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BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

30th March, 2026

SUMMONS TO ATTEND THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

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

Notice is hereby given that the monthly meeting of the Council will be held in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Belfast on Wednesday, 1st April, 2026 at 6.00 pm, for the transaction of the following business:

1. Summons
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of the Council (Pages 1 - 12)
5. Official Announcements
6. Minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (Pages 13 - 66)
7. Minutes of the People and Communities Committee (Pages 67 - 70)
8. Minutes of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee (Pages 71 - 94)
9. Minutes of the Licensing Committee (Pages 95 - 108)
10. Minutes of the Planning Committee (Pages 109 - 120)
11. Minutes of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee (Pages 121 - 124)
12. Minutes of the Climate and City Resilience Committee (Pages 125 - 128)
13. Minutes of the Standards and Business Committee (Pages 129 - 132)

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

John Walsh

Chief Executive

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Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall,
on Monday, 2nd March, 2026 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);
The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey);
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCullough and
Rodgers; and Councillors Abernethy, Anglin,
Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, Brennan,
R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson,
Cobain, Collins, de Faoite, M. Donnelly,
P. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas,
S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Groogan,
Hanvey, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, McAteer,
McCabe, McCallin, McCann, McCormick,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay, McKeown,
I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Murphy,
Nelson, Ó Néill, Smyth, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor T. Brooks declared an interest in the item “UPSURGE project” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that she worked for Queen’s University Belfast. However, she clarified that, as she did not work within that team, she did not feel that she needed to leave the meeting for the item.

Councillors Groogan and McCabe declared an interest in the item “City Imagining Investment Programme – Cultural Multi-Annual Grants (CMAG)” within the City Growth and Regeneration minutes, in that they worked for, or with, organisations which had applied for funding. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors Duffy and Groogan declared an interest in the item “Vacant to Vibrant” within the City Growth and Regeneration minutes, in that their employers had applied for funding through the scheme. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors P. Donnelly, R-M. Donnelly, Duffy, Groogan, McCabe, McCann and Verner declared interests under the item ‘Minutes of Shared City Partnership’ which related to the

Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026

matters 'PEACEPLUS', in that they, or their relatives, worked for organisations which had applied for, or were in receipt of, funding under the programmes. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors Beattie, Bradley, Canavan, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, Duffy, Groogan and McCann declared interests under the item 'Social Supermarket Fund' in that they, or their relatives, worked for organisations which had applied for, or were in receipt of, funding under the programmes. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors R. McLaughlin and Long declared an interest under the item "Notice of Motion - Call for the NI Executive to Introduce a Basic Income for Artists Scheme", in that their partners were, respectively, a Junior Minister and a Minister within the NI Executive. Councillor Long also declared an interest in the item "Stand alone Hate Crime Bill", in that his wife was the Justice Minister. They left the room during the discussion on the Notice of Motion.

Councillor Bunting declared an interest in the item "Physical Programme and Asset Management – (ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section)" within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that she was a Committee Member of Belvoir Community Allotments and Shed, as it was a potential satellite site for the UPSURGE project, she left the room during discussion and did not participate in any vote on the matter.

Councillor Lyons declared an interest in the item "Physical Programme Update - Belfast Stories" within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that he was a Member of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). He left the room during discussion and did not participate in any vote on the matter.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Kelly),
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the meetings of the Council of 9th and 13th February, 2026, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor paid tribute to Mr. Damien Lavery, who had recently passed away. He had been a Civil Engineer in the Council's Landscape Planning and Development Team for over 18 years and the Lord Mayor, on behalf of the Council, expressed her condolences to his family and friends.

The Lord Mayor referred to the recent retirements of long-standing staff members Vivienne Fullerton, Roberta Wilkinson and Gary Livingstone. A tribute was also paid to Catherine Christy, who would also be retiring shortly. The Council wished them all well in their retirement.

Councillor Long thanked officers in the Civic Services and the Property and Projects teams for the marking of the Electric Vehicle charging points within the City Hall Courtyard.

Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026

Councillor M. Donnelly referred to the recent passing of Bláthnaid Ní Mhaoilmheanna, aged four, who had been diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour in May 2025. He requested that the Council would illuminate the City Hall as brightly as possible in her memory, and that the Council would consider ways in which to raise awareness of both brain injury and brain cancer.

Councillor Brennan congratulated Emma Kelly and the Community Sports Network (CSN) on recently completing their 15th Winter League. She explained that the winter league was for girls Gaelic Football teams, aged 12-16, with over 1100 girls having registered to take part over 7 weeks. The Lord Mayor agreed to write to Emma and CSN to congratulate them.

Councillor McKeown congratulated the Camogie team of Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, which had recently won the Rosina McManus Cup for the first time in the school's history.

Councillor Maghie congratulated the Hockey team of Strathearn School on having reached the semi-final of the School's Cup.

Councillor McCabe reminded the Council that International Women's Day would take place on Sunday, 8th March. Councillor Groogan added that the Reclaim the Agenda International Women's Day Rally was entitled "Strength in Solidarity" and would take place on Saturday, 7th March, in Writers Square. She advised that guest speakers included former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, and encouraged other Members to attend.

Councillor Groogan also congratulated Hannah Spencer MP (The Green Party), on recently winning the by-election in Greater Manchester.

Councillor Walsh advised the Council that Seachtain na Gaeilge, an international Irish language and cultural festival, would take place from 1st to 17th March, 2026, and he encouraged Members to participate.

A number of Members stated that their thoughts were with the people in Iran, who deserved safety, dignity and a future free from oppression and violence.

Several Members condemned the illegal bombing of Iran by the United States and called for an immediate cessation of US bombs against the country.

A further Member stated that thousands of British and Irish citizens lived and worked in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha, as well as Members of the UK Armed Forces, all of whom had loved ones who were concerned for their safety.

Changes of Membership on Committees

The Chief Executive reported that notifications had been received of the following changes to Committees:

- that the Social Democratic and Labour Party wished Councillor McKeown to replace Councillor de Faoite on the People and Communities Committee; and

**Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026**

- that Sinn Fein wished to replace Councillor Walsh with Councillor R. McLaughlin on the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Council approved the changes.

Request to Address the Council

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Ms. A. Mulholland, Ms. M. Mulholland and Mr. P. McAnespy, representatives from Friends of the Field and the Stranmillis Neighbourhood Association, regarding the future of Lower Botanic Gardens. The Council agreed to receive the deputation.

Ms. A. Mulholland stated that the Friends of the Field was a cross-community community group which had co-designed and co-delivered a thriving community garden at the Lower Botanic site. She outlined a number of their projects and achievements to date.

She stated that, while they appreciated the time some Members had recently spent engaging with them, they were extremely disappointed with the lack of coherent and targeted communication and engagement in respect of the future of the site. She outlined that they had learned about the plans for a GAA pitch being installed on the site through social media and the press, rather than through direct communication. She explained that the messaging had been confusing and, at times, contradictory in nature. She advised that Friends of the Field had been told by Elected representatives that the community garden would not be affected by pitch development. However, subsequently, a Council official had approached them about potentially relocating.

She concluded by stating that Friends of the Field wished to be included in the discussions regarding the future of the site and to be treated as a valuable stakeholder, representing the environmental and wider community's interests.

The Lord Mayor thanked Ms. Mulholland for attending and she retired from the meeting.

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

The Chief Executive advised the Council that the decisions relating to "New Crematorium at Roselawn" and "Draft City Centre Byelaws" had been Called-in and therefore those items were not before the Council for consideration.

Moved by Councillor Brennan,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

"That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted."

**Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026**

**Physical Programme and Asset Management –
(ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence Agreement with
Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor T. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor McDonough-Brown and

Resolved - "That the decision, under the above-mentioned heading, be amended to also provide that a report be submitted to a future meeting, providing additional information on whether the UPSURGE project and a GAA pitch can co-exist on the site.

**Requests for the Use of City Hall –
Belfast National Graves Association – East Lily Launch**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor McDowell,
Seconded by Alderman McCullough,

"That that the decision to approve the Use of City Hall for the Belfast National Graves Association – East Lily Launch, be rejected."

On a vote, seventeen Members voted in favour of the amendment, with twenty-six voting against and twelve 'no votes' recorded. Accordingly, it was declared lost.

Restricted Items

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

Resolved – That the Council 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 item, 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.

The Members were advised that content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which takes place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

**Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026**

**Physical Programme Update-
Belfast Stories**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan
Seconded by Councillor Flynn and

Resolved – “That the Council agrees to move forward with the enhanced studio space and that a report be brought back with potential operating models, including how it would be financed.”

**Contracts Update – Competitive Tenders:
Supply and Delivery of Uniforms, Footwear and PPE**

Amendment

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

Resolved – That the Council agrees to refer the item back to the Committee for further consideration.

City Centre Gritting Feasibility Study

Amendment

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,
Seconded by The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey) and

Resolved – “That the Council agrees to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to seek clarification on the Winter Preparedness arrangements for Belfast City Centre, specifically in relation to drainage and gully management, in light of the sustained and prolonged rainfall across Northern Ireland and to request the urgent clearance of all drains in order to ensure that the City Centre has no unnecessary barriers to accessibility.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th February, were approved and adopted.

People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Cobain,
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 10th February, be approved and adopted.

**Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026**

A Member stated that he had been contacted countless times by constituents regarding an ongoing lack of availability of food waste bags. He requested that more be made available, particularly for those at the end of each refuse collection route.

After discussion, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 10th February, were approved and adopted.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

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

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 11th and 24th February, be approved and adopted.

Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Doran,
Seconded by Councillor Carson and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 18th February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor Carson and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 17th February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Climate and City Resilience Committee

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

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 12th February, be approved and adopted.

**Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026**

District Heating Network

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor McKay and

Resolved - That a report comes before the Committee urgently, with tangible proposals in order to progress the District Heating scheme for Belfast, that it includes looking at a social housing element and to consider the upskilling of local trades people in relation to low carbon energy sources.

Expenditure

Amendment

Moved by Alderman McCullough
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

Resolved - That a report be submitted to a future meeting, detailing the exact expenditure on all Climate functions within the Council.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 12th February, were approved and adopted.

Minutes of the Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Carson and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 24th February, be approved and adopted.

Notice of Motion

**Call for the NI Executive to Introduce
a Basic Income for Artists Scheme**

In accordance with notice on the agenda, it was

Moved by The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty)
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

“This Council notes that:

The arts, culture and creative sectors are central to Belfast’s social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy.

Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026

Many artists, performers and creative workers in Belfast and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice.

The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries.

This Council believes that:

- Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity.
- Belfast's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, mental health, youth engagement and cultural life.
- A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the city's cultural ecosystem.

This Council resolves to:

- Call on the Executive to introduce and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, modelled on the Irish Government's programme, providing regular, unconditional income support to eligible artists and creative workers.
- Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance, engaging directly with the arts and creative sectors in its design.
- Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process."

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

That the motion standing in the name of The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty), seconded by Councillor de Faoite be amended as follows:

"This Council notes that:

Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026

The arts, culture and creative sectors are central to Belfast's social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy.

Many artists, performers and creative workers in Belfast and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice.

The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries.

This Council believes that:

- **The arts and culture are for everyone and government policy should ensure the widest possible participation, inclusion and engagement with the sector;**
- Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity **or have to rely on other employment, detracting from their time and ability to create, in order to survive;**
- Belfast's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, **public health including mental health and wellbeing**, youth engagement and cultural life;
- A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the city's cultural ecosystem. **Evidence from the Irish scheme has proven that a Basic Income for Artists is an investment that pays back to the economy and society more than it costs, through increased expenditure, increased productivity and less reliance on other welfare payments. This scheme will help to reduce barriers to people who are from working class, global majority and/or those who are working at a disadvantage, ensuring diversity and inclusion within the creative industries.**

This Council resolves to:

- Call on the Executive to **legislate for** and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, providing regular, unconditional income support to eligible artists and creative workers. **This scheme should be permanent, include all eligible artists and creative workers and be provided indefinitely while they remain eligible for the scheme.**
- Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the **Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance. The Minister should work directly with artists, arts organisations and those working in the creative industries to design and set the terms of the scheme and eligibility based on local needs and experience;** and

Meeting of Council
Monday, 2nd March, 2026

- Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process."

The amendment was put to the Council and, on a vote, thirty-five Members voted for the amendment, with fifteen against and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the amendment was put to the Council as the substantive motion and it was passed.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson

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Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 20th March, 2026

HYBRID MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brennan (Chairperson);
Councillors Beattie, Black, Bunting, Cobain,
Doran, de Faoite, R-M Donnelly, Ferguson,
Garrett, Long, Maghie, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin
Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Ó Néill, Smyth and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of Communications, Marketing
and External Affairs;
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th February, were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meetings on 2nd March subject to the amendments under the following headings:

- ***Physical Programme and Asset Management – (ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence Agreement with Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens***- be amended to also provide that a report be submitted to a future meeting, providing additional information on whether the UPSURGE project and a GAA pitch can co-exist on the site.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

- **Physical Programme Update- Belfast Stories** - the Council agreed to move forward with the enhanced studio space and that a report be submitted to a future meeting with potential operating models, including how it would be financed.
- **Contracts Update – Competitive Tenders: Supply and Delivery of Uniforms, Footwear and PPE** - The Council agreed to refer the issue back to the Committee for further reconsideration.
- **City Centre Gritting Feasibility Study** - The Council agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to seek clarification on her Department's Winter Preparedness arrangements for Belfast City Centre.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor R-M. Donnelly declared an interest under item 7. (a) Minutes of Shared City Partnership, in so far as it related to PEACEPLUS in that she worked for an organisation which was funded under the Programme. As the item did not become the subject of debate, she was not required to leave the meeting.

In relation to item 2. (b) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, 6. (a) Contracts Update and 6.(c) Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality, Councillor Murray declared an interest, in that he was employed by S.O.S NI who were a delivery partner of the Fleadh and had applied for use of City Hall. As the related interests did not become the subject of debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor de Faoite declared an interest under item 4. (d) Planning Information, in that he was on the Board of Governors of Forge Integrated Primary School. As the item did not become the subject of debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

In relation to item 4. (h) Draft NI Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy, Councillors Long declared an interest, in that his wife was the Justice Minister, Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest under the same item, in that his partner was a Junior Minister, and they both left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Black declared an interest under items 2. (f) Independently Managed Community Centres, in that she was employed at Grosvenor Recreation Centre and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Regarding item 5. (c) Update on Area Working Groups, Councillor Doran declared an interest in that he was employed by Westland Community Group who were in receipt of funding and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Murphy declared an interest under item 6. (b) Requests for Funding, in that a family member was associated with a request and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor I. McLaughlin declared an interest under item 2. (f) Independently Managed Community Centres, in that he was on the Committee of one of the centres and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following seven 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 seven items 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.

The Members were advised that content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which takes place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Area-based Community Planning and Community Wealth Building

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty and the Director of Property and Projects provided with an update on a proposed way forward to design, develop and resource area-based community planning alongside enabling communities to bring forward proposals to transform local places through demonstrator projects and community wealth building initiatives.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues: the split between South and East Belfast and suggested that flexibility in the areas which fell between both be considered; the North Belfast Action Plan and the importance of community buy-in; and the need to engage with facilities management regarding asset transfers.

After discussion, the Committee:

Local Community Ownership Fund

- i. agreed the guidance document and assessment pathway (Appendix 1).
- ii. agreed that the open call for the fund would commence in mid/end of April 2026.

Area-based community planning

- iii. agreed the guidance document and submission proforma (Appendix 2).
- iv. agreed the proposed community led approach outlined within the report which included an administrative and convening role of a wider community-based consortia.
- v. Noted the potential administrative fee (up to a maximum of 10%) which would currently need to come from the overall core budget.
- vi. agreed that an internal cross-departmental 'area planning operational group' be established as set out at para. 3.15.

The Committee also agreed that a meeting be convened with relevant stakeholders in North Belfast to engage and address the issues which had been raised.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

(Ms. L-A O'Donnell, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Economic Development and Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism provided an update on the planning to support the hosting of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in Belfast in August 2026.

During discussion, one Member highlighted the importance of Day One and the management of parking and road closures and requested that the issues be raised at the Ministerial meeting. The officers advised that engagement continued with key stakeholders and highlighted that a public communication and signage plan would be put in place.

Regarding Falls Park now being a designated Camp Site for the Fleadh, one Member suggested that the information should be added to the website.

In relation to communication and advertising, Members suggested that previous Fleadh footage to show the scale of the event might improve the public's understanding of the event. One Member also suggested that the Members be given Q&A information sheet for dealing with queries.

In response to a Member's question in relation to Policing and the Event Management Plan, the Chief Executive undertook to provide further detail on this.

After discussion, the Committee noted the progress to date on the development of the Fleadh Cheoil and that the issues raised would be taken forward by the relevant officers.

Bad Debt Write Off

The Committee approved the write-off of ground rent arrears, in accordance with Section M12 of the Council's Financial Regulations.

Belfast Stories Update

The Programme Director presented an update on the Belfast Stories Programme and outlined the next steps, including the addendum to the Outline Business Case (OBC) to develop an Enhanced Studio space in Belfast Stories.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin

That the Committee agrees to rescind its decision of 20th February, under the heading Physical Programme Update, specifically as it related to Belfast Stories, which had been amended at the Council meeting of 2nd March, and agrees not to proceed with the development of the Enhanced Studio space for the Belfast Stories scheme.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

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

The recommendations as outlined in the report were put to the Committee and twelve Members voted for the proposal and eight against and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee:

1. Noted the key programme milestones in RIBA stage 3, including the submission of the planning application at the end of April 2026;
2. Noted the further information provided on the Enhanced Studio and the next steps in relation to the approval of the addendum to the Outline Business Case, including implications of design changes and the call for expressions of interest;
3. Agreed to a Members site visit and design update in April 2026 in advance of the planning application submission; and
4. Agreed that party briefings be undertaken on RIBA stage 3, development of the operator model and inclusive growth in May 2026.

Asset Management (1)

The Committee:

- **Paisley Park Sports (PPS) Grounds – Transfer from Department for Communities (DfC) to the Council** - approved the proposed one off DfC contribution of £69K in order to progress with the proposed transfer of Paisley Park from DfC to the Council, with the proposed transfer subject to agreeing a new lease with PPS, under which PPS would be responsible for all repairs, maintenance, rates, and utilities costs associated with the use of the land and buildings at Paisley Park.

Independently Managed Community Centres

The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided an update on a range of areas with regards to the Council's seven Independently Managed Community Centres (IMCC's).

Proposal 1

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

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that a condition survey would be undertaken across all Independently Managed Community Centres.

Proposal 2

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

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Resolved - That the Committee accedes to the request from 4 of the IMCCs to receive double their awards and receive an uplift of £74,000 each (totalling £296,000) for this financial year (2025/26), subject to in-year underspend/specified reserves, and that officers engage with the other centres to assess their requirements.

After discussion, the Committee:

1. Agreed to the annual revenue awards to 6 IMCCs including the annual Consumer Price of 3.8% based on September 2025 figures.
2. Agreed to defer the decision in relation to the Ballymacarret Community Centre so that a report could be submitted to the next Committee meeting in relation to the issues raised and delegated authority to the Chief Executive to manage the interim arrangements of the Centre, to ensure current users would be supported.
3. Agreed to the request from 4 of the IMCCs to receive double their awards and receive an uplift of £74,000 each (totalling £296,000) for this financial year (2025/26), subject to in-year underspend/specified reserves, and that officers engage with the other centres to assess their requirements.
4. Agreed to the request from the 4 larger IMCCs that they receive their first payment in April.
5. Agreed that a report would be brought back to the committee which would provide members with options on proceeding with standard Legal Agreements outlining Terms and Conditions for all IMCCs at a future meeting.
6. Agreed that a condition survey would be undertaken across all Independently Managed Community Centres.

City Innovation Programme Update

The Committee was provided with an update on the progress on a number of City Innovation programme initiatives including the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayoral Challenge competition.

The Committee:

1. Approved Belfast City Council's acceptance of the letter of offer from Bloomberg Philanthropies to deliver the Belfast Mayors challenge;
2. Noted that the Bloomberg team would be visiting Belfast on 30th and 31st March, 2026 to meet with the Lord Mayor and Chief Executive on progress;
3. Noted that invitations had been issued to Party Leaders, or their representatives, to meet with Mr Andrew Haldane on 30th March to discuss inclusive growth; and

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

4. Approved the Council's £50,000 contribution to Innovation City Belfast for the financial year 2026 to 2027 (as part of a collective contribution of £300,000 by ICB partners).

Requests for Funding

(The Committee agreed to discuss the item under restricted session)

The Committee noted that 8 requests for funding had been received, and the following next steps:

- 1) **Glentoran Under 16-Girls travel to USA Cup - £x** – Agreed to defer consideration of the request so that further information could be provided;
- 2) **Clarawood Tenants Hall Renovation - £122,720** –As the request related to the Local Investment Fund, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the request so that it could be considered at a special meeting of the East Area Working Group;
- 3) **Whiterock Children's Centre – additional £50k** – Agreed to the request under the Discretionary Fund;
- 4) **Glór na Móna - £200k for Croí na Carraige** – As the request related to the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund, the Committee agreed that a report be submitted to the April meeting to outline the options for increasing this fund across the city. The Committee also agreed that Party Group Leaders also receive an update on the Fund at its next meeting;
- 5) **Mid Falls Alleyway Regeneration – £70k** - As the request related to the Bloomberg alleyway transformation fund, the Committee agreed that a report be submitted to the April meeting on how this request could be considered as part of the Bloomberg Scheme. The Committee also agreed that Party Group Leaders also receive an update on the Fund at its next meeting;
- 6) **Request from MLA re an individual in relation to representing Team Ireland in international Ice Hockey tournament** – Agreed that the request was not eligible as deemed a request from an individual;
- 7) **Ligoniel Rec Football Club cost of travel - £2k** – Agreed to the request as there was no current funding stream;
- 8) **An Droichead short-term stabilising support £100k - £150k** – Agreed that officers engage with the group to assess their requirements and report back to the Committee;
- 9) Noted that further funding requests had been submitted since the report had been submitted which would come back to the Committee for consideration;
- 10) **In relation to Cultural Multi Annual Grants** and the decision made by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in March, agreed that an uplift to the transition fund for a maximum of £98,000 for year one support, and that a report be submitted to a future committee to review the scheme and the impact on the organisations that had not received funding.

