

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



**Belfast
City Council**

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet both online and in-person, in the Lavery Room - City Hall on Friday, 24th April, 2026 at 9.30 am, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters

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

2. Presentations

- (a) Irish Athletic Boxing Association (IABA)
- (b) Request to present - Retail NI and USDAW (Sunday Trading consultation)
(Pages 1 - 2)

3. Restricted Items

- (a) Independently Managed Community Centres (IMCC's) - Ballymacarret Community Centre (Report to follow)
- (b) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann (Report to follow)

- (c) Update on Employees on Temporary Contracts and Agency Workers (Pages 3 - 18)
- (d) Organisational Reviews and Change Programme (Report to follow)
- (e) Requests for Funding (Pages 19 - 26)
- (f) Summer Community Diversionary Fund (Report to follow)

4. **Matters referred back from Council/Motions**

- (a) Notice of Motion - Gender Budgeting (Pages 27 - 28)
- (b) Notice of Motion - Disused and Derelict Phone Boxes (Pages 29 - 32)
- (c) Notice of Motion - Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme (Pages 33 - 34)
- (d) Notice of Motion - Costed Support for the Childcare Sector (Pages 35 - 38)
- (e) Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update (Pages 39 - 44)
- (f) Correspondence Received - Hardship Funding (Pages 45 - 50)

5. **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (a) Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy (Report to follow)
- (b) Pitches Strategy (Report to follow)
- (c) Gender Pay Gap Report (Pages 51 - 60)
- (d) Draft Bullying and Harassment Policy and draft Equal Opportunities Policy (Pages 61 - 78)
- (e) Sustain Exchange Climate Leadership Event - Funding Agreement (Report to follow)
- (f) Horizon Cities@Heart Project (Pages 79 - 82)
- (g) City Innovation (Report to follow)
- (h) Potential Additional Funding from Special EU Programmes Body - Local PEACEPLUS Action Plans (Report to follow)
- (i) Social Supermarket (Report to follow)
- (j) Planning Update (Report to follow)

6. **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

- (a) Physical Programme Update (Report to follow)
- (b) Asset Management (Report to follow)

7. **Finance, Procurement and Performance**

- (a) Contracts Update (Report to follow)
- (b) NICVA Summit 2026 (Report to follow)

8. **Equality and Good Relations**

- (a) Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting (Report to follow)

9. **Operational Issues**

- (a) Minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum (Report to follow)
- (b) Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality (Pages 83 - 88)
- (c) Request for use of City Hall grounds for International Yoga Day (Pages 89 - 92)
- (d) Minutes of Disability Working Group of 24th March, 2026 (Pages 93 - 100)

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Subject:	Request to Present – Retail NI and USDAW (Sunday Trading consultation)
Date:	24th April, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Damien Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control
Contact Officer:	Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 	
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
<p>After Committee Decision</p> <p>After Council Decision</p> <p>Sometime in the future</p> <p>Never</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
	To request that the Members of the Committee receive a presentation from Retail NI and USDAW (Sunday Trading consultation) at its meeting in May.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the request to receive a presentation from Retail NI and USDAW (Sunday Trading consultation) at its meeting on 22nd May.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Correspondence has been received from Mr. Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive, Retail NI for a joint presentation from Retail NI and Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW) in relation to the Sunday Trading consultation.</p> <p>If agreed, Officers will request that the presentation is shared with Members in advance of the meeting.</p> <p>Consultation Information</p> <p>At its meeting in July 2025, the Council agreed, in principle, to introduce the holiday resort designation across the full Belfast council area, subject to public consultation.</p> <p>The consultation is currently open for feedback and closes on 13th May, 2026: https://yoursay.belfastcity.gov.uk/sunday-openings</p> <p>Further information can be found here: https://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/news/council-seeks-public-s-views-on-extending-sunday-t</p>
4.0	Finance & Resource Implications
	There are no finance or resource implications associated with this report
5.0	Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment
	There are no Equality or Good Relation Implications/Rural Needs Assessment requirements associated with this report
6.0	Appendices
	None

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

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Subject:	Notice of Motion – Gender Budgeting
Date:	24th April, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider a motion in relation to Gender Budgeting, which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 24th March 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure or fall within the remit of a particular Committee must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.

