area Energy Plan and delivery of the 2025 Climate Action Plan, as well as details of specific initiatives such as implementation of Phase 1 of the Belfast 'One Million Trees' Programme, which sets a target of planting one million trees across the city by 2035.
- 3.15 Section 8 of the 2025 Progress Report provides details of progress with implementation of the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026.
- <https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/documents/belfast-city-air-quality-action-plan-2021-2026> Updates have been provided by our competent or relevant authority partners, and by other city bodies and partner organisations on actions taken to improve ambient air quality across Belfast during the Action Plan years of 2021-2026.
- 3.16 Finally, Section 9 of the 2025 Progress Report provides overall conclusions and proposed actions. In terms of conclusions drawn from 2024 monitoring year data and monitoring data for preceding years, and mindful of recommendations arising from previous DAERA appraisal reports, including the 20th November 2024 appraisal report concerning our 2024 Updating and Screening Assessment, that the council should move to revoke AQMA No.2 Cromac Street and Albertbridge Road, AQMA No.3 Upper Newtownards Road and AQMA No.4 Ormeau Road, council air quality officers have referred to the minutes of agenda item '7f Air Quality Updating and Screening Assessment 2024' of the People and Communities Committee meeting of 3rd December 2024.
- 3.17 Accordingly, and on the basis of the Committee decision in respect of agenda item 7f, the 2025 Progress Report advises that with regard to revoking our AQMAs, at this stage, the council has decided not to move to revoke any of its Air Quality Management Areas, and instead to continue to monitor within its AQMAs and in other city locations in order

to work towards further improving ambient air quality, having regard to air quality guidelines for ambient air quality as recommended by the World Health Organisation, in its 2021 Global Air Quality Guidelines: particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), ozone, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and carbon monoxide publication.

- 3.18 Members are reminded, however, that with respect to revoking AQMAs, Section 3.57 of LAQM.TG(22) advises that, *‘the revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of compliance with the relevant objective as evidenced through monitoring. Where nitrogen dioxide monitoring is completed using diffusion tubes, to account for the inherent uncertainty associated with the monitoring method, it is recommended that revocation of an AQMA should be considered following three consecutive years of annual mean nitrogen dioxide concentrations being lower than 36 µgm⁻³ (i.e. within 10% of the annual mean nitrogen dioxide objective). There should not be any declared AQMAs for which compliance with the relevant objective has been achieved for a consecutive five-year period’.*
- 3.19 In addition, the 2025 Progress Report advises that the current air quality monitoring network provides an appropriately detailed representation of ambient air pollution levels for the city and, as a consequence, it is considered that the network does not need to be expanded further at this time. The Progress Report further advises that on an annual basis, council air quality officers will, however, review monitoring locations and relocate monitoring sites to better reflect relevant human health exposure.
- 3.20 In terms of forward actions, the 2025 Progress Report advises that the council will continue to monitor implementation of the Belfast City Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026 via at least annual meetings of the Air Quality Action Planning Steering Group, and that we will next report progress with ambient air quality to DAERA via our 30th June 2026 Progress Report.
- 3.21 The 2025 Progress Report finally advises that whilst the current Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2026 will continue to deliver further improvements in ambient air quality within our AQMAs and across the city until its conclusion during 2026, it is the council’s intention, in late 2026, to engage with competent authorities and our city partner organisations concerning development of a new 5-year Air Quality Action Plan for the city covering the period 2027 – 2032.

3.22 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications for the council in the production of this Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report. The Report has been developed from within existing Scientific Unit air quality staff resources.

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

There are no Good Relations Implications or Rural Needs Assessment implications associated with this Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report.”

The Committee:

- noted the Belfast City Council 2025 Air Quality Progress Report ([Appendix A](#)); and
- recommended that the Report be submitted to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs’ (DAERA) independent technical appraisers by the revised submission deadline of mid-August 2025.

Request for Events in our Parks

The Committee considered the request from the All Nation Church for a “March for Jesus” event at Ormeau Park on Saturday, 23rd August, 2025.