Governance

Official Announcements during Council Meetings

The Committee agreed that official announcements at Council meetings be limited to the following:

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

1. Births, deaths, marriages, civil partnerships and retirements of Belfast citizens or Belfast City Council employees;
2. Achievements by local groups/organisations and/or individuals;
3. Requests for the Lord Mayor to write to and/or host a group/organisation;
4. Be no longer than 1 minute on duration;
5. Cannot commit the Council to any position or action which should be properly brought before the relevant Committee in the first instance by way of a notice of motion or is otherwise governed by a Council Policy or existing process;
6. The Lord Mayor may depart from this Standing Order where, due to the urgency of the matter, allow it to be discussed at the Council meeting rather than it being referred to a committee;
7. Acknowledgement of particular dates/days in the Calendar to recognise events; and
8. Should not be used for Political Statements for debate.

The Committee also noted that Standing Order 11 (b) would be amended to reflect the Committee's decision.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Boxing Strategy

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 19th December, it had agreed to invite the IABA to a future meeting to discuss the implementation and recommendations made in a NI Equality Commission report; Approved the Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 payment to the IABA; and Requested that future funding be considered for the delivery and continuation of the Council's Boxing Strategy post March 2026.

The Operational Director, City and Neighbourhood Services advised that the IABA had been invited present to the Committee in April.

He reminded the Committee that the Council with Partners had developed a Belfast Boxing Strategy 2012 – 2022. At its meeting in January 2018, the Committee had agreed to provide £200,000 to the Irish Athletic Boxing Association Ulster Branch (IABA) for delivery of an agreed annual action plan supporting the Belfast Boxing Strategy. Council had continued to offer financial support through People and Communities committee on an annual basis.

He stated that the IABA provided a detailed breakdown of programmes to be delivered under six main areas; Salary – Development Officer and Coaches, Pathways, Events, Coach Education, Club Support and Governance.

The below table highlighted the current timeline for the development, consultation and implementation of the new Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy:

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Action	Timeline
Presentation to elected members via Party Group Briefings	March - 2026
Presentation to SP&R Committee for approval	March/April - 2026
Conduct final 12 week public consultation	May 2026-July 2026
Review of findings from Public Consultation	August 2026- September 2026
Report requesting approval of the new Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy to P & C Committee	October 2026
Development of Strategy Delivery Plan	October- December 2026
Report requesting approval of final Action Plan to P & C Committee	January 2027
Launch of the New Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy and Action Plan	February 2027

The Operational Director, City and Neighbourhood Services stated that the above timelines highlighted that the Council would not have a new PASD strategy in place for the financial year for 2026/27.

He advised that the Committee was asked to consider extending the boxing strategy for one year whilst the new strategy and implementation plan was developed and a total of £200,000 was available within the next financial year to support a new Belfast Boxing Strategy Action Plan.

After discussion, the Committee agreed to extend the Belfast Boxing Strategy and funding for delivery of the related work programme from 1st April 2026 until 31st March 2027 and noted that the AIAB would present to the Committee, at its meeting in April.

European City of Sport

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide Members with an update on the European City of Sport 2026 designation for the city including:

- I. our related monitoring and progress reporting obligations to the awarding body ACES
- II. the request for non-recurrent additional resources to allow us to enhance programme delivery from April – December 2026, as well as ensuring adequate resource for communications activity.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the successful bid to ACES, note the planned programme of activity under the bid which is based on existing council and partner activity, note the programme monitoring and progress reporting obligations and consider the limitations for delivery in the absence of an approved budget to support additionality for collaborative impact.

3.0 Main report

3.1 ACES Europe have confirmed that Belfast was successful in securing the designation of European City of Sport for 2026 (Jan-Dec). ACES is a non-profit association based in Brussels and award this accolade each year, recognising the best cities, towns and regions across Europe to take part in sport. The successful bid will give the city an opportunity to showcase the excellent sports and leisure facilities/services provided by Belfast City Council along with the rich sporting heritage of the city.

3.2 Following a successful community launch weekend in late January 2026 (see appendix 1), our focus has now moved from application to delivery and officers are continuing to work with relevant internal services and strategic partners to expand the outline programme of activities and branding opportunities into a robust detailed programme.

City of Sport Planned Programme Delivery for 2026/7

3.3 Our programme reflects ACES' manifesto pledges – enjoyment in exercise, willingness to achieve, sense of community, learning to play and improvement in health – and focuses on five key themes:

- investment made into sport in Belfast over the last 10 years
- support provided to elite athletes
- contribution of our leisure centre staff, local clubs, coaches and volunteers
- ensuring everyone feels welcome and included, and
- how sport is delivering better health outcomes for our residents.

3.4 2026 will see lots of great sports events delivered across the city, as well as more work to:

- promote use of our leisure centres
- showcase the variety of sports available in our city

- **celebrate the contribution of sports clubs and athletes, and**
- **highlight how everyone can get involved.**

3.5 Activities will include:

- **the Phoenix Energy Belfast City Marathon and other sports events**
- **our annual Belfast Primary Schools' Cross Country Championships**
- **our try-it events in our community and leisure centres, and**
- **activities celebrating the contribution of athletes, coaches and volunteers.**

3.6 In December 2026 we will conclude the year with an end of year event and in Jan 2027 we will present the end of year report to ACES.

3.7 The current programme is limited to activity already planned within existing council and GLL revenue budgets. It also includes the activities and events planned by the range of delivery partners who have committed to support the Belfast City of Sport 2026 programme.

3.8 In order to maximise the impact of already planned activity, it is critical that the Project Co-ordinator proactively works with partner organisations to ensure that their programmes come under the banner of the City of Sport with the relevant branding and comms requirements.

3.9 The project has to date been supported entirely as extra work by the Senior Manager of Campaigns, Press and Social. This was for the bid and launch, which was being carried out on top of management duties. However, given existing resource pressures within the CMEA department, this is unsustainable.

3.10 For City of Sport to be successful, a full planned and resourced programme of events and a fully planned and resourced communications programme is required. City of Sport has the potential to present risk to the organisation if the programme and required communications cannot be adequately delivered.

3.11 To maximise the impact of the existing activity programme, we are asking members to consider a non recurrent budget of £160,000 which will include:

- **£40,000 for MarComms support in the form of an additional temporary officer to support the extensive marketing and communications requirements involved in the year long programme.**

- £15,000 to build a stock of CoS support materials, for example, infographics, mesh banners, branded sport products, for council facilities and events and to gift to partner delivery bodies.
- £85,000 for additional programme support which would include:
 - £25,000 to deliver targeted events/activities where gaps are identified in the programme particularly in relation to gender, disability, ethnic background, etc. This is in line with our commitment to removing barriers to physical activity to ensure we get more people playing sport, keeping fit and having fun.
 - offer up to £5k for up to 12 Sporting Organisations to deliver key events in the city linked to the themes outlined in the City of Sport Bid Document – Total £60,000.
- £20,000 for an end of year celebration and final report including evaluation.

3.12 Officers are continuing to engage a range of strategic partners to explore how they can collaborate on the City of Sport status in order to maximise benefit and legacy for the city. Identified partners currently include DfC, Sport NI, PHA, BHSCT, UU, QUB, Tourism NI, etc. The intention is to further secure their strategic commitment, collaborative resourcing and legacy arrangements.

3.13 We have met with DfC and Sport NI to further interrogate their commitment to resource support the programme. DfC Sports Branch have agreed they will fully allocate their modest capital budget (circa £60k) in 2026 towards the City of Sport. While welcome, this is restricted support in that it is fully allocated to their hosting of Celebration of Sport events at locations throughout NI each year, bringing local school children together for taster sessions of a wide range of sports.

3.14 They have agreed to locate all events in 2026 in Belfast to celebrate the City of Sport. They propose to host 3 events March 2026:

- NewForge Primary Schools 13th March
- Brook LC Primary Schools 20th March
- Girdwood Community Hub General Public 28th March

3.15 They hope to allocate two further events in Sept/Oct subject to available funds. We will continue to work with DfC to ensure a citywide spread is achieved via the Autumn events. While DfC

Sports Branch indicate they have no unrestricted budget to allocate, they have asked Sport NI about their potential input.

- 3.16 One of the core CoS themes is how sport is delivering better health outcomes for our residents, and we are working closely with colleagues in BHDU to brand any of their planned programme activity or campaigns in the 2026 calendar year. We are also exploring any additional resource support they, PHA or the Belfast Trust can commit in order to extend the programme.
- 3.7 Officers are continuing to work with council staff teams across Neighbourhood Services and Parks Outreach and Events to brand existing programme delivery including some of our external grant support where appropriate. We are keen to engage with other Departments to raise awareness of the European City of Sport 2026 programme and to identify collaborative opportunities to extend the programme and build the legacy.

Obligations to ACES as a designated European City of Sport for 2026.

- 3.18 Belfast as a European City of Sport must comply with the general regulations as set out by ACES for successful cities these in summary include:
- 3.19 Quarterly reporting submission of reports to ACES commencing from 1 Apr 2026 and focusing on the noted requirements. Each report should include:
- A summary of the activities carried out,
 - Photographic material,
 - Media coverage and press impact.
- 3.20 These reports allow ACES to monitor the correct use and promotion of the title, ensure compliance with the Regulations, and coordinate actions and events in the most effective manner.
- 3.21 At the end of the year, a final report must be submitted. This report must include a dedicated Legacy section, outlining the positive impact of the award on Belfast and its long-term outlook.
- 3.22 We have agreed a performance framework for the CoS programme and a simple monitoring return to capture information from council and GLL activities and from our delivery partners. Our ability to report to ACES on the related measures and targets will depend on the further development of the programme and available resourcing.

Financial Implications

- 3.23 The bid phase costs were estimated at £30,000 and this amount was agreed by People and Communities committee with funding provided on a 50/50 basis shared between BCC and GLL. The bid phase was delivered within budget.

To deliver an enhanced programme and ensure we have sufficient comms support to capture current planned activity, we have outlined a growth bid of £160k as follows:

- Corporate Comms (towards temp officer role) £40,000
- Branding and support materials £15,000
- Programme support £85,000
- End of Year celebration event and programme report £20,000

Members are asked to consider a non-recurrent budget be allocated to city of sport for the 2026/27 financial year. CNS will ringfence any underspends over the 2067/27 year to cover the costs.

Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.24 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.”

During discussion, several Members raised concern in relation to the proposed use of additional funding for Communication activity and suggested the need to concentrate on participation, outcomes and engagement.

After discussion, the Committee:

1. Noted the successful bid to ACES;
2. Noted the planned programme of activity under the bid which was based on existing council and partner activity;
3. Noted the programme monitoring and progress reporting obligations and agreed to maximise the impact of the existing activity programme, with a non-recurrent budget of £160,000 to include: £140,000 for additional programme support and £20,000 for MarComms, support materials, end of year celebration and final report including evaluation.

Planning Information

The Committee noted the update on the Major planning applications and applications that had been determined by the Planning Committee.

Review of Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) Fees

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 This report sets out proposals for a small operational change and inflationary uplift to Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) fees in the short term alongside a proposal for a longer term review of PAD fees in the coming financial year.

1.2 The report was noted by the Planning Committee at its meeting on 17th February 2026.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to agree the following:

- (i) the proposed increased PAD fees set out at Appendix 1.
- (ii) the small operational change set out at paragraph 3.13.
- (iii) a fundamental review of PAD fees over the next financial year.

3.0 Main Report

Background

3.1 The Council’s Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) service is a discretionary service, which provides opportunity for customers to discuss their planning proposals with the Planning Service before they make a planning application.

3.2 As the Committee is aware, the planning application process can be complex. PADs provide opportunity for issues to be identified early, thereby helping to improve the quality of application on submission, in turn leading to better outcomes on the ground as well as more efficient and timely decision-making. PADs also provide applicants with a degree of certainty as to whether their proposals are likely to be acceptable, with the caveat that the process does not bind the Council to a final outcome, with the planning application subject to consultation with the public and technical consultees, and the potential for the decision to be made by the Committee following the democratic process.

3.3 Customers can use PADs to establish:

- whether their proposal requires planning permission.
- the main issues and planning policies relevant to consideration of their proposal.

- the Planning Service's initial assessment of the proposal and how the proposal can be improved to increase the chances of planning permission being granted.
- the information that they will need to submit with their planning application (in accordance with the Council's published *Planning Application Valid Checklist*).
- the application process and likely timescales for a decision.

Best Practice

3.4 PADs are universally accepted as best practice in the industry, particularly for more complex proposals, and form an important part of the 'front-loading' of the planning application process to support timely decision making and secure better outcomes on the ground. PADs are advocated by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) through the Strategic Planning Policy Statement for NI (SPPS) and [Development Management Practice Note 10: Pre-Application Community Consultation \(and Pre-Application Discussions\)](#).

3.5 PADs also form an important part of the Council's published '10 Operating Principles' that support an efficient and effective Development Management service, and the Planning Service's aim of *helping customers get a timely planning decision that benefits the city*.

3.6 Operating Principle 7 states:

'We provide a Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) service so that issues can be identified at the beginning of the process, before the application is made. This leads to better quality planning applications which should be determined in a more timely manner...'

BCC charging for Pre-Application Discussions

3.7 Belfast City Council was the first council in Northern Ireland to charge for PADs in 2017. It is understood that some but not all NI councils have since introduced charging for PADs. Endorsed by the Committee, PAD fees were introduced in recognition of the significant level of resources that the Planning Service expends in providing its PAD service and significant demand for the service from customers.

3.8 PAD charging was informed at the time by engagement with applicants, agents, developers and other customers. It also formed part of the business case for employing two additional staff in the Development Management team.

- 3.9** PAD charging has since become culturally embedded in the planning application process in Belfast. The Planning Service remains acutely aware of the importance of providing high standards of service and advice in delivering a charged PAD service.
- 3.10** The Council’s PAD fees were originally set in March 2017 and are provided at Appendix 1.
- 3.11** Projected income from current PAD and PPA fees is £100,000 pa. Actual PAD income for previous years is set out in Table 1, below.

Year	Actual PAD Income	Number of PADs
2021/22	£88,200	85
2022/23	£82,400	76
2023/24	£70,200	62
2024/25	£66,000	56
2025/26 (pro rata)	£92,900	58

Table 1: PAD income and the number of PADs per year since 2021/22

Review of PAD fees

- 3.12** it is recommended that the original 2017 fees are subject to an inflationary uplift from 2026/2027, applying the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- 3.13** In addition, a small process change is proposed. The current charges including two PAD meetings at no additional cost for all PAD categories other than for Largescale Major proposals which include one meeting. It is proposed that the process for Largescale Major proposals is brought in line with other PAD

categories so that they also include two meetings at no additional cost, to simplify the approach and recognising that it is unlikely that the largest category PADs would only ever involve one PAD meeting, due to their scale and complexity. The base fee for a Largescale Major proposal is proposed to be increased to cover the cost of the additional meeting.

- 3.14 PAD fee exemptions for householder proposals, commercial proposals of less than 200 sqm, community and proposals by non-profit organisations (i.e. fee exempt for planning applications) would remain. There would continue to be no charge for PADs for these proposals.
- 3.15 The general public can continue to avail of the free Duty Planner service which operates daily and provides opportunity to discuss householder and small-scale proposals with a planning officer.
- 3.16 The revised PAD fee proposals are set out at Appendix 1. It is considered that these small changes may make it more likely that the Council will achieve the £100k income target for PADs.
- 3.17 It should be recognised however that the Planning Service has evolved and improved its PAD service over the years. Since early 2024, following feedback from customers and informed by learning from the lean systems redesign experimentation project (2022 to 2024), the PAD process has been streamlined and targeted with the process more tailored to the specific requirements of the applicant and proposal. A new series of PAD principles relating to delivery of the service have been introduced, aimed at providing efficient, proportionate and more timely feedback to customers. These will be published on the Council's website alongside updated customer guidance on the PAD service.
- 3.18 A more fundamental review of PAD fees is therefore considered timely given the evolution in the delivery of the PAD service. It is recommended that a more comprehensive review is undertaken during 2026/27, informed by planned feedback from the new Belfast Planning Partnership with planning agents; and further development of internal processes following further roll-out of the learning from the lean-systems redesign project.
- 3.19 A further report on the review and its conclusions will be brought to Committee in late 2026 / early 2027.
- 3.20 The implementation of the proposed new PAD fees at Appendix 1 will need to tie in with the annual update of regional planning fees for planning applications in the NI Planning Portal, expected towards the end of April or early May 2026.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.21 The realisation of PAD income remains an important income stream for the Council's Planning Service. Planning application fees are set regionally by DfI and overall income falls substantially short of the annual cost of delivery of the Planning Service. The proposed new PAD charges will help support the Planning Service's overall costs and service delivery and will help to achieve the income target of £100k per annum.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.22 There are no equality or good relations / rural needs implications associated with this report."

The Committee agreed the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Belfast Business Promise - Next Steps

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy presented the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the review process that the Belfast Business Promise has been undergoing and to set out a proposed way forward to transition the service to a more sustainable and scalable offer, ensuring that it adds value and supports corporate priorities.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to.

- i. consider the contents of the report and the appendices attached
- ii. consider the proposed reduction of the BBP pledges from 8 to 5 (refer Appendix 3)
- iii. consider the recommended approach to transitioning the Belfast Business Promise (Option 2: Good Practice Plus) (refer to Appendix 2)
- iv. consider and agree the proposed next steps as outlined at 3.17 and 3.18
- v. Note that further detail will be brought to the next Social Policy Working Group.

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1** The inclusive growth city charter is a key commitment in the Council's Inclusive Growth strategy. Co-created with businesses, it was designed to provide an assessment framework to enable employers to look at their current practices and identify where they could make changes which would have a beneficial impact on inclusive growth in the city. Driven by the Council's Social Policy Working Group (SPWG), the charter has been operationalised as the Belfast Business Promise (BBP) since April 2023 and delivered by a cross-council team, led by the Strategy, Programmes and Partnership and Economic Development teams, with support from Corporate HR, CPS and Climate teams. A snapshot of the progress made is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.2** As Members will be aware the BBP had been brought forward on an initial pilot basis with a commitment to undertake an interim review of its progress and impact to ensure it remained fit-for-purpose and impactful. This review sought to consider the future model options for the BBP, building upon what works well, seeking to complement and enhance existing support programmes and position the programme to positively impact on the inclusive growth ambitions of the city while also taking account of the changing legislative and economic context within which organisations are operating.
- 3.3** In summary the key findings of the interim review included:
- BBP members valued the support and energy of the team in spurring them on to meet the pledge areas.
 - Areas for further development included maximising the networking opportunities and ability to learn from and share good practice, along with the potential to build on existing programmes of support for businesses offered by the council and other partners.
 - BBP members felt that the support provided enabled them to move forward at a more rapid pace in terms of improving business and employment practices.
 - Highlighted the possible challenges of scaling the offer if the current administratively heavy processes were maintained.
 - Consideration to be given to adopting a more focused approach which would deliver greatest impact across the inclusive growth ambitions and key sectors.

3.4 The review also acknowledged that there are a number of significant factors emerging which may influence the future approach and cope of the BBP. These include, for example:

- Planned introduction of the Good Employment Bill by NI Executive
- PfG commitment to the development of the NI Good Employment Charter (PfG), which is being developed by the LRA (BBP team have been engaged in this process)
- Legislation is now in place for public bodies to report on their carbon emissions
- Internally, work is progressing on the development of a Sustainable Procurement Policy and a commitment in the Belfast Agenda to seek to establish an 'Anchors Network'
- Internally, exploratory work underway to examine the potential to create a Corporate Social Responsibility Framework which will seek to align future investment opportunities from medium-to-larger organisations to identified community and city initiatives
- Ongoing focus on efficiencies and need to ensure effective use of council resources.

3.5 A series of planning workshops and internal discussions with key staff engaged in and associated with the BBP have taken place to consider the future model for the BBP; building upon what works well, seeking to complement and enhance existing support programmes and position the programme to positively impact on the inclusive growth ambitions of the city. The BBP team have carried out initial engagement with Belfast Business Promise Partners who have been instrumental in shaping the pledges and processes to date (such as the Labour Relations Agency, Queen's University, Ulster University and Translink) as well as key officers internally and informal engagement with Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter. It is accepted that it would be challenging to scale and sustain the existing model if the current processes and resources were maintained, given the administration burden associated with the various accreditations and that a more focused approach should be considered to deliver on the inclusive growth ambitions.

Guiding principles

3.6 A number of guiding principles have informed the transition planning for the Belfast Business Promise:

- Consistency and alignment - Embedding in BCC practices, delivering through existing provision and mechanisms where possible (BCC and BBP Partner resources) and building on what works.

