

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Thursday, 18th June, 2026

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE
ADJOURNED ON 10TH JUNE, 2026.

Members present: Councillor J. Duffy (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor; and
Councillors Black, Bower, Bunting,
Collins, de Faoite, S. Douglas,
Kelly, Lyons, McAteer, McCabe,
McDonough-Brown, McKay, R. McLaughlin,
Meenehan, Nelson and Ó Néill.

Also attended: Councillor Flynn.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. L. O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism;
Ms. R. Campbell-Palmer, Culture Development Manager;
Ms. C. Cassin, Markets Development Manager
Mr. F. Grant, Operations Development Manager;
Ms. M. Miller, Marketing Manager, City Development; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Groogan and I. McLaughlin.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 13th and 27th May, 2026, 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 June, 2026.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in relation to the presentation from the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership and the item 'Belfast City and Region Place Partnership Update' in that he was on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and left the meeting whilst those items were under consideration.

Councillor McDonough-Brown declared an interest within the item 'Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update' in that a member of his family was associated with an applicant to scheme and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Presentations

Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP)

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. M. Doyle, Chair of the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP), and Mr. J. McDonald, Managing Director of GRAHAM Investment Projects.

Ms. Doyle provided the Committee with an overview of the BCRPP, which was a public-private partnership collaboratively working toward the following objectives:

- Strengthen collaboration and partnership working across the Belfast City Region;
- Promote and market the region nationally and internationally;
- Enhance engagement and advocacy with key stakeholders to advance regional investment and development priorities;
- Support delivery of Belfast Region City Deal projects and strategic initiatives; and
- Drive inclusive, sustainable and innovative growth that strengthens communities and delivers long-term prosperity.

She informed the Committee that the BCRPP continued to use a four-pillared approach to programming, namely, investor-focused activity, advocacy and engagement, media and communication, and community engagement.

The Committee was provided with further information on BCRPP's key areas of focus which included detail in respect of strategic communications, BCRPP's supporting approach to the Council-led Belfast Place-Based Growth Proposition, engagement with the Executive and the UK and Irish Governments, and community engagement through the BCRPP Community Forum.

Mr. McDonald outlined some of BCRPP's investor-focused activity including its attendance at the UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) and MIPIM. He highlighted the value of those events to showcase the region globally to investors and developers.

Ms. Doyle concluded the presentation by setting out the next steps for the partnership for 2026/27 to help build on the collaborative working to support the place-based growth proposition for the city, showcase and position the region as a place to invest, attract inclusive investment to deliver regeneration and development, and maximise the social, environmental and economic benefits of investment and development activity through continued community engagement.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Doyle and Mr. McDonald for their attendance and presentation, and they left the meeting.

The Committee noted the information provided within the presentation.

Destination Cathedral Quarter
Business Improvement District

The Senior Manager for Culture and Tourism provided the Committee with an update on the upcoming ballot for a third term of Destination Cathedral Quarter (CQ) Business Improvement District (BID).

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. D. Corr, Destination CQ BID Manager.

Mr. Corr presented an overview of the BID, which had been established in 2016 to provide a collective voice for businesses in the area. He reported that, since its establishment, the BID had helped deliver projects to improve trading, increase partnership working, and leverage substantial additional funding for the area.

He informed the Committee that the BID area was the city's leading destination for culture, hospitality, enterprise and learning with a diverse mix of businesses, residents, students and visitors. He stated that the BID area was a key contributor to city's economy and international reputation and highlighted the significant growth opportunities in relation to regeneration and investment.

The Committee was provided with further detail in relation to the BID's plan for 2026-31, which would include work to:

- Provide continued support for businesses;
- Make the area safer, greener and cleaner through environmental improvements, safety initiatives and public realm enhancements;
and
- Promote and animate the area through events and cultural programming and marketing to increase footfall and visitor spend.

Mr. Corr highlighted that the BID worked closely with the Council to support city centre objectives in relation to regeneration, economic growth, tourism, cultural activation and to ensure effective engagement with the business community.

He concluded the presentation by requesting the Council's endorsement of Destination CQ BID in the upcoming ballot for a third term to continue and maintain the strategic partnership and ongoing collaboration on regeneration, place-making and city centre development.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Corr for his attendance and presentation, and he left the meeting.

The Committee:

- i. noted the information provided within the presentation;
- ii. noted the update on the pending ballot for the third term of the Destination CQ BID; and
- iii. agreed to return yes votes for the Council properties located within the BID boundary.

Restricted Items

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

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

Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the Vacant to Vibrant Programme and sought approval for citywide grant awards as recommended by the Vacant to Vibrant assessment panel following the receipt and assessment of recent applications.

The Director of City Regeneration and Development also provided the Committee with an update in relation to applicants V2V126 and V2VCW006. In response to a Member’s question regarding the applicant V2VCW006, the Director advised that the Council would take a flexible approach in supporting the applicant and that further updates would be brought back to the Committee.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update in relation to the Vacant to Vibrant Programme which would be supporting up to 85 businesses/organisations to locate or expand into long-term vacant units;
- ii. agreed the recommended citywide grant awards as outlined within the report; and
- iii. noted the update in relation to applicants V2V126 and V2VCW006.

Assembly Rooms Cluster Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on a number of workstreams in relation to the Assembly Rooms Cluster.