The Committee granted authority to the applicants for the proposed event on the date noted, subject to the completion of the appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers:

- I. resolved all operational issues to the Council’s satisfaction;
- II. meets all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and
- III. shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.

The Committee noted that the recommendations were taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for ‘Events’, which was currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.

The Committee also noted that the event would take place before ratification of the committee decision at September's Council meeting.

Update Report on Overfilled bins and bin liners

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To provide an update to members on the work being carried out in relation to the overfilled bins and bin liner collection issues.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to note the contents of this report.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Key Issues

Members will recall this matter was discussed in June and members requested that updates were presented to P&C Committee at the August and September meetings. This report provides an update to members on progress to date.

- 3.2 It should be noted that Corporate Communications have supported and continue to provide resource to Resources and Fleet through the communications and awareness raising elements of the plan. A summary of that activity is in Appendix A.**

- 3.3 The Project Teams and their Resource Advisor colleagues within Waste Management have produced an engagement plan (Appendix B) based on the Implementation and Communications Plan approved by Council. Key Dates to be noted are as follows:**

- 3.4 Monday 4 August – the beginning of **Amber tagging** bedding in period for 8 weeks. Collections continue as normal (i.e. overfilled bins and bins with liners still collected) with warning tag placed on bins and reporting by crews. Enhanced Resource Advisor Teams on ground raising awareness and messaging. Report it App data will be used to inform the engagement and targeting of resources on the ground. It will also be used to measure the impact of the programme during both the amber and red collecting to policy stages.**

- 3.5 September P&C Committee – Further update report to members on the impact of the amber phase and the comms and engagement plan. This update will include a summary of the reporting data and highlight problem areas.
- 3.6 Monday 29 September – planned start date for the beginning of **Red tagging** collecting strictly to policy phase. Overfilled containers will be tagged and will not be collected, and instances reported. Temporary additional clear up teams to be engaged Resource Teams, OSS and Enforcement Teams will be deployed to targeting remaining hot spot areas.

Project Team progress as at time of writing of this update report:

3.7 Overfilled Bins – Domestic Waste

The following actions are ongoing or are on schedule to be carried out as detailed

- In order to strengthen the presence of educational and communications on the ground, additional Agency Resource Advisors have been recruited. Staff have received their full day of induction and training and advised on the work required, campaign details and timeframes around communications and engagement..
- The Additional Resource Advisor Staff have been deployed and began operating in Urban Belfast from Monday 21st July. It is envisaged that this early messaging and later engagement will soften the landing of the bedding in and collecting to policy periods.
- Briefing information and FAQs have been prepared and issued to internal stakeholders w/c 21st July. For example, this includes a 2-page collection crew brief with graphics and scenarios.
- Customer Hub have been made aware of timings, comms and sequencing around the campaign and have agreed a bank of FAQs to support any customer engagement around the proposed changes.
- Corporate Comms are preparing a member briefing pack with FAQs supplied. It is planned that these are to be issued on Tuesday 29 July alongside the main press release.
- The Project team have held briefings with operations managers and assistant managers and their crews.
- Community Outreach team are involved and have compiled a list of locations, areas and activity (e.g. Fresher's week) to support the campaign messaging

- w/c 21st July. Corp Comms have been included in this and will align their social media messaging to these events and amplify as appropriate. Campaign material has been provided to the Outreach Team to support their engagement.
- Campaign materials, letters, leaflets and posters have been printed and issued to the Resource Advisor Team to support resident engagement.. Example letter included in Appendix C. Engagement will be refined into the hotspot areas where overfilled bins are problematic based on reporting in the amber and red periods. Posters have also been delivered to all community centres and Household Recycling Centres to support the campaign.
- Trade Unions have been updated at the recent Resources and Fleet TU and Resources and Fleet Health and Safety fora. Messaging sent via Firetext to all teams on the ground w/c 21st July to align with other internal messaging and briefings.
- Internal Communications are running an Interlink piece in August and some messaging in community centre screens to inform staff of the campaign, many of whom are residents of Belfast themselves.
- Recent Summer City Matters had a 2-page piece around good bin behaviour and better recycling. The Autumn/Winter edition will also include a piece around the campaign and collecting to policy approach planned from 29th September. The project team have supplied this to Corporate Communications to include in the Autumn/Winter edition.
- Amber and Red Notification tags. An initial order of 40,000 amber tags has been placed, following a procurement exercise, which were circulated to crews and internal stakeholders w/c 21st July. This aligns with crew briefings etc planned for the bedding in period starting 4th August. Red tags will be ordered at end of August in time for Red Tag/Collecting to policy briefings with Waste Collection Operations Management.
- It is recognised that an additional hot spot area response team will be required from when we collect to policy. Planning has commenced to ensure that these posts will be in situ for the collecting to policy phase.
- The Resources Officer and team have been charged with compiling a distribution list of all agents, housing associations and management companies to advise on campaign and the application of the collection