- **Creating value - Working with Partner organisations to deliver, share and promote good practice, demonstrating the benefits of doing the right thing and in a state of readiness for pending legislative changes which may impact on them.**
- **Evidence based - Working alongside other accreditations and standards to recognise employers and working with knowledge experts to support good practice.**
- **Continuous Improvement - Continuing to evolve and develop in line with external factors, changing legislation and the needs of the network.**

Purpose of BBP

3.7 The purpose of the BBP has also been simplified to emphasise that its role is:

- **‘To work with employers to change behaviours to support a more sustainable thriving local economy by:**
- **Providing a framework to improve and recognise good employment and inclusive business practices.**
- **Helping to deliver more good jobs with opportunities for people to progress and develop.**
- **Engaging with employers and partners to provide more wrap around support to help businesses to thrive, grow and scale.**
- **Building a strong business base and network, committed to supporting the city’s inclusive growth ambitions – leaving no one behind’**

3.8 In line with this a number of key outcomes have been delivered to date:

- **Increased number of employees paid above the RLW and/or Increased number of organisations accredited RLW employers**
- **Increased procurement spend in the local economy/with Belfast based suppliers (via the collaborative network/anchors working group)**
- **Increased awareness of and readiness for impending legislative changes (e.g Good Employment Bill & LRA Charter/Guidance)**
- **Increased proportion of organisations monitoring (and reducing) their carbon emissions**
- **Increased proportion of organisations engaging in local community activity**

3.9 While there has been an emphasis on refining the current operational processes and the assessment process in

particular, the Belfast Business Promise delivers through a number of functions:

- Strategic and employer engagement
- Assessment and validation of the pledges and practice
- Learning and capacity building
- BBP Network and collaboration, shared learning opportunities
- Visibility and recognition

- 3.10 Across these functions opportunities are being identified to mainstream and integrate within existing programmes, for example Learning & Capacity building could largely be delivered through existing business support and growth programmes, Go Succeed, employability and skills programmes etc. Given that re-focusing, a key challenge has been to identify the unique added value and clear purpose of the refined Business Promise approach, working alongside business-as-usual both for council teams and for other external partners.

Strategic alignment

- 3.11 There is an opportunity to deliver positively on the city's ambition for inclusive growth. For example, the BBP has the potential to be the city's inclusive growth charter and governance vehicle to harmonise procurement practice across anchors and unlock shared, evidence-based outcomes in fair work, social value and climate action as well as economic outcomes.
- 3.12 Building on both the Belfast Promise and the Council's Sustainable Procurement Policy, there is an opportunity to create a shared structure through which anchor institutions can collectively raise expectations on fair work, prompt payment, modern slavery prevention, social value delivery and climate action.
- 3.13 An Anchor Procurement Working Group could share best practice, take advantage of collaborative opportunities and coordinate engagement with local SMEs and VCSEs, reducing duplication while increasing impact. This partnership approach also enhances transparency, fosters innovation in supply chains and supports the Belfast Agenda's ambitions for inclusive growth, local competitiveness and a just transition to a low-carbon economy.
- 3.14 Many of the anchor organisations in the city are regional bodies, guided by CPD and NI Public Procurement Policy, therefore realistic expectations will need to be set; however, the output of the Anchor Procurement Working Group -the

creation of the Belfast City Procurement Framework - could provide a coherent, city-wide approach that strengthens value for money by aligning economic, ethical, social and environmental standards across all major public institutions.

- 3.15 Drawing on examples in Leeds and Birmingham, there may be potential to establish Anchor working Groups to focus on each of BBP pledges/outcomes such as Inclusive Recruitment and Employment Practice; Climate and Working with our Communities.

Options assessment

- 3.16 In considering the way forward with the BBP, three options have been considered in detail (as outlined in Appendix 2) offering varying levels of assurance and robustness for those organisations involved in the Belfast Business Promise. In summary they include:

<p>Option 1 Good Practice Guidance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of advice/guidance • Raising awareness of and access to BCC programmes
<p>Option 2 Good Practice Plus</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balanced approach to providing guidance as well as some level of assurance/validation for high impact/priority sectors. • Flexibility to adopt and target specific high impact/priority sectors • Scope to strengthen the Network and support the development of Anchor Procurement Working Group
<p>Option 3 Full Validation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality assurance in terms of commitments, however resource intensive – especially for SMEs

- 3.17 To date, a significant amount of effort has gone into building a robust level of accreditation and assurance, developing officer expertise, raising awareness and managing expectations of BBP Partners involved in the process and those organisations signed up. A key benefit of the initiative programme has been the ability of businesses to come together to network and share good practice and support. It has been noted that for organisations to fully realise the reputational benefits of being associated with the BBP, will require an enhanced focus on communications and marketing and monitoring and evaluation.

3.18 In considering these options, it is recommended for Members consideration, that option 2 be adopted as the preferred way forward. This would result in the following changes being brought forward which we believe offers greater potential to scale, provides flexibility to adopt approach and focus depending on size of business, enhances the added value to specific business sectors/cohorts and ultimately enhance the delivery of the desired and outcomes.

- Reducing from 8 to 5 pledge framework (attached at Appendix 3)
- Scaling the pledge commitments to better fit organisational size (micro, small, medium and large) and clarify the assessment verification and validation requirements. This will increase transparency and manage expectations and officer time.
- Simplifying the language to make it more business focused.
- Introducing a signatory stage removing the barriers to entry and enabling scaling.
- Increasing the onus on the organisations to self-assess against the 5-pledge framework and progress. Crucially this will reduce the administrative support required from BCC
- Enhanced focus on the support using existing business support interventions and programmes; engagement, assessment and recognition.
- Strengthening the BBP Network, developing the opportunities for peer-to-peer mentoring, networking, shared learning and increasing collaboration amongst employers on key issues/topics for example through working groups or communities of practice. This also takes account of the pilot evaluation feedback on what the 'early adopters' felt would be beneficial.
- Providing the vehicle to leverage the potential for strategic collaboration amongst anchor and strategic employers in the city, with an initial focus on the creation of an Belfast Procurement Working Group.

Next Steps

3.19 The following next steps are proposed for the coming months to support the delivery of option 2 - 'Good Practice Plus' , laying the foundations for an anchors working group:

- Further develop and engage on the 5 Pledge framework.
- Develop a BBP information pack that outlines the assessment process, roles, expectations and ambition.
- Defining the self-assessment process and outlining the associated requirements.

- Map and integrate/align BBP learning and capacity building opportunities to enable roll-out of interventions via existing Council/Partner resources, where possible.
 - Revisit the role and membership of the BBP Internal Working Group to ensure the Council leads by example.
 - Develop key messages/lines to take and associated communications plan.
 - Develop the distinct BBP membership offer for businesses signing up.
 - Building on the BBP ethos, provide a platform to progress and align CSR efforts and to develop a city proposition to deliver greater social impact/value for communities.
 - As discussed at the Social Policy Working Group, Members will note that engagement is planned with a number of key anchor/larger organisations in relation to the potential approach to CSR. Work is also underway with the Community Foundation NI to explore hosting a roundtable discussion around the potential opportunities around Philanthropy funding.
 - Consideration given to the future delivery structure with consideration given to what can be mainstreamed and what needs bespoke / dedicated focus.
 - Development of an engagement strategy which sets out our core audiences and methods of engagement.
- 3.20 In addition, conversations will continue with key officers to explore the opportunity around a Belfast Anchors Procurement Working Group, and in relation to other Pledges, to support collaboration, innovative approaches and share good practice. Cognisance will also be given to existing forums to ensure it creates value for the city. This could also be used to enhance and strengthen the reach of relevant corporate initiatives such as EVAWG or accessible city.
- 4.0 **Financial & Resource Implications**
There is no financial or resource implications contained within this report.
- 5.0 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**
The Belfast Business Promise has been designed to be inherently inclusive and is not expected to have any adverse impacts on the Section 75 categories. It was therefore screened out with mitigating actions to monitor the roll-out of the programme, the team continues to tie in and promote specific issues/events such as Disability Awareness Day, Mental Health Awareness Week etc. and work with its Partner organisations such as Equality Commission and NOW Group. No equality issues have been reported.”

During discussion, in response to a Member's question in relation to the reduction in pledges, the Director advised that there had been no dilution of the pledges, they had been mapped and some had been merged together.

After discussion, the Committee agreed the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Belfast Region City Deal Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 This report has been prepared to provide a progress update on activity within the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD).

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the latest progress in respect of the BRCD.
- Approve continued participation in the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund at a cost of £11,500 which is within current BRCD budgets.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) is a £1billion programme of investment that was signed in December 2021 and represents a new way of working between central and local government and regional partners to support the delivery of:

“Inclusive economic growth that delivers more and better jobs, a positive impact on the most deprived communities and a balanced spread of benefits across the region.”

3.2 This report sets out progress to date across all pillars of investment and an update on a possible extension to the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund.

Main report

Investment to Date

3.3 By the end of Q3, the BRCD PMO had paid out £75.4m for projects across all pillars of the programme with a year-to-date spend of £33.7m.

3.4 Innovation Pillar – 5 projects progressing.

- The £64m [iREACH Health](#) project - a world-class integrated clinical research innovation centre led by Queen's University - is progressing well. The completion of construction phase at 2 buildings on either side of the Lisburn Road close to the City Hospital is expected to complete in December 2026 and March 2027.
- Meanwhile, [AMIC's Factory of the Future](#) - a place for companies to discover the latest manufacturing advancements and technologies - is also nearing a significant milestone, with the facility at Global Point Newtownabbey now completing and with staff beginning to move to the facility.
- Progress continues at Ulster University's [CDHT](#)- a £42m quality Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology with associated 'living labs' in the areas of cardiology, diabetes, respiratory and stroke. Imminent sub-funding and collaboration agreements with BHSCT, will now also enable the Living Labs element of this project to move ahead. Demolition works are ongoing; the Council has also now granted Planning permission and procurement for the main contractor is in progress.
- [Momentum One Zero](#) - a global innovation centre at Queen's University - is expanding its facilities to build on its existing Global Research Institutes (Deep Tech, Agri and Health) and house 550+ experts from across many organisations to solve business and societal problems through research and innovation in advanced digital technologies and data. Construction commenced in September and completion is expected by November 2027 - a Memorandum of Understanding with the AI Competency Centre has now also been agreed.
- Meanwhile [Studio Ulster](#) is well into its operational phase and, with the first productions filmed using the facilities already having been shown on BBC during the festive period, including Titanic Sinks Tonight.

3.5 Digital Pillar - three new OBCs approved, two projects progressing, one project concluded

- Outline Business Cases (OBCs) have been approved for 5G Research, additional investment into the successful 5G Innovation Regions programme, and the Regional Contracts for Innovation initiative; all projects have begun and are awaiting final funding contracts, and the AI Grants business case is close to submission.

- The [Digital Twin Centre](#) - which creates virtual representations of physical assets to bridge the gap between physical and digital worlds as testbeds to optimise performance, reduce costs, and predict outcomes - has now successfully completed its first Industry Accelerator with strong SME engagement and has launched its first Academic Accelerator call.
- Work on [i4C](#) - a new innovation and clean technology centre for SMEs at St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena - is now well advanced, and RIBA Stage 2 almost complete, positioning the project to draw down BRCD funding. An operator has also been appointed for the facility.
- Meanwhile, the c.£1m fund for innovation in immersive technology, [Augment the City](#) has concluded successfully with a final showcase in Belfast City Hall in January, where the final three entrepreneurs presented their prototypes, and provided their insights into the futureproofing of the tourism sector.

3.6 Tourism and Regeneration Pillar – 5 projects progressing

- The [Bangor Waterfront](#) programme has been designed to return Bangor to a destination of choice. Concept design and survey work for Ballyholme Yacht Club and Pickie Fun Park has been advancing with RIBA 2 complete for both projects and public consultation, in advance of submission of planning applications, underway. The procurements for the design teams for the Urban Waterfront and Public Realm and Marine projects are ongoing.
- Building on an already popular destination in Hillsborough Castle, [Destination Royal Hillsborough](#), will further enhance the existing offering to create a world class heritage village. An OBC Addendum has been submitted for approval and planning permission for the public realm element of the programme was granted in January 2026, allowing designs to be finalised. Key surveys works and concept designs are being progressed for the other elements of the programme in tandem with Addendum approval.
- In Newry, the Newry regeneration programme aims to increase footfall within Newry City Centre. The contractor for the [Newry Theatre and Conference Centre](#) has been appointed and construction is due to start in June 2026. NMDDC has received a pre-action protocol letter in relation to the Civic Hub element of the Newry regeneration programme and NMDDC are responding through the appropriate legal channels.
- Both of [Mid and East Antrim Council's](#) tourism projects - Carrickfergus and Gobbins - are progressing through

the detailed design stages of project development and works to procure an Operator is ongoing.

- [Belfast Stories](#) achieved a major milestone with DoF approval of its OBC, and work is now focused on finalising the Contract for Funding and completing the subsidy control assessment.

3.7 Infrastructure Pillar – 1 project progressing, 2 projects on hold

- DoF approval for the [BRT Phase 2](#) has been granted to DfI who have now appointed Atkins to progress design development.
- Procurement of a Contractor for [Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge](#) is ongoing and DfI are considering the implications of the A5 judgement on all DfI projects.
- Following completion of a public consultation exercise for [Newry Southern Relief Road](#) earlier this year, DfI are awaiting a decision on whether a public inquiry will be required for the project.

3.8 Employability and Skills Pillar – 5 Skills Assessments completed

Five [cross-deal skills assessments](#) for the BRCD's key investment sectors have now been completed. Following this work we have engaged with project promoters and partners to consider how we might address the challenges with a view to agreeing an action plan. Individual projects across all pillars are also demonstrating good progress towards boosting inclusion, growth and digital futures through their own skills activities. Examples of these are included below:

Skills for Inclusion

To maximise inclusion, the IREACH Health and Studio Ulster projects are each providing exposure to future career opportunities to students. Meanwhile our own Belfast Stories has introduced pupils from three Belfast schools to the latest design proposals and the design process through Creative Youth workshops.

Skills for Growth

Skills in high value, high growth sectors are being promoted through both AMIC's IT apprenticeships and the Momentum 1.0 Internship Programme which offers intern opportunities in cutting edge, deep tech innovation projects.

Skills for Digital Futures

Led by BCC's City Innovation office, a BRCD funded AI Capability Building Workshop programme will aim to increase AI adoption within our six BRCD councils by helping them to identify and prioritise potential AI use cases.

Social Value

At the overall programme level the BRCD also brings additional opportunities such as contributions to social value. Projects across the Programme continue to apply SIB's Buy Social model and to date 16 contracts are committing 14,975 Social Value points, with 8,707 delivered so far. The points include 135 people accessing employment-related opportunities, mainly apprenticeships, work experience, student placements, and trainee roles, alongside careers events, mentoring, training, and site visits.

Environmental benefits are being achieved through training, awareness activities, volunteering, and reuse of surplus materials, while health and wellbeing outcomes are supported through awareness campaigns, training, assessments, and community donations.

The PMO will be considering future workshops in areas such as Benefits, Employability and Skills and other challenges and opportunities facing partners.

Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF)

The Digital Transformation Flexible Fund (DTFF) concept was initially developed in response to the low levels of innovation and digital transformation taking place across the region - particularly among the small business community. Following the development of a business case in September 2022, on behalf of all 11 councils, £6m capital funding was awarded from the City Deal Complementary Fund with a further £1.1m from The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). At that point it was agreed that fund would be administered by Newry Mourne and Down District Council on behalf of Northern Ireland, and a revenue contribution from each council was agreed for the lifetime of the project up to March 2026.

The project is now nearing completion and has experienced a high level of demand and depending on the outcome of the current funding call there is an option to extend to a further call as long as any commitments do not exceed the overall agreed capital budget. This would mean that Newry, Mourne

and Down District Council will require a further revenue contribution of £11,500 for the cost of continuing the administration of the fund. This can be accommodated within existing Belfast Region City Deal budgets so there is no additional financial ask. DTF has been very successful in helping to stimulate Digital Transformation and Innovation in small and micro businesses who generally do not have the capital reserves or resources to start to experiment, prototype and deliver new products or services using new and emerging technologies. Committee is therefore asked to approve continued participation in the programme.

3.9 Next Steps

Partners are currently preparing to report back formally on their respective Q4 and Year End positions which will inform the BRCD Annual Report – due to be brought back to the Aug/Sept meeting of this Committee. This will offer a more complete overview of progress and achievements to date.

Financial & Resource Implications

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

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.11 The approach taken to develop the City Deal has been subject to independent equality screening and rural proofing and states that;

‘BRCD is inherently inclusive, affording an opportunity for the region to grow in a way that will benefit the economy of Northern Ireland as a whole, thereby enhancing the lives and well-being of its citizens. If during further development of the programme it becomes apparent that there may be an adverse impact on certain groups or communities then the partnership commits to carrying out further Section 75 work and including screening and EQIAs as and when appropriate.’

The Committee:

- Noted the latest progress in respect of the BRCD;
- Approved continued participation in the Digital Transformation Flexible Fund at a cost of £11,500 which is within current BRCD budgets; and
- Under the Infrastructure Pillar, agreed to write to the Minister of Infrastructure to:
 - raise concern in the projects which had been outlined as ‘on hold’ in the report, clarify the Lagan Cycle and Pedestrian Bridge

and urge the Minister to progress the project as a positive Active Travel Project and benefit to the Departments Climate Change responsibilities.

- in relation to BRT Phase 2 project, request information when the design development would be completed, in particular regards to Ormeau Avenue.

Draft NI Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy

The Director City and Organisational Strategy presented the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members about the public consultation on the [Draft NI Executive Early Learning and Childcare \(ELC\) Strategy](#).

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

- I. Note that the Department of Education is seeking views on the draft NI Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy (ELC).
- II. Approve the draft consultation response (Appendix 1) to be submitted by Belfast City Council to the public consultation. Given the deadline for submission of responses is 24 March 2026, SP&R Committee is asked to give delegated authority to officers to submit the agreed response noting that it is subject to full Council ratification on 01 April 2026.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background

The draft ELC Strategy is the Executive’s draft plan for more affordable, accessible, high-quality early learning and childcare. The strategy is a comprehensive and ambitious framework designed to transform early years provision. It reflects a joined-up approach across departments and communities, recognising the critical role of early years in shaping lifelong outcomes. The draft strategy builds on work already undertaken to enhance early learning and childcare provision across the region and seeks to consolidate and expand on these achievements. The strategy is structured around three core themes which together seek to provide a holistic approach to improving early learning and childcare provision.

The PfG 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most' includes a commitment to *'provide more affordable, accessible, high-quality early learning and childcare opportunities to support children's development and ease financial pressures for working families. This must complement existing support available through Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare (TFC). We also need to ensure that our childcare sector is stable and sustainable.'*

The draft strategy is the Executive's plan for delivering on this commitment. Achieving the objectives set out in the strategy will require input from a range of departments. It will also contribute to a range of policy priorities through increased labour force participation and economic growth, poverty reduction, gender equality and social mobility.

3.2 Notice of Motion

A Notice of Motion was raised by Cllr Mal O'Hara in 2018 stating 'This council agrees to explore options and take practical steps, including through the Belfast Agenda and City Deal, with a view to creating a childcare strategy for the city that will encourage greater maternal employment, redress gender inequalities in the workplace, increase GVA in the city and, most importantly, improve educational and social outcomes for our children.'

3.3 Belfast Agenda

The core objectives of the draft ELC Strategy are aligned to the 'call to action' outlined in the Belfast Agenda, seeking partners to provide collective leadership to the delivery of a Childcare Strategy which would aim to deliver extended, affordable and high-quality provision of early education and care initiatives for families with children aged three to four (Belfast Agenda, p.10).

3.4 Core Themes and Outcomes

The strategy is structured around three themes with associated outcomes and objectives which together seek to provide a holistic approach to improving early learning and childcare provision.

Theme 1: Supporting Children in Their Early Years

This theme focuses on what the strategy will deliver for children. It concentrates on improving ELC experiences through expansion and enhancement of provision, the promotion of high quality ELC environments and targeted

support for those facing disadvantage and those with additional needs.

Outcome

All children get the developmental support needed in their early years to ensure the best start in life, including those facing disadvantage.

Objectives

1.1 Provide 22.5 hours pre-school education per week for children in their target preschool year.

1.2 Expand services for children facing disadvantage.

1.3 Expand developmental provision for children aged 2–3 (in their pre-pre-school year).

1.4 Promote high-quality provision across all ELC providers.

Theme 2: Supporting Families with their Children’s Learning and Childcare Costs

This theme focuses on what the strategy will do for families and carers. It seeks to make childcare more affordable and ensure better availability and accessibility of support and information, empowering parents to make the best choices for themselves and their family.

Outcomes

Families can access more affordable childcare that meets their needs.

Families are better equipped to understand and support their child’s learning.

Objectives

2.1 Make childcare more affordable.

2.2 Improve the information and support available for families.

Theme 3: Supporting the Early Years Sector and Workforce

This theme sets out the vital role of the ELC sector and workforce in delivering change. It focuses on improving sustainability and building capacity, while promoting fair pay and professional recognition.

Outcomes

A more stable and sustainable ELC sector with a highly trained and valued workforce.

More inclusive and accessible early years provision for children with additional needs.

Objectives

3.1 Build the sustainability and capacity of the ELC sector.

3.2 Enhance accessible ELC for children with additional needs.

3.3 Enhance the early years infrastructure through a skilled and valued workforce.

3.5 Implementation Timeframe and Financial Investment

85 actions within the draft strategy have been categorised into three groups: those commenced in the past 2 years for which £80m funding has already been provided by the Executive (Category 1), those proposed to do next (over the 4-year period April 2026 to March 2030) (Category 2) and those which may take longer to implement (currently scheduled from April 2030 to March 2034) (Category 3). It will require significant additional investment to deliver the proposed actions with an estimated requirement of £500m to deliver those actions programmed for the next four years (April 2026 to March 2030). Costs would be recurring and increase in future years to sustain progress. Additional budget would be required to implement the longer-term proposals.