The Committee was advised that funding from the World Monuments Fund (WMF), which was announced in February, 2026, had assisted in progressing works including the development of a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the Assembly Rooms; façade, window treatment and painting; interpretative signage and public realm improvements; and roof repairs. It was reported that the ongoing work would form part of a wider range of works to enhance the physical building and its environs in advance of the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

In respect of next steps and the future use of the Assembly Rooms Cluster, the Committee was provided with an update on recent Party Group briefings. It was

recommended to the Committee that, following the feedback received from those briefings and in advance of future reports to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, further consideration would be given by Party Group Leaders, at its meeting in June, 2026, on the next stages for determining the future use of the Assembly Rooms, the development and funding strategy, and the potential for a soft market testing exercise in relation to the assets adjoining the Assembly Rooms. The Committee was advised that those matters would subsequently be brought back to either Committee as appropriate. It was highlighted that the draft text for the interpretative panels would also be submitted to Party Group Leaders.

In addition to the update provided, the Committee also considered a request for the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson to attend a WMF reception in the City Hall in September, 2026, as part of WMF's Escapade event.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the activity to date, and the planned activity, in relation to the Assembly Rooms Cluster, which included repainting and façade treatment to the Assembly Rooms, a Conservation Management Plan, roof repairs, interpretative signage panels and works to improve the immediate environs in advance of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann;
- ii. noted the update on the recent Party Group briefings and agreed that, in advance of future reports to City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, further consideration would be given by Party Group Leaders, at its meeting in June, 2026, on the next stages for determining the future use of the Assembly Rooms, development and funding strategy and the potential for a soft market testing exercise in relation to the assets adjoining the Assembly Rooms;
- iii. noted that those matters would subsequently be brought back to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as appropriate to consider the funding applications in the context of a strategic approach to funding for Council heritage projects, including the potential for the use of the Regeneration Framework, as previously agreed by the Council;
- iv. noted that the draft text for the interpretative panels would be brought to the Party Group Leaders; and
- v. agreed that the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson, or their nominees, would attend the World Monuments Fund reception in the City Hall as part of the Escapade event on Thursday 17th September, 2026.

UUEPC - Review of Housing Association Grant Changes

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the University of Ulster's Economic Policy Unit (UUEPC) review of the Department for Communities' (DfC) changes to Total Cost Indicator (TCI) and Housing Association Grant (HAG) rates,

and which outlined the emerging implications for the delivery of social housing in Belfast, particularly within the city centre.

During discussion, a Member highlighted the viability challenges which faced housing regeneration delivery across all tenures and stated the need for further engagement with Executive Ministers in respect of those challenges. The Director of City Regeneration and Development outlined the ongoing engagement with the UK Government as part of the Belfast Place Based Growth Proposition and the engagement undertaken by the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership with Executive Ministers in relation to the issues raised by the Member. At the request of the Member, the Director advised that a further report would be submitted to a future meeting in relation to next steps and the potential for further engagement with Executive Ministers on the viability challenges which had been highlighted.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the key findings and recommendations from the Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) review including the scale of housing need in Belfast, the cost pressures affecting delivery and the implications of the current Total Cost Indicators (TCI)/Housing Association Grant (HAG) model;
- ii. noted that the findings and recommendations were independent conclusions of the UUEPC;
- iii. noted that the UUEPC review was submitted to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), who was leading the Department for Communities' (DfC) Subsidy Review which was scheduled to be completed by October, 2026;
- iv. noted that the DfC Subsidy Review would form a key part of the evidence base on the challenges of delivering social housing within the city;
- v. noted the wider engagement, which would include a Members' workshop with the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) and Housing Associations to consider the UUEPC findings and identify the issues which the Subsidy Review must address;
- vi. noted that DfC did not release TCI grant-rate data, as requested by the Committee, as this information was restricted to DfC, NIHE and the Housing Associations, and was therefore unavailable to inform the UUEPC's Review; and
- vii. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting in relation to next steps and future engagement with the Northern Ireland Executive on the housing viability challenges across all tenures within the city.

Bad Debt Write-Off

The Committee authorised for an outstanding account of £22,766.87 to be written off in accordance with Section M12 of the Council's Financial Regulations.

Belfast Zoo Quarterly Performance Update

The Committee noted an update on the performance of Belfast Zoo for Quarter 4 of 2025/26 which included information in relation to visitor numbers, education services, animal welfare and conservation, marketing and events, health and safety and financial performance.

Belfast Bikes Quarterly Performance Update

The Committee considered an update on the performance of the Belfast Bikes Scheme for Quarter 4 of 2025/26, which included information in relation to the operator contract, operational performance, marketing activity, expansion of the scheme, and sponsorship.

During discussion, in response to a Member's request, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy advised that an update would be brought back in relation to engagement with other Council's on the potential to expand the scheme beyond the city's boundary.

After discussion, the Committee noted the update on the performance of the Belfast Bikes Scheme for Quarter 4 of 2025/26.

Markets Quarterly Update and External Market Approval

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided a performance and financial update of the city's markets for Quarter 4 of 2025/26 and outlined the priority activity for Quarter 1 of 2026/27.

The report also provided the Committee with an update on the Spring Market held in May, 2026, and on the 2026 Christmas Continental Market.

The Committee also considered a request from the Clothes Cycle Ltd. to run a clothing recycle market at Newforge Sports Complex on 25th July, 2026.