	At this stage, the Committee is asked to note that the notice of motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 24th March 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor McCabe and seconded by Councillor Ó Néill was referred to the Committee for consideration:</p>
3.2	<p><u>Gender Budgeting</u></p> <p>“That this Council acknowledges the potential benefits of gender budgeting in addressing systemic gender inequalities for all in our society, as well as improving equality for whom we are providing services for thorough, thoughtful and deliberative financial planning.</p> <p>That the Council performs a gender data audit including to ensure maximum impact of data and to understand what gaps exist relating to the scope and scale of gender inequality, with the aim of achieving better equality outcomes and more targeted resource allocation. Annual review of progress will determine further steps in auditing and where progress allows for the phased adoption of gender budgeting tools.”</p> <p>Proposer: Councillor Áine McCabe</p> <p>Seconder: Councillor Tomás Ó Néill</p>
3.3	The motion calls upon the Council to undertake gender budgeting. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for equality and human resources and the motion has been referred to that Committee.
3.4	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>



Subject:	Notice of Motion – Disused and Derelict Phone Boxes
Date:	24th April, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider a motion in relation to Disused and Derelict Phone Boxes, which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 24th March 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure or fall within the remit of a particular Committee must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.

	At this stage, the Committee is asked to note that the notice of motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 24th March 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Bower and seconded by Councillor Abernethy was referred to the Committee for consideration:</p>
3.2	<p><u>Disused and Derelict Phone Boxes</u></p> <p>“This Council notes the increasing number of disused and derelict phone boxes across Belfast which are often used as spaces for anti-social behaviour, vandalism, and littering. These phone boxes represent a unique opportunity for urban regeneration and community empowerment.</p> <p>This Council agrees to liaise with BT regarding the process to adopt a phone box and to identify all eligible phone boxes within the Belfast City Council area.</p> <p>The Council will support those wanting to adopt a phone box by developing a process to help charities, community groups, and local businesses to navigate the legal and logistical requirements of adopting a box.</p> <p>The Council will also explore the feasibility of a small grant to help groups with the initial costs of refurbishment (e.g., painting, shelving, or installing solar lighting).”</p> <p>Proposer: Councillor Christine Bower</p> <p>Seconder: Councillor Hedley Abernethy</p>
3.3	The motion calls upon the Council to liaise with BT regarding the process to adopt a phone box. The motion is a cross-cutting issue. However, Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for the allocation of resources and the management of assets, and the motion will be referred to that Committee in the first instance
3.4	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>

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Subject:	Notice of Motion – Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme
Date:	24th April, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider a motion in relation to Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme, which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 24th March 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure or fall within the remit of a particular Committee must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.

	At this stage, the Committee is asked to note that the notice of motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 24th March 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Long and seconded by Councillor Nelson was referred to the Committee for consideration:</p>
3.2	<p><u>Proposed City Ambassadors Scheme</u></p> <p>“This Council will introduce a City Ambassadors scheme which recognises those in the city who have made outstanding contributions in various sectors. These individuals will have a formal role in promoting Belfast.</p> <p>This new scheme will be more inclusive and allow for more diverse recognition than the Freedom of the City scheme and allow us to better recognise the achievements of those in Belfast.”</p> <p>Proposer: Councillor Michael Long</p> <p>Secunder: Councillor Sam Nelson</p>
3.3	The motion calls upon the Council to introduce a City Ambassador scheme. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for the development of key corporate and cross cutting strategies and policies; therefore, the motion has been referred to this Committee for consideration.
3.4	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None associated with this report.</p>



Subject:	Notice of Motion – Costed Support for the Childcare Sector
Date:	24th April, 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider a motion in relation to Costed Support for the Childcare Sector, which was referred to the Committee by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 24th March 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to note that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure or fall within the remit of a particular Committee must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.

	At this stage, the Committee is asked to note that the notice of motion has been received and that, if agreed, a subsequent report will be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>At the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 24th March 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Maghie and seconded by Councillor Bower was referred to the Committee for consideration:</p>
3.2	<p><u>Costed Support for the Childcare Sector</u></p> <p>“That this council notes with regret the amount of parents who received notification of increased childcare costs in the past month and realises the increased financial burden this places on parents in this city.</p> <p>This council will undertake to bring back a costed report that looks at how council assets can better support childcare provision in Belfast.</p> <p>Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How our parks and open spaces could be utilised to further support the provision of forest schools. • How community spaces could be utilised to support expansions of childcare places. • How community groups could be supported to provide childcare places. • How our training academies could support this work.” <p>Proposer: Councillor Jenna Maghie</p> <p>Seconder: Councillor Christine Bower</p>
3.3	The motion calls upon the Council to bring back a report that looks at how Council assets can better support childcare provision in Belfast. The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for the management of assets included in the motion, therefore, the motion has been referred to this Committee for consideration.
3.4	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this stage as there is no commitment to proceed with the Notice of Motion. Details of any financial and resource implications will be reported at a subsequent meeting.</p>