An Implementation Plan for category 2 actions, up to April 2030, will be produced once the consultation on the draft strategy is completed, and a budget has been agreed by the Executive. This will detail the actions which will be taken forward under each objective, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), delivery partners, timescale and estimated costs. A Progress Report will be published by DE and presented to the Executive on an annual basis from the commencement of implementation.

3.6 New initiatives and commitments

The strategy aspires to subsidise over 50% of childcare costs for working families by April 2032 as well as provide universal full-time pre-school education, strongly positioning Northern Ireland amongst the leading international models of support. It will also see the introduction of an Early Years Curriculum Framework to promote consistent content and pedagogy

across early years and childcare providers and there is a longer-term objective to expand developmental provision to all 2–3-year-olds.

Alongside these new initiatives, there are commitments to invest in core services and provide a more stable funding environment for existing early years programmes. There are specific initiatives for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D) and a plan to strengthen the childcare workforce, both centre-based provision and home-based childminders.

3.7 BCC Draft Consultation Response

The draft response, attached at Appendix 1, welcomes the draft Early Learning and Childcare Strategy and endorses the objectives and actions outlined to deliver more affordable, accessible, high-quality early learning and childcare.

Theme 1

- Supportive of extending funded pre-school places on basis of 22.5 hours per week to support child development outcomes and parental employment. However, the model fails to adequately support parents who work full-time hours, atypical hours, and lone parents and may risk reinforcing gender inequality in the labour market. Furthermore, access to places alone will not ensure uptake; targeted support will be required particularly in disadvantaged communities where families may lack confidence or trust in formal systems.
- The action to remove the legislative requirement to prioritise children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds when applying for funded pre-school places is concerning and should be reconsidered. It risks diluting targeted access for those who would benefit from it the most.
- Restricting funded provision to one pre-school year misses an opportunity to support labour market participation earlier and maximise the opportunity to keep parents (predominantly women) in work.
- Supportive of actions to expand services for children facing disadvantage and children with additional needs. The inclusion of child poverty indicators could be considered as part of the assessment of where additional Sure Start provision should be concentrated.
- Supportive of actions to extend developmental provision for children aged 2-3 (in their pre-pre-school year) and the prioritisation of children facing disadvantage and those with additional needs.

- Supportive of actions to promote high-quality provision across all early learning and childcare providers. However, there is a lack of detail on how these proposals will be implemented.
- Consideration should be given to capital funding to enable the physical expansion of Irish Medium and Pre-School infrastructure to meet growing demand of children and families who use Irish as their first language.
- BCC's Irish Medium Employment Academies are ideally placed to meet the rapid growth of the Irish Medium education sector.

Theme 2

- The actions to make childcare more affordable are welcomed however the proposed subsidy scheme could be further enhanced with planned increases introduced earlier.
- Reducing childcare costs is fundamental to inclusive economic growth, particularly for women and lone parents' labour market participation.
- While the proposed policy identifies average daily childcare fees and trends over time, it does not explore regional cost variations and demand levels. The Belfast average monthly childcare cost is 28% higher than the NI median of £225.
- Focus on enhancing information provision to families is to be welcomed. The needs of those who may face additional barriers should be considered when designing systems and digital platforms to ensure inclusion and accessibility.

Theme 3

- Actions to build the sustainability and capacity of the ELC sector are strongly supported and will be critical to delivering the wider ambitions of the strategy. Over the last eight years Belfast City Council have successfully delivered several employment academies and upskilling in relation to childcare including, classroom assistants, SEN, Irish Medium, Deaf people and people with hearing loss and welcome opportunities to further invest in this area.
- Actions to enhance accessible early learning and childcare for children with additional needs are to be welcomed. However, there is no specific reference to deaf children or sign language development. Evidence suggests that a deaf child will benefit from sign language learning from an early age.

- Approved Home Childcare should be promoted more widely particularly to families with children with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEN/D) and to those who work atypical hours who find it more challenging to find mainstream settings that meet their children's needs.
- The Draft Sign Language Bill for NI has a clause (Clause no 2.2 (b)) for free sign language classes for deaf children and young people. Public authorities who work with families with deaf children and young people will have a statutory duty to provide sign language support and classes. The ELC Strategy would benefit by including this as an additional action. The Bill is expected to become law later this year.
- The actions listed to ensure the workforce are skilled and valued are strongly supported. Offering better pay, free training and a full career pathway from entry level to level 5 would help incentivise childcare as a viable career path and address systemic recruitment and retention issues. Ensuring all staff employed by ELC providers funded by Government are paid the Real Living Wage strongly aligns with Belfast City Council's commitment as an employer and procurer and with our Belfast Business Promise Charter.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.8 There are no direct implications associated with this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

- 3.9 The implementation of the draft ELC strategy presents a significant opportunity to further promote equality of opportunity and good relations across many Section 75 grounds, and to tackle some of the evident inequalities that continue to persist. While the EQIA appropriately presents the relevant data and highlights some potential impacts, there is opportunity to enhance its value by drawing out potential adverse impacts associated with some actions – specifically that identified in 1.1: proposal to remove the statutory requirement to prioritise children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds when applying for funded pre-school places. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks should incorporate the means to disaggregate data (both quantitative and qualitative) by Section 75 considerations during implementation.

There are no direct implications associated with this report.

3.10 Rural Needs Assessment

The Rural Needs Assessment acknowledges that rural areas can face unique challenges in accessing ELC services, including limited availability of registered providers, longer travel distances to existing settings, and fewer subsidised places compared to urban centres. These barriers may result in reduced participation in early education, increased reliance on informal or unregistered care, and constrained employment opportunities for parents—particularly women. The strategy seeks to improve access to early learning and childcare (ELC) services in rural areas by addressing the core barriers of accessibility, affordability, and quality.

There are no direct implications associated with this report.

3.11 Child Rights Impact Assessment

The ELC Strategy is expected to have a broadly positive impact on children and young people’s rights, particularly in relation to:

- Article 6 (right to life, survival and development),
- Article 18 (support for working parents),
- Article 23 (children with a disability)
- Article 27 (adequate standard of living), and
- Article 28 (right to education).
- Article 31 (leisure, play and culture)

The strategy aims to reduce inequalities by improving access to affordable, high-quality ELC, with targeted support for disadvantaged groups including children from low-income families, those with SEN/D, and newcomer or minority ethnic communities.

There are no direct implications associated with this report.”

During discussion, several Councillors suggested additions to the consultation response, which included:

Theme one:

- Concern in the description of 22.5hrs/week term as full time.
- Emphasise that parents have to keep places for mornings or afternoon and non-term time - reducing parenting choice.
- Request further detail on how parents move to full time places in the pre-school year.
- Highlight the need for capital support for IM education provision and support for non-traditional pre-school provision.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Theme two:

- Highlight the high costs and fee increases and a commitment to working with UKG to reform it.
- Raise capped support and address earnings cap for both parents.
- Call for DE to engage further with UKG on the issue.
- Under question 5 – highlight the need for clear methodology used to capture the average costs.

Theme three:

- Highlight the need for proposals to improve workforce pay and conditions in the ELC sector.
- Reflect that the Childcare providers are also struggling.
- Highlight the difficulty in the cycle and retention of Level 5 qualified staff in the Irish Medium education sector.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted that the Department of Education was seeking views on the draft NI Executive Early Learning and Childcare Strategy (ELC);
- Approved the draft consultation response (Appendix 1) and the additions highlighted by the Committee, to be submitted by Belfast City Council to the public consultation. Given the deadline for submission of responses is 24th March 2026, the Committee also delegated authority to officers to submit the agreed response, noting that it was subject to full Council ratification on 1st April, 2026.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update including Capital Programme 2026/27

The Committee considered the report which provided an update on the 2026/27 Capital Programme and associated capital financing, as well as requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme.

During discussion, the Committee raised a number of additional improvements to be investigated.

After discussion, the Committee:

Capital Programme Movements -

- **Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme** – Agreed that the Programme for improvements to Parks and Open Spaces for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 be moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum allocation of up to £1.5million (£750k – Year 1 and £750k- Year 2) and noted that a rolling allocation of £750k had been agreed going forwards and agreed that the scope of the Ballyhackamore Parklet improvements covered the existing green areas and that the pathway in Gilnahirk Park be added, subject to budget availability.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

- **Bridges Improvement Programme** - Agreed that the project be moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* with a maximum allocation of up to £240,000 for Year 1 and agreed the annual rolling programme of bridge improvements of £240,000 per year thereafter.
- **IT Programme — Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology** - Noted that a satisfactory tender return had been received and that the Director of Finance had confirmed that this project was within the affordability limits of the Council and agreed that a maximum of up to £225,000 be allocated.
- **City Hall – Security Improvements** - Agreed that the project be moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
- **Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites** - Agreed that the project be added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.
- **Procurement process for Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme, Bridges Programme, Pitches Programme and Leisure Programme** - agreed that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated for these Programmes as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
- **Belfast Zoo/Old Zoo** – agreed that Member site visits be undertaken to a range of other Zoo locations to inform the ongoing work in respect of the Zoo.

Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2026/27

- noted the update on Capital Financing as outlined in 3.10 of the report and the update on the Capital Programme for 2026/27 at 3.11 and in Appendix 1.
- agreed to hold Party Group Briefings to update Members on the status of projects along with the emerging implications for future capital investment decisions and in particular the potential impact on the future district rate in line with the development of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and linked to the ongoing Transformation and Efficiency agenda.

The Committee also noted that, following requests by several Members, further updates would be provided on:

- Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility including financing and health and safety works at the Girdwood Community Hub;
- Strangford Avenue Playing Fields potential play park;
- Cavehill Park proposals and potential for mobile coffee unit; and
- Vesting process of rear gate at Cherryvale Park.

Asset Management (2)

The Committee:

i) Derriaghy Glen Linear Park - Disposal

- Approved the submission of an application to the Department for Communities (DfC) to seek approval for a disposal at less than best value for the land currently owned by the Council at Derriaghy Glen Linear Park.
- Agreed to the disposal of the lands subject to receiving DfC consent to a less than best value disposal at nil consideration.

ii) Westlands – Acquisition of Land

- Approved the purchase of land adjacent to Westlands from Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to facilitate the development of a new community facility and MUGA.

iii) Alexandra Park – Licence and Easement

- Approved a licence for works and easement with JAMDAC Developments Ltd for the installation of a storm drain and associated headwall within Alexandra Park.

iv) 35-39 Royal Avenue – New Short-Term Lease

- Approved the granting of a 9-month lease to ResStock3D for 35-39 Royal Avenue at an initial rent of £1,600 per month with the first month rent free.

Update on Area Working Groups

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of South Belfast Area Working Group of 23rd February, the North Belfast Area Working Group of 25th February and the West Area Working Group of 26th February.

The Committee agreed to refer the decision of the East Area Working Group of 5th March in relation to the reallocation of the Local Investment Fund proposals to a special meeting and approved the remainder of the minute.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Contracts Update

The Committee considered a report which sought approval for tenders, contract modifications to contract term and Single Tender Actions (STA) over £30,000.

The Committee:

- Approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in
- Appendix 1 (**Table 1**);
- Approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in
- Appendix 1 (**Table 2**); and

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

- Approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 3**).

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Adobe licences	Up to 1 year	£55,000	P Gribben	Widely used software used by staff across the Council. This tender will consolidate all current Adobe licences into a single contract.	N	N	N
Provision of Travel Services	Up to 5 years	£495,000	S McNichol I	To support Officers and Members when booking travel and accommodation as part of their duties. Contract value includes all forecasted spend on travel related costs plus any supplier management fees.	N	N	N
The supply of Original Equipment Manufacturer 'OEM' parts for range of vehicles	Up to 5 years	£2,750,000	D Sales	Fleet are to amalgamate current separate contracts into one OEM spare parts tender (using Lots). Covers parts for DAF, Iveco, Scarab, Dennis Eagle, Holder/Schmidt, Fiat and John Deere and supports warranty cover for these OEMs. Some current contracts require short extensions to align expiry dates – see Table 2.	Y	N	N
Supply and Erection of Street Nameplates	Up to 4 years	£240,000	K Bentley	To supply and erect street nameplates within Belfast	Y	N	N

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Digitisation of Building Control Records	Up to 4 years	£140,000	K Bentley	Digitisation of building control hard copy files to include application forms, plans, specifications and reports	Y	N	N
Commissioning of case work and advice programme for Communities from Minority Ethnic Background	Up to 3 years	£760,000	D Sales	Funding has been received from Executive Office who have asked all Councils to commission advice services for new communities. Initial funding £380,000 for 18 months secured. Extension option for a further £380,000/ 18 months to be included, subject to further funding being secured.	N	Funding/approach approved by Shared City Partnership & SP&R in Dec 25.	Y
North Foreshore Maintenance Contracts	Up to 5 years	£350,000	S Grimes	To provide a Term Service Contract for maintenance works (both scheduled and reactionary/emergency) at the North Foreshore – Giant's Park site. The contract reflects the unique nature and conditions of the site as a former landfill site. The emergency works (if required) will provide a contractor response within 1 hour and works within 4 hours of notification – this is particularly important for the services associated with the landfill capping, leachate and gas ancillaries.	N	N	N

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Insurance Valuation Services	Up to 3 years	£90,000	T Wallace	This specialist service ensures all council assets are insured for the correct amount to avoid the risk of underinsurance in the event of a claim. All assets assessed over a 3-year programme.	Y	N	N
Strategic oversight & support for the development of the Belfast Vulnerability Model and transfer of learning to other community planning priorities	Up to 2 years	£100,000	J Tully	Building upon the success of the initial phases of the Complex Lives initiative, there is still a need for and benefit of independent advisory and strategic support. The additional capacity, experience and objectivity provided helped translate our ambitions into an actionable programme, roadmap and helped shape the emerging operating model and enabling partnership.	N	N	N

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason
Hire of The Belfast SOS Bus for Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann	Up to 2 years	£98,000	K Forster	The Belfast SOS Bus provides a mobile, non-judgemental safe space on the streets, offering a range of support including first aid, mental health intervention, and harm reduction. It offers practical assistance like refreshments, transport home, and referrals to other services. There is no	The Belfast SOS Bus	3

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason
				other provider of this service for Belfast. STA approved at Dec 25 SP&R to cover Fleadh 26. Re-submitted for approval to cover up to 2 years (i.e. Fleadh 26 with option for Fleadh 27)		
Fleadh Cheoil Belfast 2026 Volunteer Services (Phase 2)	Up to 1 year	£177,472	D Martin	Volunteer Now is the only organisation in NI with experience and capacity of co-ordinating and managing a complex, high profile, volunteering programme of the scale of the Fleadh (approx. 1200-1500 volunteers). A STA with Volunteer Now was approved by SP&R in Aug 25 (Phase 1) to cover the initial planning stages for Fleadh 26. This STA is to cover the next delivery phase. A further STA will be required with Volunteer Now to cover cost of uniforms. Costs for this will be finalised shortly.	Volunteer Now	3
Hire of Road Train for Belfast Zoo (6-month trial)	Up to 6 months	£75,000	K Forster	With current Zoo Mobile approaching end of life, the Zoo would like to trial the use of a hop-on hop-off accessible road train which would improve accessibility and the customer experience at the Zoo. Electric Events are the only company that has a road train available for hire at a reasonable cost.	Electric Events	3

Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration & Value	Modification – Period & Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
Provision of asylum support and capacity building programme (T2605)	Up to 1 year & £100k	Additional 1 year and £70k	J Girvan	In 2024 Council approved the approach to procure a training and capacity resource to support wider community and voluntary	Law Centre Northern Ireland

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration & Value	Modification – Period & Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
				<p>organisations to enhance their ability and skills to provide services to minority ethnic communities. Following an open tender exercise Law Centre NI were appointed (only bidder).</p> <p>Additional funding has been received from the Executive Office to support services for asylum seekers and other new Communities in Belfast. At the Shared City Partnership in December members agreed to recommend to SP&R to have a further phase of this work. This has also been endorsed by the Executive Office.</p> <p>An extension of 1 year is recommended with the supplier to deliver this next phase. The marketplace has not changed since the original tender and, given the requirement for the contractor to be accredited at providing immigration advice, it would be expected that should a further tendering process be undertaken that other bidders</p>	

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration & Value	Modification – Period & Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
				would not respond.	
Provision of Building Management and Operations at 2 Royal Avenue - T2583	Up to 18 months & £326k	Additional 6 month and £113,108	D Martin	The extension of 2RA's operator contract will allow the venue to remain as a primary venue for both Fleadh and Culture Night 2026, whilst retaining the operational knowledge and expertise that MayWe have gained as operators. Extension until 31 December 2026 will also allow the annual Winter's Den (Council-funded Christmas programming) and Santa's Post Office (Belfast One funded) to remain in the venue in December 2026.	MayWe
Provision of Strategic Oversight and Support for Complex Lives and Community Planning – T2433	Up to 32 months & £200k	3 months & £30k	J Tully	The Council intends to commission a new tender for the independent advisory and strategic support for the widening of both focus and impact of the Complex Lives initiative through the creation of a Belfast Vulnerability Model; however, a short 3-month extension is requested whilst this tender exercise is progressed. The extension will maintain momentum and	Marsh Public Service Solutions

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration & Value	Modification – Period & Value	SRO	Description	Supplier
				drive, retain the commitment and involvement of partners as well as facilitate the effective transfer of knowledge and experience.	
Supply of Scarab OEM vehicles parts (T2304)	Up to 3 years & £165k	Additional 3 months & £10k	S Leonard	Extend the contract expiry date by 3 months to align expiry dates with the new OEM spare parts tender – see table 1.	McCreath Taylor Ltd
Supply of DAF OEM vehicles parts (T2312)	Up to 3 years & £150k	Additional 3 months & £9.5k	S Leonard	Extend the contract expiry date by 3 months to align expiry dates with the new OEM spare parts tender – see table 1.	TBF Thompson (Garvagh) Ltd
Supply of Iveco OEM vehicles parts (T2294)	Up to 3 years & £165k	Additional 3 months & £10k	S Leonard	Extend the contract expiry date by 3 months to align expiry dates with the new OEM spare parts tender – see table 1.	NI Trucks
Facilities Management Service for Mary Peter's Track – T1856	Up to 6 years & £1.06m	Additional 2 months & £30k	S Leonard	The evaluation of the replacement tender for this service is being finalised; however, negotiations with the preferred supplier over the final management fee is ongoing. A 2-month extension will allow for these negotiations to be finalised, and the replacement tender awarded.	Athletics NI

**CIPFA Prudential Code Capital Strategy
and Treasury Management Indicators 2026/27**

The Director of Finance advised the Committee that the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 required the Council to adopt the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. In doing so, the Council was required to agree a minimum revenue provision policy annually and to set and monitor a series of Prudential Indicators, the key objectives of which were to ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of the council are affordable, prudent and sustainable.

He highlighted that a Treasury Management Strategy was presented to the Committee on an annual basis and that was supported by quarterly and year end treasury management reports.

He pointed out that, the Capital Strategy, incorporating the prudential indicators, was included as Appendix A of the report, while the Treasury Management Strategy and treasury management indicators had been included at Appendix B.

He explained that, the comparison of “Gross Debt” to “Capital Financing Requirement (CFR)” was the main indicator of prudence when considering the proposed capital investment plans of the Council. Estimated gross debt should not exceed the CFR for the current year plus two years.

He advised that the Council’s estimated gross debt position, illustrated in Table 6, Appendix A of the report, was comfortably within the CFR in the medium term. The Director of Finance therefore considers the estimated levels of gross debt as being prudent.

It was reported that Table 10 (Appendix A) showed the estimated financing costs for capital expenditure as a percentage of the estimated net revenue stream for the Council, based on the medium term. These illustrated that, in the medium term, capital financing costs would represent an average of 5.19% of the Council’s net running costs. On this basis the Director of Finance was satisfied that the level of capital expenditure is affordable.

The Director of Finance stated that the Finance Act required the Council to set an affordable borrowing limit, relating to gross debt. The Prudential Code defines the affordable limit as the “Authorised Borrowing Limit” and gross borrowing must not exceed this limit. Table 8 (Appendix A) sets out the recommended “Authorised Borrowing Limit” for the Council as being £128m for 2026/27.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report and the prudential and treasury management indicators included within the appendices to the report;
- agreed the Authorised Borrowing Limit for the Council of £128m for 2026/27;
- Agreed the Treasury Management Strategy for 2026/27, which had been included as Appendix B to the report; and
- Requested that a report on the financing options for Girdwood, be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

Equality and Good Relations

Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting

The Committee approved the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on the 9th March, including:

Members Update

- Shared City Partnership recommends that members note the update provided in the minutes.

Girdwood 10 Year Review

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report and agree the approach outlined in the contents of the report.

PEACEPLUS – Local Community Action Plan Secretariat Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

Peace Plus Thriving and Peaceful Communities Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

Peace Plus Celebrating Culture and Diversity Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

Community Regeneration & Transformation Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report

Any Other Business

- The partnership agreed to move SCP meetings to a Wednesday from May 26, and they would ask the Strategy Policy and Resources Committee to note this change.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of the Party Group
Leaders Consultative Forum**

The Committee noted the minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum on the 12th March, 2026 and also agreed to an additional illuminate request for a date in April in recognition of Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) Awareness Month.