The Committee:

- i. noted the performance and financial update for Quarter 4 of 2025/26;
- ii. noted the priority activities for Quarter 1 of 2026/27 in line with the business plan;
- iii. noted the feedback on the 2026 Spring Market and the plans for the 2026 Christmas Continental Market; and
- iv. approved an external market licence for a Clothes Recycle Market to be held in the Newforge Sports Complex on 25th July, 2025.

Artist Studio and Creative Workspace Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the work to support the artist studio and workspace sector within the city and outlined a proposed action plan for artist workspaces for year one of a five-year action plan.

The Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the report; and
- ii. approved the year one action plan for artist workspaces, as outlined within Appendix 1 of the report.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 Update

The Committee noted an update on the delivery of the 2026 Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann which was presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 22nd May, 2026.

Requests to Present

Department for Infrastructure - Castle Street Plans

The Committee considered a request from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to attend its next meeting in August, 2026, to provide an update on the potential reopening of lower Castle Street to public transport.

During discussion, a number of Members raised concern regarding the potential reopening of lower Castle Street to public transport and DfI's approach to pedestrianisation within the city centre. The Members highlighted that the reopening of the area to public transport would not align with the 'A Bolder Vision for Belfast' strategy, which was approved by the Committee at its meeting in April, 2026, and the proposed vision and objectives of DfI's forthcoming Eastern Transport Plan.

A Member also highlighted the need for the Department's engagement with the business community within the area to take place in advance of DfI attending the Committee and suggested that, in addition to providing an update on the potential reopening of lower Castle Street, that the DfI officials who would be attending provide also an update on the position of the Eastern Transport Plan.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to:

- i. receive a presentation from the Department for Infrastructure at its next meeting in August in relation to the potential reopening of lower Castle Street to public transport; and
- ii. request that the Department for Infrastructure also provide an update on the Eastern Transport Plan.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Notice of Motion - Silent Fireworks

The Committee considered a report which advised that the undernoted motion in relation to silent fireworks, which was proposed by Councillor Flynn and seconded by Councillor Smyth, had been referred to the Committee for its consideration by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 26th May, 2026.

"This Council recognises the distress caused by high-noise fireworks to many residents, including autistic people, those with sensory issues or PTSD, elderly residents, pets, livestock and wildlife.

Council notes that low-noise fireworks are increasingly used at public events and can provide the same visual impact while significantly reducing noise disruption to communities.

Accordingly, Council agrees to:

- Explore the use of low-noise fireworks at Council-run and Council-funded events;
- Include low-noise alternatives in future procurement processes;
- Receive a report on implementation options and costs; and
- Write to the Justice Minister calling for a review of fireworks legislation and the sale of high-noise fireworks in Northern Ireland.”

The Committee noted that the notice of motion had been received and agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting which would outline a detailed consideration of the motion and any potential resource and financial implications.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Local Growth Fund Consultation Response

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to update the Committee on the consultation on the UK Government’s Local Growth Fund – the successor to Shared Prosperity Fund and to seek committee approval of a draft response to the consultation.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Consider and approve the draft response and agree that this is submitted to NIO
- Note the update on the ‘Belfast Trailblazer’ that had been referenced in the June 2025 budget statement and agree to issue correspondence to NIO to seek clarity on their plans for this fund.

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 The Committee has previously received an update on the Local Growth Fund (LGF) – the successor to the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). The report noted that there were a number of significant changes from SPF to LGF namely:**

- Management of the fund was to involve ‘collaborative working’ between the regional government

departments, NIO and MHCLG (previously no involvement from regional government departments or NIO)

- Funding was to move from a predominantly revenue-based budget to heavily capital-focused one (indicative split 66% capital; 34% revenue funding).

3.2 In December 2025, Belfast City Council lead officers on Go Succeed were advised by MHCLG that there was to be an allocation of £2.53million revenue funding from the Local Growth Fund for one year, representing an overall reduction of around 60% on the previous revenue allocation. At the same time, all delivery partners that had previously led on the economic inactivity projects supported under the Shared Prosperity Fund from 2023-2026 were advised that their projects would also be extended for one year – but with a similar reduction in available budgets. These are the only two elements of expenditure that have been allocated from the Local Growth Fund to date this year – and they represent the entirety of the available revenue funding for this period.

3.3 NIO launched the consultation on the Local Growth Fund on 8 May 2026. The consultation will close on 26 June 2026. NIO expects to present a draft investment plan to Westminster before the recess period, with a similar plan being shared with the NI Executive in parallel. Subject to these respective approvals, they will then begin the process of commissioning service delivery against the agreed priority areas. The consultation seeks views on resource funding from 2027/28 to 2028/29 and capital funding from 2026/27 to 2028/29. It does not seek to revisit the original decisions around the capital and resource split of the funding.

3.4 The Local Growth Fund in NI will have a budget allocation of £129million funding over the next three years – an indicative allocation of £43million per annum. The indicative annual breakdown is as follows:

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Capital	3.8*	27.4	27.5	29.8
Revenue		11.8	15.5	13.2
Total	3.8	39.2	43	43

**Note – this £3.8million was allocated to North City Business Centre for the development of workspace in North Belfast.*

3.5 The draft strategic framework underpinning the Fund is based around two priorities for growth, namely:

- Enhancing productivity: driving higher value-added activity and increasing the efficiency of the economy to create capacity for sustainable long-term growth

- Promoting active participation in the workforce: tackling the barriers to employment to increase the working age population's participation rate and meet immediate labour needs.