policies relating to all containers, including euro bins which are common at apartment blocks. This communication is based on campaign materials and letter to households and it is planned this will be issued w/c 28th July. The team have also arranged for some of the new campaign materials to be translated into alternative language formats to support households whose first language may not be English. The Corporate contract for this service has expired and requires renewal, so the team have went out to quotation for this which may delay the arrival of the translations which ideally would have be in place in advance of 4th August.

- Waste Management Operations have increased stock levels of recycling containers in anticipation of increased demand as a result of the campaign. As the focus is on Urban Belfast, recycling box stock, in particular, has been increased to meet demand for additional or replacement containers. The project team will monitor the impact on orders and work with WM operations to ensure container supply is able to meet demand.

3.8 Overfilled Bins – Commercial Waste

Ongoing and future activities are as follows

- A dedicated data gathering exercise is currently being conducted by the Project Officer with crews/rounds and customers to determine an average % of commercial customers presenting overfilled bins. This is due to be completed by 31st July and will inform any additional resource requirements needed for Support Services to support the Commercial Waste team.
- A4 sized Amber and red stickers will be introduced as majority of customers use large euro bins and tags would be missed. These will reflect the same domestic messaging adapted for commercial customers. These have been designed and ordered to align with crew briefings. Commercial Waste timings will align with domestic actions.
- Support Services have been provided with a template letter to issue to all customers (approximately 3000) advising them of the campaign, the timelines involved and how to avoid overfilled bins. This letter was issued on the 25th July so customers will receive this info w/c 28 July onwards.
- Further work to refine a reporting procedure for commercial crews when collecting to policy i.e. no report it app use for commercial crews due to no integration with CREST so an alternative will be

required to photograph and report Overfilled Bins from 29th September. The Project Team continue to work with Support Services and Comwaste Operations to resolve this issue.

3.9 Bin Liners – Domestic Waste

Activities in relation to Bin Liners are as follows:

- All public messaging around bin liners has been incorporated into the wider messaging around the campaign and aligned to the same timeframes for overfilled bin policy.
- In terms of engagement with cleaning providers, all companies that could be identified as operating in Belfast in April 2025 were contacted. Only one provider, based in Newtownabbey replied with queries. All others were content with the information and approach and didn't think the policy would negatively impact their operations.
- A future generic update email has been drafted to update these providers and will be issued week commencing 28th July. Within the email there will be an offer to receive physical or digital campaign materials, should they feel that this will be of assistance to their client base.
- The Project Officer will continue to engage with the individual company around their outstanding queries.

3.10 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial implications associated with this report. All costs will be covered from within existing revenue estimates.

3.11 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessments

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

During discussion, the Director of Resources, Fleet, Open Spaces and Streetscene answered a range of questions regarding missed bins, overflowing bins, reporting data and enforcement activity, prosecution information, communication literature in different languages, and fly tipping in alleyways.

In relation to one Member's concern on missed bins and overflowing alleyways in the Belvoir area and Donegall Road area, the Director advised that the issues would be investigated and a site visit would be undertaken, if required.

One Member highlighted missed bin collection issues in the New Lodge, in particular those bins with missing lids and the need for consultation with residents. The Director advised that he was working with the Housing Executive to resolve the issue, to ensure the bins could be collected.