**Audit and Risk Panel Report and
Minutes of Meeting of 10th March, 2026**

The Committee noted the key issues arising at the meeting and approved the minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel of 10th March, 2026.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGE \$
The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants	9 October 2026	CIMA Awards & Gala Dinner 2026 – reception followed by dinner, awards and entertainment. Numbers attending: 150	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room Hire of £1250 Any applicable additional charges
WAVE Trauma Centre	14 October 2026	Book Launch: Celebrating 35 Years of WAVE Trauma Centre – Reception followed by dinner and speeches to mark 35 years of cross-community work aiding those who have been directly impacted by 'the Troubles' Numbers attending: 65	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Room Hire Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
SOS Bus N. Ireland	29 October 2026	Volunteer Celebration to mark 20 years event with buffet, speeches and entertainment. SOS Bus provide welfare support, first aid, mental health intervention and community safety to anyone who becomes vulnerable. Numbers attending: 200	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Room Hire Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Scouts Northern Ireland	8 January 2027	Chief Scout's Award and King's Scout Award Certificate Presentation – Annual awards ceremony Numbers attending - 500	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room Hire of £1250 Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Multi-Ethnic Sports & Cultures Northern Ireland (MSCNI)	9 January 2027	NISCANS Awards & Community Reception 2027 – Reception followed by awards ceremony celebrating volunteering, community leadership and positive cross-community relations Numbers attending: 180	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room Hire of £1250 Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Glaucoma UK	17 November 2027	UKEG \$ Dinner - annual conference for clinicians working in the field of glaucoma. Attendees will be ophthalmologists, optometrists, senior research academics, speakers. Numbers attending: 300	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Room Hire of £1250 Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Belfast City Mission	3 December 2027	Christmas Carol service to mark 200th Anniversary – As part of a series of events to mark this significant milestone in organisations history. City Mission is a Christian charity with halls in 14 districts running youth clubs, food banks, after school clubs, and senior citizen meetings. Numbers attending: 200	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No Room Hire Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>

The Committee also noted that information on Linen and other Charges for events at the City Hall would be provided.

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 20th March, 2026**

**Minutes of Language Strategy Working Group
of 30th January, 2026**

The Committee approved the Minutes of Language Strategy Working Group of the 30th January, 2026

**Request for the use of City Hall grounds
for various events in July 2026**

The Committee considered a report which sought permission for the use of City Hall ground for the following events:

- Use of East and West lawns – USA 250 Concert – 4th July, 2026 by Ulster-Scots Agency
- Use of Cenotaph and Garden of Remembrance – 13th July, 2026 by County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast
- Use of East and West lawns – Orangefest – 13th July, 2026 by County Grand Orange Lodge of Belfast

The Committee:

1. Authorised the use of the specific areas of City Hall grounds on dates as set out in the report; and
2. Authorised the events to take place on the basis of submission of an event management plan and risk assessment to ensure delivery of a safe public events.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

**Procedures of the Irish Street
Sign Consultation (Cllr Long to raise)**

Councillor Long summarised his concerns regarding occupants, not on the electoral role, being unable to participate in street surveys in relation to Irish Street Sign Consultations,

The Committee agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting regarding a review of alternatives as to how surveys for Dual Language Street Signs could be as inclusive and robust as possible.

Chairperson

People and Communities Committee

Wednesday, 4th March, 2026

MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

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

In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and
Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Open Spaces,
Resources, Fleet and Transport;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building
Control; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland and Councillor Flynn.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council on 2nd March.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Bradley, Canavan and M. Donnelly declared interests under the item 'Generalist Advice Funding 2026/27' in that they were employed by organisations which had applied for funding under the scheme. Since the item did not become subject to discussion or debate, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the report associated with the following item was restricted under Part 1, Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014.

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

**People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 4th March, 2026**

Departmental Budget – Period 3

The Committee noted contents of a report, together with the information contained within an associated financial report pack, which provided an overview of the departmental budget to the period ending 31st December, 2025.

Notices of Motion/Issue Raised in Advance

Compact Mechanical Sweeper

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 3rd June, 2025, it had adopted a number of recommendations relating to the Council's Dog Warden Service. One of those recommendations related to the undertaking of a trial of a mechanical sweeper within local neighbourhoods as a measure to address the problem of dog fouling. It was reported that the trial had been conducted in the east, south and west of the City and, accordingly, a report was presented which outlined the findings.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and the Director of Open Spaces, Resources, Fleet and Transport undertook to explore a number of options in relation to the operation of that type of mechanical machine within neighbourhoods and to submit a further report in this regard. Such a report would include also details of the financial considerations, should there be any proposed changes to cleansing operations.

Operational Issues

Proposals for Dual Language Street Signs

The Committee considered a report which outlined details of six applications which had been received for the erection of a second street sign in Irish, specifically at Onslow Gardens, Kimberley Street, Stormont Park, St. John's Place, Indiana Avenue and Mountainview Drive. It was noted that, whilst all of the applications had reached the 15% support threshold required under the Council's policy, a majority of the residents who had completed and returned the surveys in Stormont Park and Onslow Gardens had opposed to the erection of a second sign in Irish.

Proposal

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

That the Committee agrees to approve four of the six applications for the erection of second street nameplates in Irish with the exception of the applications for Stormont Park and Onslow Gardens.

Amendment

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

**People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 4th March, 2026**

That the proposal be amended to provide that, in accordance with the Council's policy for the erection of dual language street signs, the Committee approves all six applications.

On a vote, nine Members voted for the amendment and nine against. As there was an equality of votes, the Chairperson exercised his second and casting vote against the amendment and it was declared lost.

The proposal was then put to the meeting whereupon nine Members voted in favour and nine against. Since there was an equality of votes, the Chairperson exercised his second and casting vote in favour of the proposal and it was declared carried.

**Service Level Agreement
NIEA Drinking Water Inspectorate**

The Director of City Services reminded the Committee that the Council operated a service level agreement (SLA) with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Drinking Water Inspectorate; whereby Council officers undertook a range of duties, primarily concerning the sampling of private water supplies, risk assessments and investigatory services. She added that the agreement ensured compliance with 'The Private Water Supplies Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009', which involved annual monitoring programmes. The current agreement had been in place since 2015, and the Director outlined the principal aspects of a revised SLA to oversee the financial year 2026/27.

The Committee granted approval for the Director of City Services to sign the associated service level agreement.

Consultation Response - Northern Ireland Nature Recovery Strategy

The Committee considered a corporate response to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) consultation exercise relating to its draft Northern Ireland Nature Recovery Strategy. It was explained that DAERA had a legislative duty to publish a strategy to address the conservation of biodiversity in Northern Ireland. The draft strategy contained five strategic objectives that would help DAERA meet its international and national legislative obligations up to 2032.

The Committee approved the [consultation response](#) and agreed that it be submitted by the submission date of 18th March, subject to the proviso that amendments, if any, made at April's meeting of the Council would be forwarded to the department.

Requests for the Use of Parks for Events

The Committee granted approval to the holding of the undernoted events, subject to the organisers meeting all of the stipulations as set out within the report:

- March for Jesus – Ormeau Park;
- Mary's Meals: Sponsored Walk – Falls Park;
- 'Fundamania' – Boucher Playing Fields; and
- Belfast Memory Walk – Ormeau Park.

**People and Communities Committee,
Wednesday, 4th March, 2026**

In addition, the Committee granted approval also to the Strategic Director to negotiate an appropriate fee with Athletics Ireland for the hosting of the All-Ireland Schools Cross Country Championships at the City of Belfast Playing Fields on Saturday, 7th March.

Generalist Advice Funding 2026/27

The Committee noted the contents of a report in respect of the above-mentioned matter and endorsed a set of arrangements that would be put in place to provide Generalist Advice payments in lieu of the receipt of a letter of offer from the Department for Communities for Community Support Funding in the financial year 2026/27, of which Generalist Advice was an element. Specifically, the arrangements would provide that fifty per cent funding would be paid to groups in advance, subject to the receipt of the required paperwork; and that a second payment would be paid on the receipt of further satisfactory paperwork, which would be subject to availability within the allocated budget. A table of proposed payments was appended to the report.

The Committee noted also that the Council did not have a budget allocated to support activity that was one hundred percent funded through the Community Support Plan and that a further report on the one hundred percent funded elements would be provided once the Community Support Plan letter of offer had been received.

Chairperson

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 11th March, 2026

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor; and
Councillors Black, Bunting, de Faoite,
S. Douglas, Duffy, Groogan, Hanvey, Lyons,
McAteer, McCabe, McCallin, McCormick, McKay,
R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Nelson and Ó Néill.

Also attended: Alderman McCullough.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy;
Ms. C. Cassin, Markets Development Manager;
Mr. F. Grant, Operations Development Manager;
Mr. N. Simpson, Zoo Development Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was received from Councillor McDonough-Brown.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 14th January and 9th February, 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 9th February, 2026.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to the item 'Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update', Councillor Groogan declared an interest in that her employer was in receipt of a grant through the scheme. As this item did not become the subject of debate, she was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillor McCabe declared an interest in relation to the item 'Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 Update' in that her employer was referenced within the report. As this item did not become the subject of debate, she was not required to leave the meeting.

Councillors Groogan and McCabe also declared an interest in the items 'City Imagining Investment Programme - Cultural Multi-Annual Grants' and 'Financial Reporting - Quarter 3 2025/26' in that they were associated with organisations which had

applied for cultural multi-annual grant funding and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Presentation

Visit Belfast

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

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2026-2027 financial year and to set out the organisation's strategic development and operational delivery, focused on supporting tourism growth.**

Members should note that Visit Belfast will be in attendance at Committee to present the detail of its 2026-2027 business plan.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- Note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2026-2027. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by Council.**
- Approve and agree a funding allocation of £2,143,073 for 2026-2027, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets.**

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 Members will be aware that Visit Belfast was established by Council as the principal destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation for the city of Belfast. Visit Belfast leads on the tourism marketing activities and targets both the leisure and business tourism markets. It is a membership organisation with more than 500 partner businesses across the wider hospitality industry. Visit Belfast works on behalf of its funders and partners and with a range of public and private partners including Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Belfast Chamber to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.**
- 3.2 Visit Belfast is a public/private partnership. Its current Chairperson is Marie-Thérèse McGivern; and Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Sammy Douglas, Councillor Eric Hanvey,**

Councillor Tomás Ó Néill and Councillor Séanna Walsh. Also represented on the board are members from the private, public and community sectors.

- 3.3 The tourism and hospitality industry in Belfast has been going from strength to strength as Belfast continues to drive the regional tourism economy; in 2024, the most recent published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Belfast hosted 1.5 million overnight trips accounting for 31% of all overnight trips to Northern Ireland generating tourism spend of £469 million, which is 43% of Northern Ireland overnight tourism spend. There are no tourism day visitor statistics available at this time.
- 3.4 Council has worked with Visit Belfast to continue to rebuild city tourism which has resulted in Belfast's visitor economy being stronger and more competitive in a market context that has been challenging. The city has charted a strong recovery, yet challenges such as staffing, higher costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the knock-on impact on hospitality opening hours in the city remain.
- 3.5 The inclusion of tourism as a key growth sector in the City Region Deal, acknowledged the fact that the sector is already a significant economic generator but recognises the need for significant additional investment in order to sustain growth. The Council's 10-year plan for tourism in the city; 'Make Yourself at Home' sets out a vision for the future of tourism in the city that is centred on a people-based and sustainable model of development with a focus on: increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience; supporting quality authentic products; developing skills; and strengthening the city's position through marketing and communications.
- 3.6 Belfast's Make Yourself at Home, Tourism Plan recognises both the challenges to increase tourism and to maximise the positive impact that it can have on the city; whilst the updated Belfast Agenda has set a target to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m by 2030. As the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) for Belfast, Visit Belfast has an important role to play in realising the vision for tourism. It is in this context that Visit Belfast developed its three-year strategy New Horizons (2024-2027) and its year three business plan 2026-2027 to support and promote tourism activity in the city region in a way that enriches the visitor experience, encourages longer stays and achieves meaningful economic and social impact for local people. Further details of activities that will be undertaken as part of this plan with associated

targets will be set out in the presentation to the Committee and are included at Appendix A.

- 3.7** Visit Belfast's three-year strategy New Horizons (2024-2027) and year three business plan (2026-2027) are aligned to the four themes of Belfast's Tourism Plan: Make Yourself at Home, focused on delivering for the city:
- Grow the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way
 - Position the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out;
 - Enhance the Experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer, and;
 - Sustain its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.
- 3.8** Tourism Outlook – tourism contributes to the economic and social wellbeing of the city with high potential to create jobs quickly and provide the economic impetus for the wider economy. The global tourism landscape is being reshaped by shifts in demand, evolving traveller behaviours, and rising economic pressures, creating both opportunities and challenges for the city region. The analysis of tourism trends, market sentiment, policy context and performance indicators underscore the opportunity for growth in the coming year.
- 3.9** The year ahead presents a significant opportunity to attract visitors to the city and region with Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 set to become the largest cultural event in the city's history. This landmark moment is further reinforced by Belfast's designation as a UNESCO City of Music and European City of Sport, positioning the city firmly on the national and international stage. Beyond Fleadh, the marketing approach will continue to deepen the Explore the Unexpected narrative, showcasing Belfast's neighbourhoods, local voices and authentic experiences, thereby meeting the expectations of visitors seeking experiences that are authentic and inspiring; and where there are strong stories and a cultural connection.
- 3.10** Visit Belfast 2025-2026 performance - Visit Belfast's focus in year two of the New Horizons strategy was to achieve an economic impact target of £141m through leisure tourism marketing, business events, cruise and visitor servicing activity. Visit Belfast is on target to deliver a very strong year

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

two performance in 2025-26 with all KPIs achieved or exceeded.

- 3.11** Priorities outlined in Visit Belfast’s business plan 2026-2027 include: directly delivering on the ambitions and priorities set out in Make Yourself at Home tourism plan for Belfast through key strategic focus areas of growing demand by positioning Belfast as a front of mind destination for leisure city breaks and business events; increasing the value of overnight stays and day trips from NI, ROI and GB markets, prioritising midweek, shoulder season and winter months; leverage major events; marketing will focus on direct access cities within Europe and capitalise on increased US market via Dublin; enhance the experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a culturally diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer and iconic attractions in order to connect visitors with authentic and unique experiences; collaboration across industry partnerships.
- 3.12** Operational Targets for 2026-2027 - based on projected levels of growth in 2026-2027, Visit Belfast is proposing the following targets for 2026-2027 as agreed by their board:

Target 2026-2027	Measurement
1.04m Visits	Cruise 296,000 Daytrips 425,000 Overnight leisure trips 285,000 Delegates 38,500
500,000 Bednights	400,000 Leisure 100,000 Business
£150m economic impact	Leisure £66m Business events £39m Visitor servicing £19m Cruise £26m
825,000 Visitor Enquiries	Total enquiries across all sites

- 3.13** A detailed business plan has been submitted and reviewed by officers. The targets outlined will form the basis of key performance indicators for Council’s 2026-2027 funding agreement with Visit Belfast. Regular monitoring against targets will be included, and these key performance indicators will relate to the trajectory for growth and align with the implementation phases for Council’s tourism plan. This provides a basis for more effective monitoring of performance.

3.14 **Financial & Resource Implications**

In the current financial year, Belfast City Council’s funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £2,076,424. An allocation of

£2,143,073 has been set aside within the Departmental estimates for the financial year 2026-2027.

3.15 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

No specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with councils outside of Belfast, as part of the Regional Tourism Partnership."

The Chairperson welcomed Visit Belfast's Chief Executive, Mr. G. Lennon, and Chair, Ms. M. T. McGivern, to the meeting.

Mr. Lennon and Ms. McGivern presented the Committee with an overview of Visit Belfast's Business Plan for 2026/27, year three of its 2024-27 strategy 'New Horizons for Belfast City Region', which included:

- Key pillars of the strategy;
- Strategy objectives;
- Performance for year one and two of the strategy;
- Outlook for 2026/27 including opportunities and challenges;
- Key development areas for 2026/27;
- Marketing and communications;
- Public relations and engagement;
- Cruise tourism;
- Business events;
- Travel trade;
- Sustainability; and
- Visitor servicing.

During discussion, Mr. Lennon and Ms. McGivern answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the upcoming Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, festival and events within the city, neighbourhood tourism, digital marketing and communications, business tourism and sustainability.

The Chairperson thanked Visit Belfast for their attendance at the meeting and the information provided within the presentation, and they left the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the draft Visit Belfast Business Plan for 2026/27;
- ii. that the overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast for 2026/27 had been accounted for in the revenue estimates approved by the Council; and
- iii. approved a funding allocation of £2,143,073 to Visit Belfast for 2026/27, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following seven 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 items 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 receipt of recent applications.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update in relation to the Vacant to Vibrant Programme which would be supporting up to 75 businesses/organisations to locate or expand into long-term vacant units; and
- ii. agreed the recommended citywide grant awards as outlined within the report.

Cultural Multi-Annual Grants

The Committee was reminded that, at its meetings on 11th and 24th February, 2026, it had agreed to defer consideration of the Cultural Multi-Annual Grants for 2026-28, to enable further information to be provided.

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee’s consideration a report which provided further information in respect of the allocation of the grant funding and set out a range of options for both strands of the grant scheme, namely Festivals and Events, and Arts and Heritage.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Nelson,
Seconded by McDonough-Brown,

“That the Committee agrees to defer the cultural multi-annual grants for 2026-28 to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to seek additional funding for the scheme.”

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

Amendment

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

“That the Committee agrees the approach to the cultural multi-annual grants for 2026-2028, as set out within option six of the report.”

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

During discussion, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy advised that further detail would be brought back to the Committee in respect of the allocation of funding.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the report; and
- ii. agreed the approach to the cultural multi-annual grants for 2026-2028, as set out within option six of the report, and that a further report would be submitted to a future meeting on proposed funding allocations.

Markets Quarterly Update

The Committee considered a report which provided a quarterly update on the performance of St. George’s Market for Quarter 3, 2025/26, set out the St. George’s Market Business Plan for 206/27, provided an overview of the 2025 Christmas Continental Market, and outlined two requests for external markets licences.

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in November, 2025, it had agreed the introduction of a storage charge fee for St. George’s Market from 1st April, 2026. The Director of Economic Development advised that, following recent engagement with the market traders, a request had been received from the traders for the introduction of the storage charge fees to be deferred until 1st June, 2026. The Director outlined the request and the financial implications of a deferral for the Committee’s consideration.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Lyons
Seconded by Councillor McKay, and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees to defer the introduction of the St. George’s Market storage charge fees until 1st June, 2026.

During discussion, a Member highlighted the ongoing engagement with traders and suggested that the Committee undertake a site visit to St. George’s Market. A Member also requested that further information be brought back in relation to the market’s governance arrangements.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

During further discussion, in relation to the future procurement process for the Christmas Market, a Member requested that the potential to expand the Market be included as part of the process.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the markets performance and financial update for Quarter 3, 2025/26;
- ii. noted the St. George's Market Business Plan for 2026/27;
- iii. approved the granting of two external markets licences as set out within the report;
- iv. agreed that the introduction of the St. George's Market storage charge fees be deferred to 1st June, 2026;
- v. agreed to undertake a site visit to St. George's Market;
- vi. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting in respect of St. George's Market's governance arrangements; and
- vii. agreed that the potential to expand the Christmas Market be included as part of the future procurement process.

Belfast Zoo Quarterly Performance Report

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update on the performance of Belfast Zoo for Quarter 3 of 2025/26 which included visitor and education services, animal collection, marketing and events, and financial performance.

The Committee noted the update on the performance of Belfast Zoo for Quarter 3 of 2025/26.

Belfast Bikes Quarterly Performance Report

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update on the performance of the Belfast Bikes Scheme for Quarter 3 of 2025/26 which included the operator contract, operational performance, marketing activity, expansion of the scheme and sponsorship.

During discussion, a Member highlighted the need to ensure that docking stations were fully resourced, particularly when large events were being held within the city such as the upcoming Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

In response to a Member's suggestion, the Director agreed to explore the potential to engage with other Councils in respect of expanding the scheme beyond the city's boundary.

During further discussion, the Operations Development Manager advised that further information would be brought back to the Committee in respect of a Member's query on the operator's annual survey.

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

In relation to the planned expansion of the scheme, a Member requested that Belvoir be considered as a potential location for a docking station.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the update on the performance of the Belfast Bikes Scheme for Quarter 3 of 2025/26; and
- ii. agreed that, as part of the planned expansion of the scheme, Belvoir would be considered as a potential location for a docking station.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 3 2025/26

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the Committee's financial position for Quarter 3 of 2025/26.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Nelson,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons, and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to submit a request to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to explore the potential for additional funding to be allocated to the Cultural Multi-Annual Grants scheme.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the report and associated financial reporting pack; and
- ii. agreed that a request be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to explore the potential for additional funding to be allocated to the Cultural Multi-Annual Grants scheme.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026 Update

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided the Committee with an update on the preparations for the delivery of Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026, which included progress and emerging issues in relation to licensing, food provision, engagement, cultural programming and visitor accommodation.

The Committee noted the update on the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026.

Matters Referred Back from Council

Notice of Motion - Ormeau Arts Centre

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 24th February, 2026, the Standards and Business Committee had referred

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor de Faoite and seconded by Councillor McKeown, to the Committee for its consideration:

“Belfast City Council acknowledges the thriving and inclusive arts and cultural scene in Ballynafeigh and the benefits this brings not just to the local area, but to the city and region more widely;

- notes the growing aspiration in the community, particularly emerging through the Open Ormeau Community Visioning project which took place in 2025, for a dedicated arts and cultural space in Ballynafeigh, recognising the strong local interest in the arts, music and culture, and the area's increasing status as a destination for both residents and visitors to Belfast;
- and therefore agrees to fund a feasibility study to examine the potential for a dedicated arts and culture space in Ballynafeigh, working with Open Ormeau and the local community.”