3.6 Each priority includes a number of sub-priorities as follows:

Priority	Sub-priority
<i>Enhancing productivity</i>	Business support and innovation
	Strategic infrastructure investment
	Skills enhancement
<i>Promoting active participation in the workforce</i>	Localised economic inclusion
	Early intervention

- 3.7 The consultation document notes that, while MHCLG will maintain oversight of the Local Growth Fund, the Northern Ireland Executive departments will 'plan and oversee delivery of the Fund' for all future expenditure. In reality, this is likely to mean that both the Department for the Economy (DfE) and the Department for Communities (DfC) will take the lead on agreed priority projects and will be responsible for commissioning and managing delivery.
- 3.8 It also notes that a cross-sectoral Partnership Group will be established to 'provide insight and advice on delivery'. A Partnership Group existed under the Shared Prosperity Fund and local government had two representatives – one from MUDC and one from BCC. Discussions with NIO have indicated that this Partnership Group will be established once the programme is agreed, rather than advising on the programme content – as was the case for the SPF Partnership Group.
- 3.10 The consultation document is attached to this report (appendix 1) and an outline of indicative responses is also included in appendix 2. The consultation is focused around a number of questions relating to the core priorities (Enhancing Productivity and Promoting Active Participation) and the sub-priorities as well as the proposals around delivery and consideration of the equality implications.
- 3.11 In addition to responding to the questions, there are a number of issues that the Committee should be aware of and that have been woven into the draft response. These include:

- Explicit support for continued investment in Go Succeed with the potential to supplement existing support and integrate other capital interventions aligned to programme priorities e.g. grant support for digital transformation
- Proposal that the activities supported under 'Promoting Active Participation' should focus on outreach and engagement support and that outcomes should be appropriate and aligned to this support i.e. job outcomes are not always an appropriate outcome to evidence the impact of this work. This will also help streamline the support ecosystem with the SPF-funded activity focusing on the 'supply' side (reaching out to engage key target groups; providing key employability support and helping address barriers to progression) while the LMP activities will then focus more on the 'demand-side' activities i.e. working with employers to design and develop employment support interventions for those further from the labour market and create/ring-fenced specific job roles for individuals that are successful in interviews for those roles
- Potential to use local government as a delivery mechanism for economic growth support activities – direct commissioning rather than open competitions. This reflects a similar approach under Shared Prosperity Fund when councils were a conduit for substantial proportion of delivery.

3.12 A key omission from the current consultation is the reference to the 'Belfast trailblazer' that was noted in the June 2025 budget statement regarding the fund. At that time, it was intended that this would be a proxy for the 'Pride in Place' funding that was made available to towns and cities across the UK. An indicative funding allocation of £2million was set aside for 'a Belfast neighbourhood' for a period of 10 years – similar to the funding that was allocated to Derry and Coleraine in 2023. Officers understand that this indicative allocation has simply been 'rolled into' the overall Local Growth Fund with the expectation that at least £2million will be allocated to Belfast-based projects – but with no ring-fenced mechanism for doing this. It is proposed that formal correspondence is issued to NIO to verify this position.

4.0 Financial & Resource Implications

No specific financial resources.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

No specific equality or good relations implications. NIO will be responsible for the overall equality impact assessment."

The Committee:

- i. approved the draft Council response and agreed that it would be submitted to the Northern Ireland Office; and
- ii. noted the update on the “Belfast Trailblazer” that had been referenced in the UK Government’s budget statement in June, 2025, and agreed that correspondence be issued to the Northern Ireland Office to seek clarity on its plans for the fund.

Positioning Belfast to Compete

Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee’s consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- Update Committee on the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2025 / 2026 programme.
- Seek approval to extend Council’s involvement into the BCRPP to 2026 / 2027.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note a presentation will be made at Committee from representatives from the Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP).
- Note the update on the BCRPP 2025 / 2026 programme as set out in this report.
- Approve that officers continue to support the delivery of the BCRPP 2026 / 2027 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the Taskforce, and in line with Council’s procurement processes.
- Approve Council investment (from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget) as part of the wider public private sector partnership contribution towards the delivery of the BCRPP 2026 / 2027 programme.
- Approve attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2027 as part of the BCRPP 2026 / 2027 programme, noting

that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM will be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget.

- Approve attendance of the Chair of the City Growth & Regeneration Committee and the Council's nominated Elected Member / Chair of the BRCD Council Panel, or their nominated representatives, to attend UKREiiF 2027 as part of the BCRPP 2026 / 2027 programme, noting that the BCRPP presence at UKREiiF 2027 will be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) is a joint public-private initiative delivering a structured programme of work to attract inclusive investment that supports regeneration, infrastructure development, and a modern built environment for Belfast and the wider City Region.

3.2 The Partnership is supported by a broad coalition of public, private and anchor institutions, including Belfast City Council, all Belfast Region City Deal partner councils, Belfast Harbour, Translink, Queen's University Belfast, and representatives from the local development and regeneration sector.

3.3 Members will recall that this Committee agreed in May 2026 to receive a presentation from representatives of the BCRPP in June 2026. The purpose of the presentation is to update Members on the 2025/2026 programme of work and the proposed approach to the 2026/2027 programme, including priority issues and objectives for the Partnership moving forward.