In relation to Member's concern regarding residents' confusion of the new tagging campaign, bulky waste collection services awareness and additional recycling bins availability, he advised that he would liaise with managers and the Communication Team to ensure the messaging was clear.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report;
- Agreed that a report be submitted to the Committee in relation to enforcement activity, prosecution information and a geographical breakdown of problem areas, fly tipping and house clearances, impacting the bin collections.

**Department of Communities (DfC) Letter of
Offer Community Support Programme 2025-2026**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The main purpose of this report is;

- Inform Members that Council has received the Letter of Offer for the Community Support Programme 2025/26 from the Department for Communities (DfC). The Department has provided an uplift of 9% across certain elements of the programme.
- Advise Members that the Chief Executive has accepted the Letter of Offer, subject to Council approval and seek approval for him to accept subsequent Letters of Variance on behalf of the Council.
- Seek members' approval to issue further payments to funded organisations upon their completion of monitoring and relevant administrative checks.

- Seek agreement from members on the option to allocate the additional funding provided based on the detail provided in the report.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to;

- Note the CSP funding allocation of £2,939,450.49 presented in the Letter of Offer from the DfC for the 2025/26 financial year.
- Note that the Chief Executive has accepted the Letter of Offer, subject to Council approval and seek approval for him to accept subsequent Letters of Variance on behalf of the Council.
- Agree option relating to the Community Support General additional funding.
- Agree option for the reprofiling of the budget for Advice and Tribunal services.
- Agree the proposed additional funding allocation for: Community Support General, Advice Grant, Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension-Tribunal Representation and Welfare Reform Mitigations- Face to Face Advice.
- Note the additional funding to Social Supermarket projects based on previous committee decisions.
- Approve that officers progress funding payments where appropriate, following completion of due diligence requirements based on the proposals.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1** Members will be aware that the Department for Communities (DfC) provides an annual grant to Council through its Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer. This funding provides an element of the budget towards Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building grant, Summer Scheme Grant as well as Generalist Advice.
- 3.2** The CSP also provides 100% funding for other elements of activity such as Social Supermarkets, Welfare Reform Mitigations and Integrated Advice Partnership Fund (debt related services)
- 3.3** At the March Committee, Officers advised that the Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer for 25/26 had not yet been received by Council from DfC. At that stage, Members granted approval for officers to progress funding agreements and provide 50% payments for the

Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building grants and Generalist Advice.

- 3.4 Council received the CSP 2024/25 Letter of Offer from DfC on 13 June 2025. There is an increase to this year's funding across several new and existing elements. Table 1 below presents a breakdown of the allocation for 2025/25 in comparison to 2024/25.

Table 1

Belfast City Council	2025/26	2024/25
Community Support General	£993,199.04	£911,191.78
Advice Grant	£727,984.03	£667,875.26
Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation - Appeals	£84,302.81	£77,342.02
Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Face to Face Advice	£268,704.81	£246,518.17
Social Supermarket	£777,811.14	£711,627.57
Integrated Advice Fund Partnership (2024-2026)*	£87,448.66	£160,804.82
CSP Grand Total (Per Year)	£2,939,450.49	£2,775,359.62

*Please note that the Integrated Advice Fund Partnership (IAP) is allocated over a two-year period thus there is no uplift in 2025/26. Members agreed the funding awards for IAP at Committee in April 2025.

- 3.5 **Additional Funding by CSP Heading**

Table 2 illustrates the additional 9% uplift and available budgets under each heading.

3.6 Table 2

CSP Heading	Additional Funds 2025/26
1. Community Support General	£82,007.26
2. Advice Grant	£60,108.77
3. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation- Appeals	£6,960.79
4. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Face to face Advice	£22,186.64
5. Social Supermarket	£66,183.57

3.7 Proposed Allocation of Additional Funds

It is proposed that additional funding for elements 1-4 should be allocated using the approaches outlined below. Further detail is provided in Appendices 1-3

1. Community Support General

- 3.8 Members are asked to consider and agree their preferred option for allocating the additional funding provided under the Community Support General heading (£82,007.26) as outlined in Table 3. Further detail on the organisations funded through Capacity and Revenue awards is provided in Appendix 1

Table 3

Option	Description	Pro	Con
1	Allocate all the additional funding £82,007.26 to the 43 Capacity funded groups. Each group will receive a non-recurrent payment of £1,907.15	Capacity grant funding enables the provision of training, development and support programmes provided by 43 organisations to smaller organisations within communities. The funding contributes to staff and programme delivery running costs. As employers Capacity funded groups have seen an increase in staff related costs this past year particularly in relation to National Insurance Contributions. They have also seen an increase to the costs	Revenue organisations do not have access to these additional funds.