Councillor de Faoite highlighted the Open Ormeau community visioning project and the emergence of an aspiration within the local community for an improved provision of arts and culture within the Ballynafeigh area.

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Committee agreed to invite Open Ormeau to attend a future meeting to provide further information on its community visioning project and in relation to a potential feasibility study.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed:

- i. that a report be submitted to a future meeting which would outline a detailed consideration of the motion, including potential cost implications; and
- ii. to invite Open Ormeau to attend a future meeting to present on its community visioning project and the potential for a dedicated arts and culture space in Ballynafeigh.

Growing Business and the Economy

Innovation Factory Update

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the ongoing work of the Innovation Factory, a council-owned enterprise workspace operated by Oxford Innovation on behalf of the Council since its opening in 2016 to address historically low levels of entrepreneurship within West Belfast, inspire young people considering self-employment, and act as a catalyst for wider regeneration of a site that had been derelict for more than two decades.

The update provided an overview of the centre's performance for 2025/26 and set out Oxford Innovation's Annual Service Plan for 2026/27. It was reported that Council officers had worked closely with Oxford Innovation to streamline processes, review targets, capitalise on collaboration opportunities, reduce duplication of effort, improve

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

operational efficiency, and identify opportunities for shared delivery with council teams and partner organisations to maximise revenue generation and reduce the financial liability to the council for the centre.

The report recommended that the centre's management team attend a future meeting to provide Members with a more detailed overview of its work and the plans for 2026/27.

The Committee:

- i. noted the contents of the report; and
- ii. agreed that the centre's management team attend a future meeting to provide an overview of the work of the centre and its plans for the coming year.

**International Relations Quarterly Update
and Forward Plan 2026/27**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

The purpose of this report is to provide a quarterly progress update on delivery as part of the council's new International Relations Framework 2025-2028, as agreed at the November 2025 Committee meeting and to seek a number of outlined approvals required to progress imminent and planned activity in the first part of the year.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- **Note the progress of the first quarter delivery of the International Relations Framework (November 2025 to March 2026);**
- **Note proposed activity for April 2026 to March 2027, as set out in Appendix 1, including opportunities for Member engagement;**
- **Approve the participation of the Lord Mayor and an officer in a civic visit to Sister City Nashville in April 2026 at a cost of £4,000;**
- **Approve the proposed EU engagement activity, including participation of an All-Party delegation and one officer in the annual European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels October 2026, as well as the payment of the 2026 Eurocities Membership fee. Costs in respect to this activity include £8,000 for the proposed Brussels visit in October plus Eurocities annual membership of £15,000;**

- Approve the purchase of a one-year pilot CRM system as a means of tracking and measuring the impact of international activity at a cost of around £7,000; and
- Approve Council’s annual participation in the New York New Belfast event, including stakeholder sponsorship, travel and attendance for the Lord Mayor, the Chief Executive, senior officer (or nominees) and one accompanying officer at a cost of £15,000.

3.0 Main report

3.1 At the November 2025 meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, members approved the International Relations Framework 2025 – 2028, along with an action plan for 2025/26 activity.

3.2 The three-year “framework” document is intended to be a supporting document to other key strategies and plans such as the Belfast Agenda, the Corporate Plan and Local Development Plan – setting out how priority objectives and ambitions in those documents can be achieved through international connections, networks and opportunities. Its purpose is to identify areas of collaborative advantage and help focus resources on opportunities that can maximise return on investment, in keeping with city priorities.

3.3 As part of this Framework, it was agreed that there would be quarterly reports back to the Committee outlining progress and key activities over the previous three months as well as a look ahead to the coming quarter, including opportunities for Member engagement.

3.4 Quarterly progress highlights November 2025 to March 2026
Since approval of the new framework, a range of international relations activities has been undertaken by council teams and their partner organisations or are scheduled to take place before the end of the month. Under the themes of the framework, key activities include:

Trade and Investment

- Participation in the November 2025 inaugural China/NI Economic Summit event, co-hosted by Invest NI, the Chinese Consulate and Chinese Chamber UK. The event was attended by Chinese Ambassador to the UK Mr Zeguang;
- Planning work undertaken on a March 2026 recce visit to Belfast by key Nashville economic partners. This visit is ahead of a planned inward economic mission involving senior government, business and innovation partners from Nashville that will take place in October 2026.

The recce and the full programme will involve stakeholders including the Global Health Connector NI, Catalyst, HIRANI, Department of Health and Invest NI;

- Facilitation of a two-day fact finding programme for the NI Health Minister to Nashville in March 2026 to look at best practice connected health innovations and to meet investors and collaborators in this field;
- Attendance at MIPIM international real estate and property investment event in March 2026 as part of a Belfast City and Region Place Partnership delegation;
- Preparatory work ahead of the annual New York-New Belfast event in June 2026, working with Invest NI, Belfast Chamber, New York State Comptroller Di Napoli's office and new Mayor Mamdani's office, to maximise our positioning this year. Included in this is collaboration with Tourism Ireland to incorporate strong messaging around Belfast Stories and Fleadh Cheoil;
- Work is ongoing under the banner of the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor Partnership. The Political Advisory Group meeting was hosted in Belfast City Hall in December 2025 and the second meeting of the DBEC Industry Advisory Group was hosted by Belfast Harbour in February 2026; and
- Ongoing support for Belfast-based partners seeking connections and introductions through our Sister City and other networks. Over the course of the last three months, we made introductions on behalf of 16 organisations.

Innovation & Knowledge Exchange

- The Council's Resilience team participated in the launch of an EU Horizon funded project 'Pathways to Resilience' in Budapest in February. This is a €200,000 funded programme to support the development of a Climate Resilience Baseline report, a Climate Resilience Strategy, Action Plan and Investment Plan. The team also attended the Katowice-based PGM UPSURGE project General Meeting of partners before submission of the final report in February 2026;
- In December 2025, we supported Queen's University's celebratory event to mark the departure of 90 North Eastern University students who had spent the previous semester in the city. This is directly linked to our Belfast-Boston Sister City relationship;
- The EU and International Relations Team hosted two US academic inward missions including one from Belmont University in Nashville and also facilitated a visit from US College Counsellors who were in Belfast on a fact-finding

mission to promote Belfast as an international study location; and

- The EU and International Relations Team connected the Innovation Commissioner to the Global Health Connector worldwide network. This led to opportunities for showcasing roles and meetings with potential investors at two key global health-related events.

City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development

- The council supported the annual Friendship Four ice hockey NCAA tournament in November and the Women's Friendship Series in January 2026 as part of the ongoing Boston Sister City connections;
- The Council's Culture team engaged in EuroCities Culture Forum planning for the year ahead and in particular, as Vice Chair, contributed to the Work of Culture for Inclusive Cities Working Group looking at Older People's participation in culture;
- The Culture team also enabled 2 Belfast musicians to participate in an event in Germany – the inaugural Hannover-Brno-Belfast collaboration with plans for further activity in 2026/27;
- The Council's Music Officer took part in the Daegu, South Korea Global World Forum where she presented opportunities for collaboration with other UNESCO Cities of Music. A Belfast artist also performed at the Daegu Opera House;
- The Lord Mayor and elected members recently supported a number of Chinese New Year celebration events and the council demonstrated its support to the celebrations by lighting the City Hall in red on the eve of Chinese New Year; and
- The EU and International Relations Team facilitated key connections for the January 2026 conference and showcase Your Roots Are Showing. This is Ireland's largest folk music event and strong connections with our partner city of Nashville.

3.5 Looking forward outline plan for 2026/27

The draft action plan for the coming year is attached in Appendix 1. Priority actions that members may wish to note include:

Trade and Investment

- Participation in New York New Belfast in June 2026 including key engagements and investment meetings;

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

- Planned inward economic visit by Nashville businesses, investors and economic development leads: recce visit in March 2026 and full delegation to visit in October;
- Engagement with NI Office in Brussels with regard to opportunities for EU-based trade promotion and engagement activities; and
- Development of new promotional materials and revamp of Invest in Belfast website to ensure consistent messaging across FDI investment and capital investment materials.

Innovation and Knowledge Exchange

- Preparatory work on application for European Capital of Innovation 2027;
- Participation in significant global innovation events including Mobile World Congress and Smart City World Congress; and
- Development of new innovation investment prospectus.

City Positioning, Tourism Promotion and Cultural Development

- Supporting Fleadh team with key messaging to international audiences;
- Ongoing engagement and collaboration as part of UNESCO city of music network; and
- Exploring potential for engagement opportunities as part of Irish Presidency of the Council of the EU (from July 2026).

Updates on progress against commitments as well as any developments as part of this plan will be brought back to the Committee on a quarterly basis for information and approval.

- 3.6 As previously noted as part of the November 2025 report to Committee, it can be challenging to track outcomes of much of the international relations activity. This is because progress can often come from an initial introduction that we made but that takes a while to develop. In order to track the impact of our work more effectively, it is proposed that we undertake a one-year subscription to the Amplify CRM system. This system is used by many other partners that work in this field and it appears to support more effective tracking of impact which should be helpful for the regular updates to Committee. The total cost for a one-year subscription is around £7,000.
- 3.7 There are a number of specific activities that will require Committee approval to progress in the coming quarter. These include:

- **Support for Lord Mayor's visit to Nashville:** Following an invitation recently received from the Mayor of Nashville, it is proposed that the Lord Mayor – accompanied by one officer – undertakes a two-day programme in Nashville. This will include meetings and visits to key government, academic, civil society and Sister City representatives. The estimated cost of the visit is £4,000;
- **Confirmation of participation at EU Week of Regions and Cities:** Following elected members' agreement that the EU & International Unit augments its European activity, officers have commenced scoping activities that align with strategic need and seek to increase Belfast's profile. The EU Week of Regions and Cities takes place annually in Brussels. It offers an opportunity to consider and profile the role that cities and regions play in shaping and transforming Europe's economy, innovation, urban and societal landscapes. It is proposed that an all-party delegation led by one Council Officer attends this year's event which is scheduled for 13-15 October 2026. It is proposed that upon approval the EU and International Unit will convene a working group of members to prepare for the event. The Unit will also work in partnership with NILGA, the NI Bureau in Brussels and The Irish Regional European Office to create a bespoke programme of side meetings and events. The total estimated cost for delivering this initiative is £8,000;
- **Eurocities membership:** Since the ratification of the new International Relations Framework, officers have also been engaged in conversations with the Eurocities staff to also identify opportunities to benefit from membership. Eurocities staff recently agreed to provide additional support to assist with the identification of good practice, showcasing opportunities and learning exchange opportunities with relevant cities. The annual membership fee is now due for renewal at a cost of £15,000 and elected members are asked to approve this cost; and
- **New York New Belfast:** This annual conference is a key moment to position Belfast, its innovation, economic ambitions and tourism developments to a select audience of strategic decision makers who represent government, business, civic society and investors. In recent years, the Belfast representation has enhanced to include tourism and economic development agencies, Belfast Chamber of Commerce, local entrepreneurs and media influencers. In addition to the conference the Council delegation undertakes bespoke meetings which serve to contribute to communicate the city's investment and development portfolio. It is proposed that the Lord Mayor, Chief

Executive, one Senior Manager (or nominees) and accompanying officer with a total cost for a three-day programme plus conference sponsorship amounting to £15,000.

4.0 Finance and Resource Implications

- **Lord Mayor’s Nashville civic visit estimated at £4,000;**
- **All party delegation to EU Week of Regions and Cities – travel, accommodation and subsistence estimated at maximum £8,000;**
- **EuroCities annual membership fee £15,000;**
- **A 1-year pilot CRM system to monitor and measure International Relations activity at a cost of £7,000;**
- **Annual sponsorship and participation in New York New Belfast at maximum cost of £15,000; and**
- **The EU and International Relations budget was approved as part of the 2026-27 estimates setting process. Budgets for individual activities are the responsibility of the respective teams.**

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

No specific equality or good relations implications. Activities will focus on support for Belfast-based organisations and companies.”

The Committee:

- i. noted the progress of the first quarter delivery of the International Relations Framework (November, 2025, to March, 2026);
- ii. noted the proposed activity for April, 2026 to March, 2027, as set out within Appendix 1 of the report, including the opportunities for Member engagement;
- iii. approved the participation of the Lord Mayor and an officer in a civic visit to sister city Nashville in April, 2026, at a cost of £4,000;
- iv. approved the proposed EU engagement activity, which would include the participation of an All-Party delegation and one officer in the annual European Week of Regions and Cities in Brussels in October, 2026, at a cost of £8,000, and the payment of the 2026 Eurocities Membership fee, at a cost of £15,000;
- v. approved the purchase of a one-year pilot CRM system as a means of tracking and measuring the impact of international activity, at a cost of around £7,000; and

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 11th March, 2026**

- vi. approved the Council's annual participation in the New York New Belfast event, which would include stakeholder sponsorship, travel and attendance of the Lord Mayor, the Chief Executive, a senior officer (or nominees) and one accompanying officer, at a cost of £15,000.

**Local Economic Partnership Action Plan –
Update on Proposed Priority Projects**

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided a progress update on the development of the Local Economic Partnership, a key element of the Department for the Economy's Sub-Regional Economic Plan and which set out the proposed priority work areas which would cover creative sector incubation support, capital investment for creative growth, and business growth and innovation support.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the work being undertaken as part of the Local Economic Partnership;
- ii. noted and endorsed the emerging priority work areas, as set out within section 3.6 of the report; and
- iii. agreed that officers further engage with the Department for the Economy based on the emerging priority work areas, with a view to secure resources to support delivery.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the ten Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which it was responsible for, and which recommended the closure of the motion 'Gary Moore Statue', as the project had been added to the Council's Capital Programme.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that it was responsible for, as set out within Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. agreed to the closure of the motion 'Gary Moore Statue' (ID 425), as outlined within section 3.3 and Appendix 1 of the report.

Chairperson

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City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 25th March, 2026

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor; and
Councillors Black, Bunting, de Faoite,
S. Douglas, Duffy, Groogan, Hanvey, Lyons,
McAteer, McCallin, McCormick, McDonough-Brown,
McKay, R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Nelson and Ó Néill.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. L-A O'Donnell, Senior Manager, Culture And Tourism; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Mrs. Greta Rodgers

The Chairperson referred to the passing of Mrs. Greta Rodgers, wife of Alderman Jim Rodgers. It was agreed that a letter of condolence be forwarded to Alderman Rodgers on behalf of the Committee.

Apologies

There were apologies received.

Declarations of Interest

In respect of the item 'Belfast Harbour Commissioners – Draft Masterplan 2025-50', Councillor R. McLaughlin indicated that he was a Council representative on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. He left the meeting whilst the matter was under consideration. In respect of the same item, Alderman Lawlor, together with Councillors S. Douglas, Groogan and Hanvey, indicated that they were members of the Council's Planning Committee. Given that several matters relating to the Draft Masterplan would be considered by the Planning Committee in due course, the aforementioned Members retired from the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Presentations

Belfast Harbour Commissioners – Draft Masterplan 2025-50

Further to the Committee's decision of 11th February, the Chairperson welcomed Mr. J O'Neill (Chief Executive), Mr. K. Flanigan (Infrastructure and Capacity Planning Lead) and Ms. N. Sayee (Corporate Affairs and Engagement Director), representing the Belfast Harbour

**Special City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 25th March, 2026**

Commissioners (BHC), who were in attendance to deliver a presentation on BHC's Draft Masterplan 2025-50.

Mr. O'Neill outlined the principal aspects of the Draft Masterplan which provided a 25-year framework for investment, regeneration and sustainability. He added that the Masterplan sought to enable Belfast and its port to remain competitive, whilst enhancing trade, creating additional jobs, providing cleaner energy and encouraging further innovation. The Masterplan, he indicated, had been formulated over a two-year period during which extensive consultations had been undertaken with key stakeholders, local communities, statutory bodies and elected representatives.

The Committee was informed that the Masterplan reflected BHC's existing plans and addressed its longer-term ambitions. Key to the Masterplan was the concept of flexibility, which would permit BHC to adapt and address changes in economic markets, particularly relating to global shipping and logistics. Mr. O'Neill concluded by requesting that the Council consider the Masterplan and provide its positive support and endorsement for the strategic vision and overarching framework as set out therein.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives of BHC for attending and they left the meeting.

The Committee considered also a report which placed BHC's Draft Masterplan within its wider context, particularly as it related to Council initiatives within the wider harbour area. It was reported that officers would format a draft response for consideration by the Committee at its meeting on 15th April. Such a response would be formulated within the following context:

- That the Council recognised the strategic importance of the harbour to the City's economic growth and regeneration and welcomed the longer-term approach adopted to building the port's capacity, the transition to cleaner energy solutions and the proposed regeneration of the Inner Harbour area in line with the Local Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- That the Council recognised the vital role of the wider Harbour Estate in growing the City's key growth sectors in, for example, film, innovation and tourism, as well as BHC's role in delivering regeneration and sustainable connectivity;
- That the Council recognised and supported the reclassification of 'trust ports' to provide BHC with the ability to increase spending in a prudent manner; a development that had been endorsed by the Committee at its meeting on 12th March, 2025; and
- That the Council recognised the importance of proper engagement and would encourage BHC to continue to ensure that the delivery of the Draft Masterplan would be undertaken in partnership with the City's key stakeholders and communities.

**Special City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 25th March, 2026**

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and noted further that officers would prepare a draft response within the context set out.

Northern Ireland Food to Go Association

The Committee was reminded that, in 2025, as part of the development of Grand Central Station, in advance of the introduction of the Department for Communities (DfC) proposed Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road Public Realm Improvement Schemes, DfC had funded 'revitalisation schemes' for Sandy Row and the Grosvenor Road areas. Those schemes had sought to mitigate against the impact caused to local independent businesses by the development work at the new station. At its meeting on 10th September, 2025, the Committee had agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to request that consideration be given to establishing a similar scheme specifically to support independent businesses within the Great Victoria Street area.

Accordingly, at its meeting on 3rd December, it was noted that the Minister had responded to the aforementioned request to advise that such schemes should not be considered as 'compensation schemes', since they were provided in conjunction with Public Realm Improvement Schemes, which aimed specifically to enhance building frontages, support additional cleaning and promote areas as shopping destinations. The Minister had indicated also that the Belfast Streets Ahead Phase 5 - Public Realm Improvement Scheme (which included Great Victoria Street) had not, as yet, been programmed for delivery, pending the approval of the Eastern Transport Plan and Belfast Rapid Transport Phase 2. As such, it was the Minister's view that there was no rationale in bringing forward a revitalisation scheme for the Great Victoria Street area at that time.

In noting the response, the Committee had agreed to extend an invitation to the Northern Ireland Food to Go Association, to outline how the work associated with the development of Grand Central Station had impacted upon independent businesses within the Great Victoria Street area, particularly traders operating in 'The Halt' within the former Europa Bus Centre.

In accordance with that decision, the Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Henderson, Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Ireland Food to Go Association, who delivered a presentation outlining a range of issues which had - and continued to - impact upon independent business within the Great Victoria Street as a result of the development of Grand Central Station.

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees that letters be forwarded to the Minister for Communities, the Minister for Infrastructure and to Translink to reiterate the Committee's position that consideration be given to providing a revitalisation scheme within the Great Victoria Street area to assist independent businesses impacted upon by the work associated with the development of Grand Central Station.

**Special City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 25th March, 2026**

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

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

Cultural Multi-Annual Grants

(Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor, attended in connection with this item).

At its meeting on 11th March, in considering several options for the allocation of Cultural Multi-Annual Grants for 2026-28, the Committee had agreed to adopt an approach outlined in 'option six' of an associated report. The Committee had agreed also that a request be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to consider providing funding towards a discretion transition fund to support organisations which would incur a reduction in funding under the approach adopted. It was reported that the Strategic Policy and Resources had acceded to that request and allocated a sum to enable discretionary transition payments to such organisations.

Accordingly, the Committee considered a report, together with several appendices, which outlined the proposed funding allocations as formulated within the parameters of 'option six' as adopted by the Committee on 11th March.

After discussion, it was

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

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to proceed with the proposed funding allocations as set out within the report and notes that a further report be submitted, to the meeting scheduled for 15th April, that would outline a range of options as to how the discretionary transition fund might be used to support those organisations which had incurred a net reduction in funding under the terms of the Cultural Multi-Annual Grants 2026-28.

Chairperson

Licensing Committee

Wednesday, 18th March, 2026

MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Doran (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Doherty;
Aldermen McCullough and Rodgers; and
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bradley,
R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Carson,
P. Donnelly, D. Douglas, McAteer, McCann,
McDowell, McKay, McKeown and Smyth.

In attendance: Mrs. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. Bloomfield, Housing in Multiple Occupation
(HMO) Manager;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning); and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported from Councillor M. Donnelly.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th February 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 2nd March.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Non-Delegated Matter

Temporary Street Trading Scheme (excluding alcohol) at the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report outlines the proposed processes for a temporary street trading application scheme (excluding the sale of alcohol) for streets and sites within the city centre road closure pedestrianised area for the Fleadh in Belfast 2-9 August 2026.**

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to note the contents of the report and agree to the processes as outlined for a temporary street trading application scheme for period of the Fleadh 2-9 August 2026, and specifically to agree:

- That applications should only be accepted under this scheme within the road closure area for the streets and locations identified as suitable for street trading and that applications will not be accepted for the sale of alcohol.
- The procedure to invite applications and criteria for applications.
- To waive the second application fee for applications for an eight-day licence to cover the whole of the Fleadh period.
- The method of selection of successful applicants including how a surplus of applications will be dealt with (competing applications)
- That delegated authority be given to the Director of Planning and Building Control in conjunction with the City Solicitor for rejecting applications and making decisions concerning oversubscribed /competing applications under the scheme.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

Background

3.1 Members will recall that at your meeting of the 18 February 2026 as part of a report on Licensing Procedures and the Fleadh you agreed that to ensure fairness, applications for any temporary street trading licence opportunities for the Fleadh would be invited within a set timeframe, and you were asked to note that a further report on Street Trading at the Fleadh would be brought to the Committee to determine locations and processes.