3.4 Members may also recall that BCRPP representatives presented to this Committee in June 2025. The Committee subsequently approved Council participation in the 2025/2026 Programme of Work, as part of a wider public-private sector approach and recommended the establishment of a Community Forum/Reference Group. This was intended to provide a mechanism for engagement between the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sectoral Advisory Panel (for Community Planning) and BCRPP partners.

3.5 In terms of context, Belfast City Council has, for over a decade, worked collaboratively with public and private sector partners to proactively promote Belfast to local, national and international audiences to attract capital investment. This supports the delivery of the growth ambitions set out in the Belfast Agenda and aligns with the Council's strategic priority to position the city to compete globally for inclusive and sustainable investment.

3.6 Members will be aware that 'Positioning the City to Compete' is a key deliverable within the 2026/2027 City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan, as agreed in April 2026, and is also aligned with the Council's International Relations Framework 2025–2028, agreed in November 2025.

3.7 The Council plays an important civic leadership role as convener and facilitator, bringing together public and private partners to collectively promote Belfast as a competitive location for investment. This is particularly important in attracting international capital to support regeneration and development, recognising that delivery of growth ambitions requires both public and private sector funding.

4.0 Main Report

4.1 The Belfast City & Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) 2025/2026 Programme commenced on 1 September 2025 and is delivering a structured programme aimed at attracting inclusive investment to support regeneration, infrastructure and a modern built environment across Belfast and the wider City Region. The Committee presentation will provide an overview of progress and highlight key outputs from the current programme. Key areas of focus for the partnership include:

4.2 Communications

The partnership has undertaken proactive, year-round media engagement to reinforce positive messaging around the Belfast region's investment proposition, targeting local, national and international real estate and development audiences, including development of an interactive, digital investment guide showcasing real estate investment and development opportunities across the region.

4.3 Community Engagement

Following a request from this Committee in June 2025, the BCRPP has established a Community Forum/Reference Group comprising representatives from the VCSE Sectoral Advisory Panel. While statutory public consultation requirements are already embedded within the Local Development Plan (LDP) and the planning application process, the Forum is intended to provide a broader platform for engagement with community representatives and to support BCRPP partners in maximising the social, environmental and economic benefits associated with forthcoming investment and development.

Following formal establishment in November 2025, engagement has taken place with VCSE representatives, Council officers and BCRPP representatives on the role of the built environment plays in driving inclusive growth to help identify where local communities can most effectively engage in the

city's physical regeneration and development activity. It is envisaged that, moving forward, the Forum will support the dissemination of information to local communities on forthcoming development proposals and will help identify and support additional opportunities for community involvement in future projects.

4.5 Engagement and advocacy

The Partnership has expanded activity to support two-way engagement with policymakers, the public sector and the real estate community. This includes advancing engagement to support the Belfast City Council led Belfast Place-Based Growth Proposition, which sets out the case for enhanced regeneration funding and proposes the establishment of a City Regeneration Fund focused on housing-led regeneration, green infrastructure and placemaking. The BCRPP has facilitated a number of high-level engagements including convening a joint Ministerial meeting with the Ministers for Finance, Economy, Infrastructure and Communities in September 2025; a meeting with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister held in April 2026; and subsequent follow up meeting with NICS and SIB in May 2025. In addition, following an invite from the BCRPP, the Minister for Communities attended UKREiiF supporting the Region's presence at what has become the UK's leading forum for real estate, regeneration and infrastructure investment.

4.5 Scottish Cities Alliance Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting

Following approval at Committee in February 2026, the Chair of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Council's nominated Elected Member/Chair of the BRCD Council Panel attended UKREiiF to participate in the Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting and wider BCRPP activity.

4.6 The Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting built on earlier engagement in January 2026 between the Scottish Cities Alliance, the Cardiff Capital Region and Belfast City Council to consider city-regional governance and devolution arrangements. The discussions highlighted a shared diagnosis of the 'double squeeze' facing cities in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — characterised by UK-level decision-making and limited devolved powers — which restricts access to long-term funding, capital flows and policy discretion available to English Mayoral Authorities. Participants felt that deeper, faster devolution tailored to national contexts is required, supported by long-term funding under city control and strengthened multi-level governance between UK Government, devolved governments and city regions. Five areas of common ground were identified: the readiness of cities to deliver growth; the value of governance pluralism; the need for varied pace and

models of devolution; opportunities for joined-up engagement through shared instruments; and the importance of a sustained collective voice in UK-level discussions. Participants considered continued group engagement and joint case-making to Westminster. Work is ongoing with representatives of the SCA and Cardiff Capital Region on a continued programme of engagement and next steps.

4.7 Investment focused events

The 2025 / 2026 programme has included participation at national and international real estate showcase events, including representation at UKREiiF 2026 and MIPIM 2026, showcasing the Belfast City Region to global investors and developers.

4.8 At UKREiiF - the UK's leading built environment showcase event, in addition to attending the Devolved Nations Political Leaders Meeting, elected members and senior officials undertook a range of engagements. This included attendance at the Belfast City Region Showcase Reception; the UKREiiF International Investment Dinner attended by senior UK Government Ministers, institutional investors and major UK developers; the City & Regions Breakfast with other UK city leaders; the ministerial roundtable with the NI Minister for Communities and Director of Core Cities UK; roundtable discussions and meetings with national and international investors and developers. Collectively, these engagements helped ensure that the regions' voice was heard within conversations shaping future investment and regeneration priorities across the UK, while also facilitating shared learnings with other Core City elected representatives and senior officers.