		<p>running costs of their programmes.</p> <p>At Committee in March 2025, members agreed to double the funding allocation received by Revenue funded groups from a maximum of £20,629 in 2024/25 to £41,258 2025/26. Capacity funded organisations did not receive an uplift.</p>	
2	<p>Allocate the funding to Revenue and Capacity funded groups. 130 organisations will receive a non-recurrent payment of £630.83</p>	<p>Revenue and Capacity organisations will receive additional funding to meet their running costs and provide services.</p>	<p>This option does not take into account the difference in the annual level of funding to both Revenue and Capacity applicants.</p>
3	<p>Use the funding to offset the council allocation that was used to double the revenue awards in 25/26.</p>	<p>This would offset the significant council investment that was made to double revenue awards in 25/26.</p>	<p>This option would not provide an additional support to funded organisations.</p>

Appendix 1 provides a revised allocation for Capacity and Revenue based on options 1 and 2 above.

- 3.9 Members will be aware that this is the final year of awards of Capacity and Revenue Grants 2023-2026 in its current form. An open call for our new Large Grant grant programme 2026-2029 will be launched at end of July/beginning of August.

2. Advice Grant and Provision for Appeals.

- 3.10 Members will recall the Council agreed to provide £270,000 on a recurrent basis for the provision of an Appeals and Tribunal Service in the City. At Council in July, members agreed to extend the provision of the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service (BCTS) provided by Ligoniel Improvement Association on behalf of the Belfast Advice Group (BAG) to

the end of March 2026. Members also agreed that future services will be procured and for Officers to begin the process with the contract awarded and provider in place for April 2026.

This year DfC provided an allocation of £84,302.81 towards the provision of Appeals and Tribunal Services. Including Council's contribution of £270,000 the total available budget is

- 3.11 £354,302.81. BCTS requested £242,000 which was agreed by Council in July. Thus, there is a potential underspend in the budget of £112, 302.81.

Funding relating to Advice and Appeals is a specific element of the Community Support Programme and ringfenced for the provision of related services. The review of Advice services which council completed in December 23 highlighted the rising delivery and staffing costs experienced by advice organisations, this additional funding will support organisations to address these issues. Members may also wish to note that the DfC regional review of advice services is ongoing. Members are asked to consider the reprofiling of the budget and agree a preferred option presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4

3.12

Option	Description	Pro	Con
1	Redistribute the £112,302.81 providing an uplift for Generalist Advice and Appeals to the five area-based Advice Consortia using Council's allocation model. (Table 5 below)	<p>Council currently funds 5 Area based Advice consortia that includes 14 independent advice providers in 19 locations and additional cover via extensive outreach provision.</p> <p>Providers have expressed concerns regarding the growing costs relating to staff such as National Insurance Contributions and operating</p>	<p>The demand for services and complexity of dealing with multiple needs is growing. This greatly impacts on the level of service provision. The additional funding is short-term for 2025/26 on a non-recurrent basis. Next year the provision will return to its current level thus the service capacity of the organisations will</p>