3.2 Under Section 14 of the Street Trading Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 the Council may grant a temporary street trading licence to an individual where an annual stationary licence is not appropriate, such as for special events. The legislation allows

a council to formulate criteria and have regard to those criteria when considering whether to grant a temporary licence.

- 3.3 Applications for temporary street trading in locations outside of the Fleadh's road closure pedestrianised area will be accepted as normal and will follow normal processes. To allow processing we suggest applications to be made by the end of May 2026, failure to submit by this date may result in applications not being able to be processed in time.
- 3.4 However, due to the length and scale of the Fleadh and the potential large volume of applicants requesting a licence within the Fleadh's road closure pedestrianised area in the city centre, a different approach is necessary to how applications are sought and processed for this area for the period of the Fleadh.
- 3.5 While most of the Council's existing temporary street trading policy (See Appendix 1) is still applicable, a number of changes are required to be included in such a scheme.
- 3.6 The proposed scheme is only for temporary street trading (excluding the sale of alcohol) on identified sites in within the Fleadh's road closure pedestrianised area by street traders. Applications from street traders for other locations within the road closure pedestrianised area will not be accepted under this scheme.
- 3.7 The details of the proposed temporary street trading scheme for applications within the road closure pedestrianised area of the Fleadh including assessment criteria are contained in Appendix 2.

Key points of the scheme

Streets and sites within road closure/pedestrianised area suitable for street trading

- 3.8 Within the road closure pedestrianised area, specific streets have been identified as potentially suitable in terms of public health and safety for temporary street trading by the Fleadh Event Team's Health & Safety consultant, using crowd dynamics modelling, and agreed with Statutory Partners involved in Fleadh working groups. However, it should be noted that whilst detailed plans are in place for the key components of the Fleadh there continues to be the potential for change, including proposals which may come forward from the private sector. This may impact on final decisions in relation to the suitable locations for temporary street trading

- 3.9 At this stage, the streets that have been approved as potentially suitable locations for temporary street trading are:
- Bridge Street, High Street, Royal Avenue (Sunday – Sunday)
- 3.10 Further work is required to finalise the number of potential sites and site locations. Engagement with organisations representing businesses in the city centre, including the BIDs is ongoing, to mitigate against any issues regarding the details of individual trading site locations and commodities that may or may not be appropriate.

Inviting and processing of applications

- 3.11 Once the exact number and location of site locations are determined, applications will be invited within a six week time frame – anticipated to be from Monday 20 April to Friday 29 May 2026.
- 3.12 Applications will only be accepted for streets agreed as suitable locations based on public safety with applicants being asked to state their preference of street, however this will not be guaranteed.
- 3.13 Only one application per individual will be accepted.
- 3.14 Applications will not be determined until after closing date, when a set of assessment criteria will be applied.
- 3.15 Applicants may apply for whatever number of days of the Fleadh they wish to trade on. However, preference may be given to applicants wishing to trade throughout the available days for the street applied for. Prospective applicants should not apply for days they do not intend to trade on.
- 3.16 Applications for the full eight days of the Fleadh will only be asked to submit one completed application form along with one application fee of £180, although the daily licence fees must be paid if the application is granted. (Total fee of £570)
- 3.17 The legislation allows a temporary street trading licence to be issued for a maximum of seven consecutive days, and therefore two applications should be made and two application fees paid. We do not believe this to be appropriate for this scheme and therefore ask the Committee to agree to waive the second application fee, both for this scheme and for any applications received for outside the road closure/pedestrianised area for the Fleadh period.

- 3.18 The opening and closing dates and details of the application process and requirements will be communicated on the council website and various media channels with the assistance of the Corporate Communications team. The Service will also directly inform those individuals that have contacted us or previously made an application that has been returned.

Commodities

- 3.19 While it is anticipated that applications for a wide variety of commodities will be received, experience suggests the majority may be for hot 'fast food' offerings.
- 3.20 It is proposed to limit the number of street trading sites permitted to sell hot food. This is to help support the Event's food markets, St George's Market, existing city centre food retailers and hospitality sector, and to reduce the potential for litter.
- 3.21 Applications for the sale of alcohol will not be accepted under this scheme. Street trading involving the sale of alcohol may be subject to a further consideration by the Committee where this impacts on the City Council's licensing regimes.

Statutory consultations

- 3.22 DfI (Roads) and the PSNI are the Statutory Consultees for street trading applications, who provide responses on location and commodity suitability. As both these statutory consultees will have been involved in the identification of the suitable streets and sites; to expedite the process we do not intend to consult with them on each individual application.

Dealing with a surplus of applications (competing applications)

- 3.23 Competing applications do not normally occur with temporary street trading licences; however, for the Fleadh it is likely that there will be too many acceptable applications for available licences for the sites available.
- 3.24 It is proposed to select successful applicants by assessing each application under a set of criteria, based on the policy for competing applications for designated sites, but with additional criteria, for example whether application is from an existing Belfast street trader or business. See Appendix 2 for the full criteria.

- 3.25** Once sites in a preferred street are all filled, unallocated applications will be offered spaces in other streets if available and any remaining applications will be held on a waiting list.

Refusing applications

- 3.26** It is likely that some applications received under the scheme will need to be refused, in particular as it is expected that many more applications will be received than licences available. Refusing street trading licence applications is not currently a delegated matter and therefore must normally be brought to the Committee for consideration. In order to expedite the process of dealing with applications for street trading within the Fleadh's road closure pedestrianised area, we request the Committee to give delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to refuse applications in the following circumstances:

- More than one application from that individual has been received
- The application is for a street/site within the road closure/pedestrianised area other than that identified.
- An objection is received from the PSNI, DfI or Fleadh Event Team.
- The commodities applied for are deemed inappropriate, or any other application criteria considered not met.
- When more applications are received for a street, for limited sites for a particular commodity, or overall, than there are licences available (Competing Applications)

and also

- to deem refused any application where all required supporting documentation is not provided within 6 weeks of the application being received.

4.0 **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 4.1** This significant event will bring an increased workload in terms of the administering of street trading applications, which will be covered with existing resource and within the existing budget and fee income for this activity. However, the enforcement activity that is anticipated for the Fleadh may require additional resources to be allocated.

5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no issues associated with this report.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations within the report.

Delegated Matters

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

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee noted the applications that had been issued under the Scheme of Delegation during February.

A Member raised a number of queries in relation to HMOs, including how the level of intensity of HMOs in areas were determined and a trend for companies buying a number of properties and converting them to HMOs and the negative impact that had on families trying to rent or purchase a property.

The Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Manager and the Director of Planning and Building Control provided clarity on a number of points and agreed to circulate a copy of the former training, provided by Denise Kiley KC, on the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

In response to a number of Member’s queries, the Committee agreed to hold a future workshop on HMOs, with questions to be submitted in advance.

Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

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

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Applications

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for 41 Claremont Street

The HMO Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application.

He outlined that the property had had the benefit of an HMO licence issued by the Council with a start date of 2nd December, 2020, with an expiry date of 2nd December, 2025.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2026**

The Committee was advised that the ownership of the property transferred to Mrs. E. Convery with a transfer date of 2nd May, 2021. The Council had not been made aware of the change of ownership at that time.

In accordance with Section 28 “Change of ownership: effect on licence” of the 2016 Act, the licence in the name of the previous owner ceased to have effect on the date of transfer.

The Committee was advised that an application for a new HMO licence was received from Mrs E. Convery on 29th November, 2025.

An application for a Temporary Exemption notice (TEN) was received on 3rd December, 2025, and granted on 8th December, 2025, with an expiry date of 8th March, 2026. The TEN had been extended until 8th June, 2026.

The HMO Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory;
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and—
 - i. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
 - ii. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

The Planning Service had confirmed that a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) was granted on 3rd March, 2026.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with the Environmental Protection Unit in relation to daytime noise; the Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years.

For the purpose of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Area (HMA) “2/10 Fitzwilliam” as defined in the document Council’s Local Development Plan Strategy, which was formally adopted in May, 2023. It was reported that Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement in section 8 of the 2016 Act upon the Council to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision.

The officers had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and
- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2026**

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that “Nurturing sustainable and balanced communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP’s housing policies.” In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

“Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA.”

The Committee was advised that, on the date of assessment, 18th February, 2026, 97% of all dwelling units in policy area HMA 2/10 were made up of HMOs and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit as set out in Policy HOU10. There were 74 (16%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 363 persons in that HMA.

It was outlined that there were a total of 466 dwelling units in HMA 2/10. The Members were advised that, on 18th February, 2026, out of 226 premises available for rent within the BT9 area, there were 121 licensed HMOs which represented 479 bed spaces.

The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low-income households and, more recently, migrant workers and asylum seekers.

He explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

The Committee was advised that no objections had been received in relation to the application. It was also reported that the accommodation had been inspected by the NIHMO service, on 22nd January, 2026, at which time it complied with the physical standards for an HMO for five persons.

On 26th February, 2026, pursuant to Paragraph 9 of Schedule 2 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, officers had issued a Notice of Proposed Decision to the applicant, stating that it proposed to refuse the licence on the grounds of over provision.

The applicant had responded and advised that she opposed the decision and wished to appear before the Committee.

The Chairperson welcomed Mrs. E. Convery, applicant, to the meeting. She advised the Committee that her father had purchased the property and had run it as an HMO since 2009. She had taken over the ownership of the HMO property from her father in 2021, due to his ill

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2026**

health and ageing. She had telephoned the Council's HMO Unit at that time and was told that she did not have to change the name on the licence and that she just needed to wait until it was time to renew it. However, when it came to the renewal of the licence in November, she was then told that, because the name was not correct, she was obliged to make a new application for an HMO licence. That application was since proposed for refusal, due to overprovision in the area.

She explained that the property was used to house post-Graduate healthcare professionals and that she believed in providing affordable accommodation. She had also spent a considerable amount of money in trying to renew the licence for the HMO.

In response to a Member's question, Mrs. Convery explained that, unfortunately, she did not have a record of who she spoken to, or on what date, regarding the changing of the details on the licence. She stated that she was unfortunately misinformed by the Council officer and that she would have been happy to pay the £300 fee to change the name at that time.

The HMO Manager confirmed that the Council had no record of the telephone conversation in question and, in response to a further Member's question, he confirmed that all staff answering incoming calls were trained to provide the correct advice regarding the registering of name changes.

He further confirmed to the Committee that the application was a new application. He added that the property under consideration was not included within the overprovision statistics provided, as that licence ceased to have effect in 2021.

The applicant also queried why the application was being refused on the grounds of overprovision, given that the HMO had been established within the area since 2009 and was therefore not an additional HMO.

In response to a further query from a Member, the HMO Manager confirmed that Licence conditions were provided along with each HMO licence granted, which contained information relating to the requirement for any licence holder to notify the Council of any change of ownership and any change of conditions which could affect the licence.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor McKay
Seconded by Councillor P. Donnelly and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refuse the application as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2026**

**Application for a New Licence to operate a
House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 2,
32 Candahar Street**

The HMO Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application, which he clarified the address was Flat 2, 32 Candahar Street and not 32b Candahar Street, which was a separate address. However, the facts remained the same.

He outlined that the property had had the benefit of an HMO licence issued by the Council with a start date of 11th January, 2021, with an expiry date of 11th January, 2026.

The Committee was advised that a reminder letter had been sent to the owner on 3rd December, 2025, informing them that they were required to renew the HMO licence before the expiry of the existing licence on 11th January, 2026. The correspondence had been sent to the registered company address on Companies House. He stated that the Council was subsequently made aware that the company's address had changed. The Committee was advised that, within paragraph 63 of the terms of the licence, the applicant had a duty to inform the Council, within 7 days, of a change of address.

An application for a new licence was received from Norton Cross Ltd on 23rd January 2026.

An application for a Temporary Exemption notice (TEN) was received on 26th January and granted on 27th January, 2026, with an expiry date of 27th April, 2026.

The HMO Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory;
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and—
 - iii. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
 - iv. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

The Planning Service had confirmed that a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) was granted on 8th April, 2025.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with the Environmental Protection Unit in relation to daytime noise; the Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2026**

confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years.

For the purpose of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Area (HMA) "2/03 Ballynafeigh" as defined in the document Council's Local Development Plan Strategy, which was formally adopted in May, 2023. It was reported that Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement in section 8 of the 2016 Act upon the Council to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision.

The officers had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and
- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that "Nurturing sustainable and balanced communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP's housing policies." In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

"Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA."

The Committee was advised that, on the date of assessment, 2nd March, 2026, 26% of all dwelling units in policy area HMA 2/03 were made up of HMOs and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit as set out in Policy HOU10. There were 66 (4%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 294 persons in that HMA.

It was outlined that there were a total of 1642 dwelling units in HMA 2/03. The Members were advised that, on 2nd March, 2026, out of 422 premises available for rent within the BT7 area, there were 291 licensed HMOs which represented 1160 bed spaces.

The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low-income households and, more recently, migrant workers and asylum seekers.

He explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2026**

The Committee was advised that no objections had been received in relation to the application. It was also reported that the accommodation had been inspected by the NIHMO service, on 22nd January, 2026, at which time it complied with the physical standards for an HMO for five persons.

On 3rd March, 2026, pursuant to Paragraph 9 of Schedule 2 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, officers had issued a Notice of Proposed Decision to the applicant, stating that it proposed to refuse the licence on the grounds of over provision.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. R. Smyth, Macfarlane and Smyth, agent for the applicant. He explained that he was before the Committee due to a simple typographical error, whereby the incorrect renewal date had been entered into a spreadsheet, similar, he suggested, to the officer within the HMO Unit, who had referred to the property as 32b Candahar Street, instead of Flat 2, 32 Candahar Street. He suggested that the penalty on the applicant did not fit the crime.

Mr. Smyth suggested that he believed the Council had some wiggle room in terms of the legislation. He stated that while the Committee had to have regard to overprovision, he did not believe that should mean that it precluded it from granting the HMO licence for the property in question, which had been in operation for many years.

The HMO Manager advised the Committee that it was not a matter of wiggle room and that Section 8 (2) (d) of the Act stated that “the Council may grant the licence only if it is satisfied that the granting of the licence will not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality of which the HMO is situated”.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor McKay
Seconded by Councillor T. Brooks and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refuse the application as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

Entertainment Licence Applications

**Application for the Variation of 7-Day Annual
Entertainments Licence for Margot,
18 Donegal Square East**

The Director of Planning and Building Control explained that an application had been received for the variation of a 7-Day Annual Indoor Entertainments Licence to extend the hours during which entertainment may be provided at Margot.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 18th March, 2026**

The Committee was advised that the days and hours during which entertainment may be provided under the terms of the current indoor Entertainments Licence were:

- Monday to Thursday: 11.30am to 1.00am the following morning,
- Friday and Saturday: 11.30am to 3.00am the following morning, and
- Sunday: 12.30pm to 1.00am the following morning

She explained that the variation application related to a proposed extension to the hours during which entertainment could be provided, Monday to Thursday and Sunday, to 3.00am the following morning, and she reminded the Committee that applications to provide entertainment beyond 1.00am were subject to Committee consideration.

The licensee had requested to extend the permitted hours until 3.00am, indicating that the premises was an integral part of Belfast's nightlife and that part of the recent major fit-out was the opening of Rudi, a late bar/nightclub, and the proposed changes in hours were to keep them in line with similar venues in the vicinity, allowing them to compete within the sector, which was essential for the commercial success of the business.

The Members were advised that no written representations had been lodged as a result of the advertisement of the application and that the PSNI and the NIFRS had both confirmed that they had no objections to the variation application. The Committee was advised that no noise complaints had been received by the Service in the past 12 months in relation to the venue.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that Mr. P. Langsford, the applicant, was in attendance, however, the Members did not have any questions for him.

Moved by Councillor T. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor McAteer and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees to the variation application, granting a proposed extension to the hours during which entertainment can be provided Monday to Thursday and Sunday to 3.00am the following morning.

**Review of Street Trading Licensing Fees -
result of consultation exercise**

The Committee agreed to defer the item for one month and requested that officers would submit a report outlining a short-term inflationary rise of the current Street Trading fees, with proposed staged increases, for the Committee to consider at its next meeting.

Chairperson

Planning Committee

Tuesday, 10th March, 2026

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Aldermen Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers;
Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Bell, Brennan,
T. Brooks, Carson, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas,
Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey, Magee, McCabe,
McCann and Whyte.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning);
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management),
Ms. C Reville, Principal Planning Officer;
Ms. L. Walshe, Principal Planning Officer;
Mr. P. O'Reilly, Senior Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 17th February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd March, 2026.

Declarations of Interest

The Chairperson declared an interest in relation to item 9m on the agenda, in that he had been involved in conversations around the erection of the ballstop fencing at the site.

Alderman McLaughlin declared an interest in relation to item 9l on the agenda, in that he had been involved in various projects at the application site.

Councillor Magee declared an interest in relation to item 8a on the agenda, in that he had previously undertaken work at the application site.

Withdrawn Items

The Committee noted that the following three items had been withdrawn from the agenda:

- LA04/2025/0288/F - Retrospective change of use from ground floor taxi passenger terminal, cafe, office

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

and newsagent to a Homeless Centre, Category D1(B). The centre will provide meals, washing and changing facilities and an internal social amenity area for users. The centre will operate Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday each week from 4:00 pm up until 10:00 pm (Amended Description) - Existing taxi passenger terminal and former retail unit located within 35a King Street;

- LA04/2024/0569/O - Outline planning permission with all matter reserved for independent living (Use Class C1) units and up to 62no. assisted living units (Use Class C3), associated internal access roads, communal open space, revised access from Castlevue Road, associated car parking, servicing, amenity space and landscaping and demolition of dwellings at Castlevue Road (nos. 2, 4, 6, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28 & 30) and Summerhill Parade (nos. 18, 20 & 22) (amended description). - Stormont Hotel, 587 Upper Newtownards Road BT4 3LP and adjacent properties at Castlevue Road (nos. 2, 4, 6, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28 & 30), Summerhill Parade (nos. 18, 20 & 22), and rear of 160 Barnetts Road, Belfast (amended address); and
- LA04/2024/0570/F - Change of use of an existing hotel, conference centre and offices (sui generis) to a 97-bed care home (Use Class C3(b)) and 1,559sqm diagnostic medical facility (Use Class D1(a)), associated access, car parking, landscaping and open space (amended plans and description to remove reference to demotion of number 39 Summerhill Park). - Stormont Hotel, 587 Upper Newtownards Road.

Committee Site Visit

The Committee noted the site visits and agreed that consideration of the following three applications would be deferred in order for site visits to take place:

- LA04/2025/0594/F - Change of use from 4 bedroom residential property (C1) with to 5 bed HMO with occupancy of 5 (Sui Generis) - 163 Ballygomartin Road;

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

- LA04/2025/1002/F - Change of use from 4 bed residential dwelling (C1) to 5 bedroom HMO (suis generis) with occupancy for 5 people - 24 Rutherglen Street; and
- LA04/2025/1350/F - Change of Use from 3 bed Dwelling (Class C1) to 5-bed, 5-person HMO (sui generis) - 29 Glencairn Street.

Planning Appeals Notified

The Committee noted the appeals decisions.

Planning Decisions Issued

The Committee noted the planning decisions issued in February, 2026.

Live Applications for Major Development

The Committee noted the list of live applications for major development.

Committee Decisions that have yet to issue

The Committee noted the list of Committee decisions which had not yet been issued.

Miscellaneous Reports

Planning Performance Framework

The Committee noted the Planning Performance Framework and the intention to bring a performance report to future meeting of the Committee.

Local Applications subject to NI Water Objections

The Committee agreed to delegate to the Director of Planning and Building Control those Local planning applications to which NI Water had objected.

**Planning Learning and Engagement Programme
- Request for Nominations**

The Committee agreed to nominate Councillors Groogan and White to the Task and Finish Advisory Group for NILGA's Planning Learning and Engagement Programme.

Planning Applications previously considered

**LA04/2024/0483/F and LA04/2024/0480/DCA -
Proposed change of use from Office (B1) and
restaurant (Sui Generis) to Hotel comprising of**

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

88 no. bedrooms, two storey rooftop extension, restaurant and bar offerings, gym facilities, including new dormer windows on roof, internal and external refurbishment and alterations, and all associated site works. Part demolition of existing buildings (stripping back of roof, shopfront and other external alterations to facilitate change of use and extension of buildings to hotel use. - 34-44 Bedford Street and 6 Clarence Street

The Planning Manager explained that the application had been approved by the Committee, at its meeting in October, 2024, subject to a Section 76 planning agreement to secure a Construction Employability and Skills Plan.

He reported that, despite repeated requests, the applicant had still to complete and sign the Section 76 planning agreement and therefore the decision notice could not be issued. He stated that the application was before the Committee for reconsideration.

He outlined the proposal to the Committee and explained that it was an important regeneration scheme that would see the renovation of the existing rundown buildings within the Conservation Area with a new vibrant hotel use. He added that it was considered to be in the public interest for the Council to grant the planning permission in order to increase the chances of the scheme being implemented so that its benefits could be realised and, therefore, it was recommended that the Construction Employability and Skills Plan be secured by condition rather than a Section 76 planning agreement as originally intended.