4.9 In addition, senior officers attended MIPIM 2026, the world's leading built environment conference and exhibition which attracts approximately 20,000 public and private sector delegates from across the globe. Attendees included major European and UK cities such as London, Manchester, Newcastle, Cardiff, Liverpool alongside, for the first time, an Ireland at MIPIM pavilion, an Irish Government led initiative aimed to showcase Ireland as a progressive, high-growth location for international investment. MIPIM provided a platform for Belfast to position itself to a global audience and attract interest from institutional investors, developers, occupiers and funders.

4.10 BCRPP's presence at UKREiiF and MIPIM has continued to stimulate significant investor and developer interest in Belfast and the wider region. Building on the strong engagement achieved at these flagship events, a coordinated programme of follow-up activity and inward-investment visits is now underway. This includes tailored engagement with:

- New-to-market residential developers: major UK, Irish and international homebuilders considering expansion into Belfast and Northern Ireland.
- Institutional investors: funds and asset managers with active mandates for housing-led regeneration, mixed-use districts and strategic infrastructure.
- End-use occupiers: including FDI companies, commercial and leisure operators, innovation-hub providers and global hotel brands assessing opportunities for expansion into Belfast.

4.11 Proposed approach to 2026 / 2027

The Partnership is governed by a Taskforce comprising representatives from both the public and private sectors. The Taskforce has endorsed continuation of the Partnership into 2026/2027 and the delivery of a structured, pillar-based programme of activity. The presentation to be delivered to Committee by BCRPP representatives will outline the core objectives and proposed programme of activity for 2026/2027.

4.12 BCRPP partners consistently express strong support for the value and benefits of participating in the wider public-private partnership and taking a coordinated approach to investment-promotion activity. While commercial sensitivities limit the detail that can be shared about specific investments secured for Belfast through this work, partners report a clear and shared view of the partnership's added value. This includes its impact on elevating the overall positioning of the Belfast City Region, enhancing the visibility of real estate investment opportunities, and contributing directly to business and investment activity that has emerged as a result of the partnership's work.

4.13 From a Council perspective, the key aims and objectives of continued participation in the BCRPP, and contribution to the programme, include:

- Securing the investment required to support delivery of the city's shared growth ambitions, as set out in the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan, and BCCRIS, while recognising the wider economic benefits, including economic growth, increased rates generation and delivery of corporate priorities;
- Strengthening advocacy and support for the Belfast Place-Based Growth Proposition;
- Maximising the benefits of investment through the Belfast Region City Deal and opportunities presented by the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor;

- Securing investment in the built environment across the city to support job creation, inclusive economic growth, and enhanced physical and social infrastructure; and
- Securing investment in key infrastructure priorities, including waterfront regeneration, connectivity, net zero transition, and innovation-led projects.
- Supporting delivery of the Council's International Relations Framework 2025–2028;

- 4.14 Council plays a key role in both the strategic and operational management of BCRPP including the development, management and delivery of the Programme of Activity. Members are asked to approve Council continuing to take on this role, with officers supporting the 2026 / 2027 programme including governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the Taskforce, and in line with Council's procurement processes.
- 4.15 The BCRPP Partnership is supported and funded by public, private and key anchor institution partners, with external funding forming the majority of the overall programme delivery budget. Members are asked to note the proposed approach to the 2026 / 2027 Programme and approve the Council investment (from existing and approved City Regeneration & Development Budget) as part of the wider public private partnership contribution towards the delivery of the 2026 / 2027 Programme.
- 4.16 Council has facilitated and supported a Team Belfast presence at MIPIM since 2016. Following the positive feedback from MIPIM 2026, the Taskforce has endorsed a Belfast City Region presence at MIPIM 2027, in line with the approach taken by other UK cities and the Irish Government, and has recommended its inclusion within the wider BCRPP programme of activity for 2026 / 2027. The Taskforce considers that, to effectively showcase Belfast and the wider City Region, civic leadership and attendance by Belfast City Council is essential. Members are therefore asked to approve attendance by senior officers at MIPIM 2027, noting that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM will be funded through the wider public-private BCRPP Partnership budget.
- 4.17 Following positive engagement at UKREiiF 2026, Committee approval is sought for the Chair of City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Council's nominated Elected Member / Chair of the BRCD Council Panel, or nominated representatives, to attend UKREiiF 2027 to participate in wider BCRPP activity at UKREiiF, including participation in a Belfast City Region Showcase event. Members should note that the BCRPP presence at UKREiiF

will be funded from the wider public-private BCRPP Partnership budget.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

5.1 The BCRPP Partnership is delivered as a public private sector sponsorship fund and is supported by a range of public, private and key anchor institutions who contribute financially towards the 2025 / 2026 programme, with external and private sector funding forming the majority of the overall programme budget. It is anticipated that the majority of the 2026 / 2027 programme budget will again be funded through external funding.

5.2 Council has previously agreed to contribute of £80,000 towards the 2025 / 2026 Programme, and subject to Members agreement it is proposed that Council contribute £80,000 (from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget) as part of the wider public private partnership investment towards the delivery of the 2026 / 2027 programme.

5.3 Approval is sought for attendance of senior officers at MIPIIM 2027. Travel costs for Council attendance at MIPIIM 2027 to be met from within existing and approved departmental budgets. All other costs related to the Belfast City Region presence at MIPIIM would be met from the 2026 / 2027 BCRPP Partnership programme budget.