		<p>overheads.</p> <p>Staff retention has posed a significant problem for advice providers. Due to short-term contracts and lower salary compared to other agencies such as Housing Associations</p> <p>Providers have also discussed the growing need for the provision of services that meet the needs of more complex cases and also of a growing population who do not have English as a first language.</p> <p>An additional non-recurrent allocation for this year will provide the Advice providers with sufficient resources to maintain their current level of staff, meet increased overheads and provide additional resources to meet the growing demand for services on complex cases as well as for people who require additional support such as translation services.</p>	<p>reduce. Providing funding for 1 may lead to a higher dependency of the providers on Council funding and of people on the service. A demand that may be inflated with the provision of additional support this year.</p> <p>The providers may use some funding to increase its staff salaries and off set NIC. This increase may lead to an unmanageable cost next year</p>
2	<p>Redistribute the £112,302.81</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing an uplift for Generalist Advice and Appeals to the five area-based 	As Above	As Above

	<p>Advice Consortia using Council's allocation model. (Table 5 below) up to £85,302.81.and allocating the remaining £27,000 towards the procurement process ensuring that contingencies are in place to effectively transition from current funding to contracted service provision e.g. costs to transfer service user records and systems from the current to the new provider. Grant permission to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations to the generalist advice services should the budget provision of up to £27,000 not be used.</p>	<p>This is the final year of the current arrangement for the Tribunal Service. From April 2026 the service will be provided by a contracted organisation following a procurement process. It is envisaged that the provider will be secured by December 2026. The current provider has extensive case records and systems in place for maintaining the records. The provider is also dealing with an extensive caseload that may take longer to complete beyond the 31March 2026.</p> <p>This allocation will provide Council with an opportunity to manage the transition from the current funding arrangements to the new contract. It may cover items such as transfer of Casefiles and systems, current caseloads, issues relating to GDPR.</p>	<p>Its £27,000 that can be used for direct service provision.</p>
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In relation to the Advice Grant, DfC has provided an uplift of £60,108.77 for the provision of Generalist Advice Services. Members are asked to consider allocating the uplift based on Council's current advice grant funding model.

Table 5 below presents the level of additional funding each Area Based Advice Consortia will receive this year for the uplift and budget reprofile options. The additional funding is non-recurrent.

3.13 Table 5

Area Consortium	Council's Funding Allocation Model	Advice Grant Uplift	Additional Budget Reprofile Option 1	Additional Budget Reprofile Option 2
Central	9%	£5,381.69	£9,953.06	£7,560.13
East	14%	£8,628.51	£16,229.47	£12,327.66
North	26%	£15,556.90	£29,063.05	£22,075.67
South	15%	£9,259.96	£17,299.22	£13,140.11
West	35%	£21,281.71	£39,752.01	£30,199.34

Appendix 2 provides details of the revised allocation for each Consortium based on uplift plus Options 1 and 2

3. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Tribunal Representation- Appeals

- 3.14 Members are asked to note the increase of £6,960.79 towards the provision of tribunal and appeals and agree the allocation be used for the Belfast Citywide Tribunal Service.

4. Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension Face to face Advice

- 3.15 The funding relating to the WRME Face to Face Advice is funded 100% by DfC. The Department allocates the funding of £268,704.81 as follows for 2025/26.

Table 6

Organisation	% Of Total Allocation	Uplift Allocation
Advice Space	46.74%	£125,585.24
Advice Space (EBIAC)	13.32%	£35,779.89
Falls Community Council (NDA)	13.32%	£35,779.89
Ballynafeigh Community Development Association	13.32%	£35,779.89
North Belfast Advice Partnership (LIA)	13.32%	£35,779.89

The allocation is made to specific organisations covering the geographical areas aligned with the advice consortia. Should an organisation not be able to use all or part of this allocation, the area consortium will be able to bid for the available funds. All decisions relating to expenditure reprofiling, monitoring and reporting is made by the Department.

Members are asked to note DfC's allocation relating to Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension.

5. Social Supermarket Funding

- 3.16 In May 25 Council agreed to provide bridging support to 2024/25 funded groups from 01 April – 30 June 25, up to a maximum amount of £13,738 per group. In June, council further agreed that grants to the 24/25 scheme would be rolled over until 31 March 2026 except to those organisations which received funding in 2024/25 but did not apply for funding in 2025/26.