The Committee granted planning permission and Conservation Area Consent, subject to conditions.

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2024/0015/F - Erection of 53 residential units (including 43 dwellings and 10 apartments) including creation of access, internal roads, landscaping and associated works (revised information). - Lands at Cabin Hill, Upper Newtownards Road

The Senior Planning Officer summarised the application for the Committee and explained that the Committee had deferred consideration of the application, at its meeting in February, in order to review additional information following a fire at the application site, prior to the Committee meeting.

He reported that officers had subsequently carried out a further site visit and reported that the fire had been confined to a small area within the auditorium building at the back of the

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

site. He stated that the fire incident had no material impact on the assessment of the application.

He provided an overview of the application and highlighted the following key areas for consideration:

- Principle of housing in the location;
- Housing density;
- Affordable housing;
- Housing mix;
- Adaptable and accessible accommodation;
- Design, placemaking and landscape impact;
- New open space;
- Impact on heritage assets;
- Climate change;
- Residential quality and impact on amenity;
- Open space;
- Access parking, and transport;
- Health impacts;
- Environmental protection;
- Flood risk and drainage;
- Waste-water infrastructure;
- Natural heritage;
- Section 76 planning agreement; and
- Pre-application Community Consultation.

He stated that having regard to the Development Plan and other material considerations, on balance, it was recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. C. Bryson, Gravis Planning Agent, to the meeting.

Mr. Bryson stated that he fully endorsed the officer's recommendation to approve the proposal which would deliver 53 residential units within the settlement limit of Belfast and regenerate an underutilised brownfield site.

He stated that the application site was a sustainable location and that green travel measures had been proposed to offer future residents the option of travel cards, car club membership, bicycle vouchers and Belfast Bikes membership.

He explained that the proposed development had been demonstrated to be in accordance with both regional and local planning policy and as such, the applicant respectfully requested that the Committee endorse the officer's recommendation to approve the application.

In response to a question from a Member, Mr. Bryson provided reassurance that measures were in place at the site of the adjacent listed building to keep it secure.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

Restricted Information

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the Developer’s viability information, as, due to the nature of the information, 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.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided the issues were not substantive.

Planning Applications

LA04/2025/0574/F - Erection of eight storey building comprising seven floors of grade A office accommodation, ground floor retail / business units together with car parking (15 no. spaces), cycle parking and plant areas: and public realm improvements including dedicated drop-off area to front of building - Surface level car park at lands to east of Lanyon Place Station Mays Meadow

The Principal Planning Officer presented the application and provided an overview of the proposed eight-storey office development with associated retail and public realm improvements.

She highlighted the following key considerations:

- Principle of the proposed uses;
- Design and placemaking;
- Impact on heritage assets;
- Impact on amenity;
- Climate change;
- Open space;
- Access and transport ;
- Health impacts;
- Environmental protection;
- Flood risk and drainage;
- Waste-water infrastructure;
- Natural heritage;
- Waste management; and
- Pre-Application Community Consultation.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

She reported that no third-party objections had been received and that the Council's Environmental Health Service and Urban Design Officer had raised no objections. She explained that NI Water had objected due to network capacity issues but that it was considered unreasonable to withhold planning permission on those grounds as an appropriate planning condition could be imposed to restrict development until a satisfactory agreement was reached with NI Water.

She stated that, having regard to the Development Plan and other material considerations, it was recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and deal with any other issues that might arise, including those raised in the further consultation responses from DfI Road Services, provided that the issues were not substantive.

LA04/2025/1272/F - Erection of temporary mobile classroom village to facilitate future refurbishment and extension of existing Harberton North Special School, comprising 3 no. 2-storey blocks of temporary classroom accommodation, temporary hard play areas, temporary staff and visitor parking areas, tree removal and landscaping. (Amended Plans) - Harberton North Special School 29a Fortwilliam Park

The Principal Planning Officer summarised the application for the Committee and highlighted the following key areas for consideration:

- Principle of development;
- The impact of the proposal on the conservation area and setting of listed buildings;
- Trees and landscaping;
- The impact on the amenity of adjacent land users;
- Access, movement, and parking;
- Climate change;
- Drainage and sewage infrastructure;
- Noise, air quality and other environmental impacts including contamination; and
- Ecological issues.

She stated that, having regard to the Development Plan and material considerations, it was recommended that temporary planning permission be granted, to 30th September, 2030, subject to conditions.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided the issues were not substantive.

LA04/2025/1003/F - Proposed use of 300 No. Student Bedrooms/Studios as Short Term Let Accommodation outside of term time - 81-107 York Street

The Principal Planning Officer provided an overview of the application and explained that the key issues for consideration were the principle of the proposed change of use outside of term time and access, movement and parking.

She stated that one representation had been received from the Northern Ireland Hotel Federation siting concern with regard to the definition of term time and clarity of use, monitoring and enforcement issues, neighbourhood amenity, precedent and policy alignment.

She reported that, in addition to the case officer's report, a letter had been received from the University of Ulster in support of the application and that DfI Roads had been consulted and had offered no objection to the application.

The Principal Planning Officer explained that a Section 77 planning agreement, to vary the Section 76 planning agreement, was necessary and agreed in principle with Legal Services.

She stated that, having regard to the Development Plan and material considerations, it was recommended that planning permission be granted.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions, resolve the relevant Section 77 to vary the host Section 76 Planning Agreement, and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2025/0973/F - Retrospective change of use from student accommodation to short term lets accommodation (limited to July & August only) - Bradbury Place 30-44 Bradbury Place

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application and stated that the key issue for consideration was the principle of the proposed change of use outside of term time which had been approved under LA04/2017/2753/F.

She stated that one representation had been received from the Northern Ireland Hotel Federation which outlined its concern with regard to the definition of term time and clarity of use, monitoring and enforcement issues, neighbourhood amenity, precedent and policy alignment. She added that DfI Roads had been consulted and had no objections.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

The Principal Planning Officer explained that a Section 77 planning agreement, to vary the Section 76 planning agreement, was necessary and agreed in principle with Legal Services.

She stated that, having regard to the Development Plan and material considerations, it was recommended that planning permission be granted.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions, resolve the relevant Section 77, and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2025/0837/F - Demolition of Mount Masonic Hall, erection of 35 no. social housing units in 2 no. blocks with associated private, shared, communal, and public space, 29 no. private car parking spaces, vehicle and pedestrian access from Park Avenue, improvements to pedestrian steps linking Strandburn Drive to Sydenham Park, and demolition of 1no. garage. - Land of the former Mount Masonic Hall, 45 Park Avenue

The Principal Planning Officer summarised the application and explained that the proposal was for 100% social housing which was supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and would comprise of two detached blocks and 21 resident parking bays, 8 visitor parking bays, amenity provision, landscaping, cycle parking and associated works.

She reported that three letters of objection had been received and the issues raised had been addressed within the report.

She stated that, having regard to the Development plan and material considerations, it was recommended that planning permission be granted.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. D. Worthington, Pragma Planning, to the meeting.

Mr. Worthington explained that the proposal would deliver 35 new social housing apartments for people aged over 55, in partnership with Alpha Housing Association that would address a significant unmet need for social housing in the Middle East Belfast Housing Need Area, particularly for accommodation suitable for older residents.

He stated that the scheme represented the redevelopment of a vacant brownfield site within the development limits of Belfast and that the design had been carefully developed to respond to the topography of the site and the surrounding context.

He stated that the proposal would provide wider community benefits beyond the housing itself and included the full replacement and upgrading of the public pedestrian steps which connected Strandburn Drive to Sydenham Park.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

He addressed concerns which had been raised by neighbouring residents and highlighted that the proposal had received support or no objection from key consultees and was compliant with relevant planning policies. He requested that the Committee supported the recommendation to approve the application.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement.

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, to include the requirement for a Construction Environmental Management Plan, and to deal with any other matters that might arise, including resolving final responses from NIEA: NED and Trees, provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2025/0463/F - Proposed change of use of Vacant Warehouse to indoor Padel Court Facility to include, Cafe, Changing rooms, Gym, Picklecourts and ancillary site development works - Decco Ltd 1-5 Redcar Street

The Principal Planning Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the application and explained that the key issues for consideration were the principle of use, the impact on the character of the area, impact on existing residential amenity, access and transportation, impact on natural and built heritage, wastewater infrastructure, landscaping and environmental matters.

She reported that four representations had been received in objection to the proposal which were detailed and addressed within the case officer's report. She added that an objection from NI Water was to be resolved and that no further objections from consultees had been received.

The Principal Planning Officer stated that it was recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions.

The Committee granted planning application, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of conditions, resolve a final consultation response from NI Water and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2025/0951/F - Proposed 25m monopole with 6no. antennas, 4no. transmission dishes, 2no. equipment cabinets and ancillary development thereto. - Loughside playing fields, Shore Road

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

The Principal Planning officer summarised the application and drew the Committee's attention to an error in the report and clarified that the application had not been made by the Council, however, the application site was Council owned land.

She reported that the proposal was contrary to Policies ITU1 and OS1 of the Belfast Local Development Plan: Plan Strategy 2035 as the siting, height, scale and design of the proposal would negatively impact on the area of protected open space and that the application did not demonstrate that community benefits would decisively outweigh the loss of the open space.

She stated that it was recommended that the application be refused.

The Committee agreed to refuse the application and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the refusal reasons and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided they were not substantive.

(The Chairperson (Councillor Murphy) retired from the meeting, Deputy Chairperson (Councillor Sammy Douglas) in the chair.)

LA04/2025/1692/F - Extension of existing ballstop fencing from 5m to 8m along three sides. This will total 220m in length. (Amended Proposal Description) - Existing soccer pitch at Marrowbone Millenium Park (approx. 25m north of No. 8 Ardoyne Court), Ardoyne Avenue

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and stated that it was recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

Restricted Item

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

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

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 10th March, 2026**

Quarter 3 Finance Report - 2025/2026

The Committee noted the report and associated financial reporting pack.

Chairperson

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Monday, 16th March, 2026

MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BELFAST WATERFRONT AND ULSTER HALL LTD. SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Hanvey (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Bower, Brennan, R. Brooks,
Collins, de Faoite, Ferguson, Flynn, McCabe,
McCann, McCormick, McDowell, McKay, Ó Néill,
Verner and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. R. McConnell, Chief Executive, Belfast Waterfront
and Ulster Hall Ltd.;
Mr. I. Bell, Director of Finance, Risk, and Corporate
Services, Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.;
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Bell and Canavan.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th January, 2026, were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 9th February, 2026.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Request to Present: MCI

The Committee acceded to a request for MCI, an International Convention Centre (ICC) Belfast Strategic Partnership Project, to present at its next meeting on 15th June, 2026, on the project, its findings and the strategies to be adopted for ICC Belfast.

Capital and Maintenance Update

The Director of Property and Projects submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the capital and maintenance works at the ICC, Waterfront and Ulster Hall.

The Director of Economic Development highlighted the update provided in relation to the Waterfront Hall's chiller units and smoke curtains, and the Ulster Hall's lighting scheme.

The Committee noted the capital and maintenance update.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following four 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 item as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The 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.

Internal Audit Update

(Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit Governance and Risk Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Audit Governance and Risk Manager provided the Committee with an update on the outcome of the first of two internal audits planned for Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall (BWUH) Ltd. in 2025/26.

He reminded the Committee that, as part of the contract between the Council and BWUH Ltd., the company was required to establish an Audit and Risk Committee and plan for both external and internal audit, and that the role of the internal audit would be fulfilled by the Council's internal audit service.

The Committee was provided with an overview of the first audit for 2025/26, which covered corporate risk management, performance management, sales and marketing, and capital programme/property maintenance.

The Audit Governance and Risk Manager provided a summary of the audit's findings and advised that an action plan had been agreed to address any issues identified.

During discussion, in response to a Member's request, the Audit Governance and Risk Manager stated that further information would be brought back to the Committee in relation to BWUH Ltd.'s reporting for Quarter 4, 2024/25.

After discussion, the Committee noted the internal audit update.

Performance Update - Q3 2025/26

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on BWUH Ltd.'s performance for Quarter 3 (Q3), 2025/26.

The Director of Finance, Risk, and Corporate Services, BWUH Ltd., advised that Q3 was busy, as expected, and provided a snapshot overview of the occupancy levels, events and delegates. He outlined the financial figures for Q3, which included a breakdown of BWUH Ltd.'s overall actual income and expenditure against targets.

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee
Monday, 16th March, 2026

The Chief Executive, BWUH Ltd., provided the Committee with a Business update, which included information on BWUH Ltd.'s work in relation to:

- securing multiple year and new business;
- supporting both the UNESCO City of Music and European City of Sport status for Belfast;
- conferences;
- entertainment events;
- grassroots and legacy initiatives;
- engagement with the local community;
- sustainability;
- apprenticeships and placements; and
- event curation.

During discussion, BWUH Ltd.'s Chief Executive and Director of Finance, Risk, and Corporate Services, answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to accessibility, customer satisfaction, apprenticeships and placements, the financial update provided and the upcoming Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

In response to Members' questions in relation to customer satisfaction surveys and accessibility, the Chief Executive advised that further information would be provided at a future meeting.

After discussion, the Committee noted the update provided on BWUH Ltd.'s performance for Q3, 2025/26.

Reserved Matters

The Committee noted that there were no reserved matters which required approval and that a special meeting might be required in April or May, 2026, to ratify the appointment, or extension, of BWUH Ltd. Board Members.

Extension of BWUH Ltd Operating Contract

The Director of Economic Development reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 19th January, 2026, it had approved the option to extend the duration of the current operator contract with BWUH Ltd. for a further five years, which would commence on 3rd June, 2026, subject to the insertion of a clause within the contract that continuation beyond three years should be on the basis of agreed targets being met.

He advised the Committee that, following a review of the existing contractual framework, the insertion of an additional clause would not be required as the current Services Agreement with BWUH Ltd. had included a suitable specification on Collective Partnership Targets. It was reported that the existing contract permitted the changing of targets, subject to agreement with BWUH Ltd. The Committee was also advised that the current Services Agreement included a suitable specification on Termination, and that it could be activated in the event of the Collective Partnership Targets and subsequent Action and Rectification Plans not being met. The Director stated that the new Collective Partnership Targets were currently being developed with BWUH Ltd., and that they would

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee
Monday, 16th March, 2026

be submitted to the Committee's next meeting with the associated Key Performance Indicators.

The Director recommended that the current contract be extended to 2nd August, 2026, to ensure an appropriate timeline for the confirmation of the five-year extension, and that, if agreed, the five-year extension would commence from 3rd August, 2026.

During discussion, in response to Members' questions, the Director advised that he would explore the potential for Members to feed into the development of the Collective Partnership Targets in advance of the next meeting.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted that the current contract did not require the insertion of a new clause as the current clauses on Collective Partnership Targets and Termination were suitable and applicable;
- ii. noted that the proposed new Collective Partnership Targets and associated Key Performance Indicators would be submitted to its next meeting;
- iii. approved a two-month extension of the current contract until 2nd August, 2026; and
- iv. approved the commencement of the five-year contract extension from 3rd August, 2026.

Chairperson

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 12th March, 2026

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);
The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey);
Alderman Copeland;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, R. Brooks, T. Brooks,
Collins, P. Donnelly, S. Douglas,
Ferguson, Groogan, Lyons, Magee,
McCann, Meenehan and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Mr. O. Croll, Local Energy Systems Advisor; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported from the Chairperson (Councillor M. Donnelly) and Councillor Murray.

Chairing of the Meeting

As neither the Chairperson nor the Deputy Chairperson were present at the start of the meeting, nominations were sought for the chairing of the meeting.

Moved by Councillor Collins,
Seconded by Councillor Bell and

Resolved – That Councillor McCann be elected to take the Chair for the meeting.

(Councillor McCann in the Chair)

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 12th February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 2nd March.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the reports associated with the following item 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.

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

Update on the Innovate UK project to de-risk rooftop solar and a heat network

The Climate Commissioner provided a detailed overview of the Innovate project, including the rationale for a low carbon heat network in central Belfast, a summary of the various workstreams, off-taker engagement, the delivery model, procurement, governance and oversight, the heat tariff and an update on the visit to an operational heat network in Leeds.

After addressing several Members’ questions in relation to the project, during which officers agreed to bring a further report back to the Committee with information on other places in the UK and Ireland which had heat networks and how they were funded, the Committee noted:

- I. the extensive stakeholder engagement undertaken since 2024 and the work completed including: 1) heat mapping and initial feasibility, 2) community opportunities assessment, 3) route to market analysis, 4) market readiness assessment, and 5) the Business model analysis;
- II. that since 2024, in excess of £300k has been spent de-risking and developing the heat network and rooftop solar project for investment to strengthen the delivery pathway for the Belfast Local Area Energy Plan to help achieve the City’s ambitious emission reduction targets;
- III. the ongoing work including: 1) further development and market testing of the business model for rooftop solar; 2) economic appraisal of the thermal storage component of a heat network; 3) engagement of off-takers and co-design of letters of intent to connect; 4) pre-market engagement of developers, legal review and development of a procurement roadmap; and 5) the UK-wide dissemination and communication of findings;

**Climate and City Resilience Committee,
Thursday, 12th March, 2026**

- IV. that the project has generated significant interest from Innovate UK, other UK Councils and DNOs who will be attending a series of project webinars and a Knowledge Exchange visit to Belfast on 19th March;
- V. the need for Council to lead the development of any heat network in Belfast due to its critical role in convening off-takers and other key stakeholders, estate aggregation, planning, project sponsorship and potentially providing land for an energy centre;
- VI. that an affordable heat tariff of 10p/kwhr is achievable with the right delivery model and investment partner, and that ongoing analysis and market engagement are targeting ways of attracting grant finance and reducing operating costs;
- VII. that DfE, is preparing a series of draft policy proposals on heat networks and is exploring options for NI to join the Heat Network Technical Assurance Scheme (HNTAS), currently being developed by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) for GB;
- VIII. that the outcomes of the ongoing work will be reported back to committee in due course with a request to give approval to utilise the outputs of the work to date to move into a formal market engagement phase, lasting 6-12 months; and
- IX. that an alternative date is being sought for a visit to the Leeds heat network.

Notice of Motion quarterly update

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy provided the Committee with an update on the Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which it was responsible.

After discussion, the Committee:

- agreed that whilst an impact assessment for the Upsurge Project would be brought to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as part of the Pitches Strategy Implementation Plan, a report on the UPSURGE project would also be brought to the Climate and City Resilience Committee; and
- noted the updates to the other Notices of Motion / Issues Raised in Advance for which Climate and City Resilience Committee was responsible.

Chairperson

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Standards and Business Committee

Tuesday, 24th March, 2026

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Flynn (Chairperson);
Aldermen Lawlor and McCullough; and
Councillors Bower, Bradley, Carson,
de Faoite, P. Donnelly, D. Douglas, Long,
Magee, McAteer, McCallin, McCormick,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin and Murphy.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager; and
Ms. C. Donnelly Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 24th February, 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 2nd March, 2026.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Motions

Armed Forces Covenant

Proposal

Moved by Councillor McAteer,
Seconded by Councillor Bower,

“That the above-mentioned motion, which had been moved by Alderman Lawlor and seconded by Alderman McCullough, be referred to the Council for consideration, with no restrictions placed upon the number of speakers.”

**Standards and Business Committee,
Tuesday, 24th March, 2026**

Amendment 1

Moved by Councillor R. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

“That the Committee rejects the motion.”

Amendment 2

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,
Seconded by Councillor I. McLaughlin,

“That the motion be adopted.”

Councillor McAteer withdrew her proposal and accordingly, Amendment 1, standing in the name of Councillor R. McLaughlin became the substantive proposal.

On a vote, ten Members voted for the amendment, standing in the name of Alderman Lawlor, eight against and one no vote and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee adopted the following motion, which had been proposed by Alderman Lawlor and seconded by Alderman McCullough:

“This Council recognises the unique contribution that Armed Forces service leavers have and continue to make to our society; agrees that Veterans and serving personnel should not face any disadvantage as a result of their military service and resolves that this Council will sign up immediately to the Armed Forces Covenant.”

Disused and Derelict Phone Boxes

The Committee noted that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor Abernethy, be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Gender Budgeting

The Committee noted that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor McCabe and seconded by Councillor O'Neill, be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

**Standards and Business Committee,
Tuesday, 24th March, 2026**

Placing Children's Safety Above Political Ideology

Proposal

Moved by Alderman McCullough,
Seconded by Councillor Ian McLaughlin,

“That the above-mentioned motion, which had been moved by Alderman McCullough and seconded by Councillor Bunting, be referred to the Council for consideration, with no restrictions placed upon the number of speakers.”

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Ronan McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

“That the Committee rejects the motion.”

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

For (13)	Against (6)
Councillor Flynn (Chairperson); and Councillors Bower, Bradley, Carson, de Faoite, P. Donnelly, Long, Magee, McAteer, McCallin, McDonough-Brown, R. McLaughlin and Murphy.	Aldermen Lawlor and McCullough; and Councillors D. Douglas, McCormick, McDowell and I. McLaughlin.

Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals held in Belfast

The Committee noted that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Murray and seconded by Councillor Smyth, be referred, in the first instance, to the People and Communities Committee.

Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme

The Committee noted that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Long and seconded by Councillor Nelson, be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

**Standards and Business Committee,
Tuesday, 24th March, 2026**

Costed Support for the Childcare Sector

The Committee noted that the motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Maghie and seconded by Councillor Bower, be referred, in the first instance, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Chairperson