5.4 Committee approval is sought for the Chair of City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Council's nominated Elected Member / Chair of the BRCD Council Panel, or their nominated representatives, to attend UKREiiF 2027 to participate in wider BCRPP activity at UKREiiF, including attendance at a Belfast City Region Showcase event. Travel costs for Member attendance at UKREiiF 2027 to be met from within existing and approved departmental budgets. All other costs related to the BCRPP presence at UKREiiF will be funded from the 2026 / 2027 BCRPP Partnership programme budget.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report."

The Director highlighted the update in respect of community engagement and advised the Committee that, further to its decision in June, 2025, to recommend the establishment of a Community Forum/Reference Group, BCRPP had established a Community Forum in November, 2025, to provide a mechanism for engagement between the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sectoral Advisory Panel (for Community Planning) and BCRPP partners to help maximise the social, environmental and economic benefits associated with forthcoming investment and development.

She highlighted also the work of the partnership in relation to advocacy and engagement with policymakers, the public sector and the real estate community, which included engagement to support the Council led Belfast Place-Based Growth Proposition and participation at national and international investment focused events.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the Belfast City and Region Place Partnership (BCRPP) programme for 2025/26, as set out within the report;
- ii. approved that officers would continue to support the delivery of the BCRPP programme for 2026/27, which would include governance processes, administering programme funded expenditure, and entering into associated contracts on behalf of and with oversight from the BCRPP Taskforce in line with the Council's procurement processes;
- iii. approved Council investment, from existing and approved City Regeneration and Development Budget, as part of the wider public-private sector partnership contribution towards the delivery of the BCRPP programme for 2026/27;
- iv. approved the attendance of Council senior officers at MIPIM 2027 as part of the BCRPP 2026/27 programme, and noted that the BCRPP presence at MIPIM would be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget; and
- v. approved the attendance of the Chairperson and the Council's nominated elected Member/Chair of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) Council Panel, or their nominees, to attend the UK's Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum (UKREiIF) in 2027 as part of the BCRPP 2026/27 programme, and noted that the BCRPP presence at UKREiIF 2027 would be funded from the wider public-private sector BCRPP programme budget.

Culture Night Update

The Senior Manager for Culture and Tourism provided the Committee with an update on the planning and preparation for the 2026 Culture Night for Belfast, which would take place on 18th September, 2026.

The Senior Manager highlighted the update in respect of the programme development and engagement, which included an open call for participation in the 2026 Culture Night, which had opened on 1st June, 2026, targeted communication to the cultural sector, and a programme of scheduled in-person information and planning sessions.

She highlighted that, to further strengthen the geographic spread and sustainability of Culture Night, officers would explore opportunities to enhance engagement with Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) across the city. She advised the Committee that officers would continue to engage with the Department for Communities regarding potential funding support for Culture Night.

The Committee noted the update.

Festive Lights Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report / Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To provide members with a report and overview of the 2025 festive lighting scheme and update on ongoing planning for 2026 provision

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Note the contents of this report

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background and Programme Context

The Culture Team currently led on the delivery of the Council’s Christmas Lighting Scheme, working in partnership with appointed contractors, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), Estates and Property teams, and private landowners to deliver a city centre-wide festive lighting programme.

In March 2025, a new tender was issued inviting proposals from contractors to deliver the city’s Christmas lighting provision. This procurement process reflected a shift in approach, recognising the importance of festive lighting not only as seasonal decoration, but as a strategic cultural and economic intervention supporting city centre vitality.

The tender placed particular emphasis on the role of Christmas lighting in contributing to economic growth, reinforcing Belfast City Centre’s position as a major retail, leisure and cultural destination, encouraging increased footfall, and enhancing the overall visitor experience during the peak winter trading period.

This approach aligns with the broader principles of the City’s Lighting Strategy, which positions lighting as a core component of public realm quality, place identity, safety, and the activation of the night-time economy.

3.2 Strategic Objectives of the Christmas Lighting Scheme

One of the core objectives of the Christmas Lighting Programme is to improve connectivity and coherence across the city centre, creating strong visual and experiential linkages between key destinations, including:

- Belfast Christmas Market at City Hall
- Victoria Square Shopping Centre
- CastleCourt Shopping Centre
- Primary pedestrian corridors such as Royal Avenue and Donegall Place

The lighting scheme is therefore not intended as a series of isolated installations, but as a coordinated city centre network that supports pedestrian movement, wayfinding, and dwell time across multiple retail, leisure and cultural anchors.

3.3 2025 Programme Delivery and Performance

The 2025 installation was implemented across a significantly expanded footprint of the city. While the scheme was successfully delivered and well received, several infrastructure and operational issues impacted installation timelines. These included upgrade requirements of power supplies, timeliness of external agency approvals, issues incurred with private supply feeds, constraints due to construction on buildings with infrastructure points.

Despite these operational challenges BCC officers worked well with suppliers to secure the necessary approvals and alternative power sources or locations where required

2025 Infrastructure Uplift and Enhancements

As part of the 2025 programme uplift, Department for Infrastructure (DfI) lighting columns were upgraded in line with current electrical and safety standards. This enabled the safe addition of column-mounted Christmas lighting features across the city centre.

Additional lighting was installed along Royal Avenue, including illumination of street trees. This intervention was widely recognised by BIDs and private landowners as having a positive impact on the inner city core, contributing to improved ambience and increased evening activity.