Council also granted delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations based on the agreed option, if further funding becomes available. The total amount of funding required for 25/26 to make the awards approved by council is £752,109.67 with DFC allocating £777,811.14 in the current year. Members will be aware that DFC fund Social Supermarkets at 100%, this provides additional funding of £25,701.47 for 25/26 Social Supermarkets. Given the low value of these additional funds, the Director has used his delegated authority to provide an equal allocation to all 19 groups who have been awarded funding in 25/26. This would equate to £1,352.71 which could be used to meet increasing demands for the services that social supermarkets provide.

- 3.17 Members will note that the criteria for funding Social Supermarkets will be reviewed by September 2025 and Officers will bring a report to Committee in advance of the open call for 26/27.

3.18 **Financial Implications**

All awards listed in the appendices can be made in line with existing budgets for 2025/26. Members should note that the Capacity and Revenue awards which are multi annual awards from 23/26.

3.19 **Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment**

This will be considered throughout, and any appropriate issues highlighted to Members. Any amendments to existing scheme or new scheme will be considered in the context of any equality/good relations and rural needs considerations.”

Proposal

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

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refer consideration of the recommendations under points 3 and 4 of the report, namely, the options relating to the Community Support General additional funding and the options for the reprofiling of the budget for Advice and Tribunal services to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to allow more time for the options to be reviewed.

The Committee:

1. Noted the CSP funding allocation of £2,939,450.49 presented in the Letter of Offer from the DfC for the 2025/26 financial year;
2. Noted that the Chief Executive had accepted the Letter of Offer, subject to Council approval and approved the Chief Executive to accept subsequent Letters of Variance on behalf of the Council.
3. Agreed to refer the options relating to the Community Support General additional funding to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration;
4. Agreed to refer the options for the reprofiling of the budget for Advice and Tribunal services to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration.

5. Noted that the proposed additional funding allocation for: Community Support General, Advice Grant, Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension-Tribunal Representation would also be subject to the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (under points 2 & 3 above). The Committee agreed to the proposed additional funding allocation for the Welfare Reform Mitigations-Face to Face Advice to ensure it continued for another year.
6. Noted the additional funding to Social Supermarket projects based on previous committee decisions;
7. Approved that officer's progress funding payments where appropriate, following completion of due diligence requirements based on the proposals, once agreed.

Dual Language Street Signs (Verbal Update)

The Director of Planning and Building Control advised that, due to the response rates to the recent dual language street signs surveys being unusually low, an investigation had been undertaken which had identified an issue which resulted in a number of responses to the surveys that were using the pre-paid envelope being held by Royal Mail at the delivery centre.

Further investigation found that this amounted to around 375 responses being held at the delivery centre, with an unconfirmed number being sent through by Royal Mail to its return centre. Whilst the 375 responses had subsequently been recovered by Officers, Royal Mail were sending batches of additional responses from the return centre.

In response to Members' concerns, the Director of Planning and Building Control confirmed that the applications that were considered at the committee meeting in June had not been impacted and an assessment was being carried out on the applications that would have been brought to the August Committee and those that were currently out to survey to establish whether there would be a need to undertake any resurveys.

The Committee noted the update in relation to the Dual Language Consultation responses and that a further update would be submitted to the Committee in September.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Lagan Gateway - Pedestrian Crossing (Councillor de Faoite to raise)

In response to Councillor de Faoite in relation to Lagan Gateway and the need for a pedestrian crossing on Annadale Embankment to access it, the Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure and the Active Travel Unit to formally support the call for a crossing under Phase 2 enabling works for safe access to the Lagan Gateway.

Alley-gate Update (Councillor Doran to raise)

In response to Councillor Doran's concern in relation to the length of time it was taking to install alley gates in various entries in North Belfast, the Committee noted the update provided and further funding installation request to the Department of Finance and that a report be submitted to a future meeting to provide a further update.

**Targeted Upgrades to Enhance Park
Accessibility (Councillor Brooks to raise)**

In response to the Chairperson's concern in relation to accessibility in Parks, the Committee agreed that a report be submitted to a future committee to outline the current standard of accessibility in Parks and what steps had been taken to date, an overview of engagement and research that had been undertaken with children directly, together with the potential of mapping the accessibility of parks across the city for users.

Chairperson