New lighting curtain installations were introduced on Castle Place and Fountain Lane, alongside colour-controlled festoon lighting on Garfield Street. Going forward, both the Fountain Lane lighting curtain and the Garfield Street festoon installations have remained in situ, with no additional cost to the Council, providing ongoing value from the initial investment.

Some minor issues were recorded during the season, primarily relating to servicing and loading vehicles coming into contact with lighting elements. In total, there were approximately 6 contractor call-outs related to maintenance and minor repairs.

Festive Lighting Commission and Switch-On Event

The full festive lighting programme was safely installed and fully operational in advance of the official Christmas Lights Switch-On event. Delivery was achieved within required

timescales and in compliance with all relevant health and safety requirements.

Approximately 84 wayleave agreements for the installation of eyebolts and fixings were secured enabling lighting infrastructure to be installed across privately owned frontages and buildings.

The successful completion of these agreements in advance of the Christmas period was critical to programme delivery.

3.4 Issues for Long-Term Sustainability and Improvement

While the 2025 programme was delivered successfully, a number of structural and strategic issues have been identified which require longer-term planning and intervention to ensure future viability and growth of the programme.

It is clear that a future strategy should address a number of critical and interdependent components:

- **City Spectacle**: Developing a format and programme capable of functioning as a large-scale tourism product.
- **City-Wide Reach**: Exploring how to achieve greater lighting density and presence beyond the core city centre.
- **Pathways**: Building local skills, knowledge and career pathways within cultural sector for lighting and production
- **Infrastructure**: Addressing key infrastructure challenges and mitigating future operational risks, such as the reliance on private electrical feeds and the loss of fixing points.
- **Future Technologies**: a future-focused approach to festive lighting, recognising that lighting technologies are evolving rapidly and audience engagement is shifting towards immersive and interactive experiences.
- **City-Wide Approach**: At present, festive lighting remains heavily concentrated within the city centre core and future considerations should consider support for neighbourhood retail centres

However, it should be noted that development and implementation of this strategic approach would require an uplift to current fund levels.

3.5 Next Steps and Strategic Direction

Planning is underway for the delivery of the 2026 core scheme and associated switch on event.

Festive lighting budget allocation is £300,000 and, with management support previously facilitated through BCCM. Council have been in ongoing discussions with the BIDs about future provisions of the management of the scheme but for 2026 this will remain as council led delivery.

Officers will continue to engage with the BIDs to identify additional areas that can be supported through allocation of their own funding.

Future intention, aligned with ongoing work on the development of an events action plan, and subject to future budget provision, is to move towards a more strategic, sustainable and place-based approach to Christmas lighting, which:

- Supports economic regeneration objectives
- Enhances the city's cultural offer and visitor experience
- Reduces operational and safety risks
- Builds local creative and technical capacity
- Enables more equitable city-wide participation

3.6 Financial and Resource Implications

There are currently no financial implications attached to this report.

4.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

There are no Equality or Good Relation Implications attached to this report.”

During discussion, the Senior Manager for Culture and Tourism answered questions from the Members in relation to support for organisations along the city's arterial routes seeking to install festive lighting, engagement with the BIDs and the potential to enhance connectivity of the lighting.

After discussion, the Committee noted the update.

UNESCO City of Music Programme Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the delivery of the UNESCO City of Music programme of activity and the progress across accessibility initiatives, community engagement, international partnerships and sector support.

Further to the Committee's decision at its meeting in April, 2026, to approve the priority work areas and budget allocations of the Culture, Tourism and Events Workplan

for 2026/27, which included an allocation for additional UNESCO City of Music activity, the report also outlined a breakdown of the proposed additional activity and associated allocations for the Committee's consideration.

The Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the report; and
- ii. approved the additional aspects of the UNESCO City of Music 2026/27 Workplan delivery, as set out within Appendix 1 of the report.

**Department for Communities Consultation on
Museums Policy - Draft Response**

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a draft Council response, set out within Appendix 1 of the report, to the Department for Communities' consultation on museums policy.

The Senior Manager for Culture and Tourism advised the Committee that, should the draft response be approved, it would be submitted to the Department for Communities by the consultation deadline, with the caveat that it would be subject to ratification by the Council at its meeting on 1st July, 2026.

The Committee:

- i. noted the contents of report; and
- ii. approved the draft Council response to the consultation, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report, and that it would be submitted to the Department for Communities by the consultation deadline, subject to Council ratification at its meeting on 1st July, 2026.

Strategic and Operational Issues

**Committee Plan 2025/26 End-of-Year Report
and 2026/27 Performance Information**

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided a copy of the Committee's End-of-Year Performance Report for 2025/26.

At its meeting in April, 2026, the Committee had approved a draft Committee Plan for 2026/27, subject to additional performance information being submitted to a future meeting. Accordingly, a final Committee Plan for 2026/27 which included performance information was submitted for the Committee's consideration.

The Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the Committee Plan's End of Year Report for 2025/26; and
- ii. approved the performance section of the Committee Plan for 2026/27.

Notices of Motion Quarterly Update

The Committee noted the update in relation to the Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which it was responsible for, as set out within Appendix 1 of the report.

**Minutes of the Zoo Long-Term Financial
Sustainability Group - 27th May 2026**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Zoo Long-Term Financial Sustainability Group of 27th May, 2026.

Chairperson