3.5	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None associated with this report.
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Subject:	Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update
Date:	24 April 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor & Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer(s):	Russell Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer Clare Hutchinson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Committee on the progress of all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which SP&R Committee is responsible for.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	It is recommended that SP&R Committee: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the updates to all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that SP&R Committee is responsible for and • Agree to the closure of Notices of Motion 284, 305, 347, 358, 391, 411, 439, 440, 455, 456 and 474.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>At SP&R Committee on 25th October 2019, the following Notice of Motion was agreed: “That this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting, detailing the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Date received 2. Notice of motion title 3. Submitted by which Councillor 4. Council meeting date 5. Committee motion is referred to 6. Outcome of committee where Notice of Motion will be debated 7. Month it will be reported back to committee 8. Other action to be taken.”

3.2	<p>Following a review exercise, a new database containing all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance at Committee was created and quarterly reporting to Committee commenced in March 2021. Appendix 1 is the latest quarterly update showing all active Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which SP&R Committee is responsible for.</p>
3.3	<p>Closure of Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance</p> <p>At SP&R Committee on 20th November 2020, it was agreed that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notices of Motion which contained an action(s) that has been completed; and • Notices of Motion have become Council policy. <p>SP&R Committee are asked to agree that the following are now closed:</p>
3.4	<p>Category 1 Recommended Closure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of the Ceremony Room, City Hall (284): <p>This Issue Raised in Advance called on the Council to submit a report on the potential for the Ceremony Room in the City Hall, which was being used to accommodate staff as part of the Covid-19 arrangements, to be reinstated for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies. Following a report on the City Hall Income Generation Project that went to SP&R Committee in May 2024, considerations relating to ceremonies and locations were clearly set out and agreed. It is proposed that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for striking health workers (305): <p>This Notice of Motion called on the Council to write to the Department for Health and the Secretary of State to urge them to source and provide a fair, above inflation pay rise for health workers. The correspondence requested was issued and the disputes were resolved in 2023-24. It is proposed that this Notice of Motion is now closed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost of school uniforms and P.E. kits (347): <p>This Notice of Motion called on the Council to write to the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Education, expressing concern for children and their parents in relation to the cost of school uniforms and ask them to address this problem by putting in place robust and enforceable measures to require schools to provide for affordable uniform options from a range of suppliers. No return correspondence has been received. The School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Act (Northern Ireland) 2026 came into operation in February 2026 with immediate effect. It is proposed that this Notice of Motion is now closed.</p>

- **Ulster Bank closures (358):**

This Notice of Motion called on the Council to support the Financial Services Unions (FSU) and write to Ulster Bank calling on them to reverse planned branch closures. In January 2024 Council wrote to Ulster Bank and the Commissioner for Older People but no return correspondence has been received. The Financial Services Union addressed Council on 8th January 2024 in relation to these branch closures, but all were closed in 2024. It is proposed that this Notice of Motion is now closed.

- **High costs of childcare (391):**

This Notice of Motion called on the Council to write to the Minister of Education to bring forward a package of interventions to deliver urgent financial support for parents, a new funding scheme to guarantee sustainability for providers and increased pay and qualifications for workers and a new independent body to oversee the development and implementation of the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy. Since this motion was proposed the NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme has been introduced providing access to tax-free childcare or reimbursement through Universal Credit. As part of the initial development of the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy, the Minister announced a £55 million package of measures which included an extension of the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme to cover school-age children. The public consultation on the draft strategy closed in March 2026, and the Council's response was agreed and submitted. It is proposed that this Notice of Motion is now closed.

- **LORAG, Youth Club development (439):**

This Issue Raised in Advance called on the Council to investigate the lease and administrative fees being paid by LORAG for Council-owned land and assess the possibility of a granting a waiver. Assignment of the Lease from the Trustees of St John Vianney to LORAG was completed in November 2025 and Ministerial consent has been approved. It is proposed that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed.

- **Bi-weekly meeting of SP&R Committee (440):**

This Issue Raised in Advance called for a special meeting of the Committee be held to consider an initial report on efficiency savings, consultancy fees and fees and charges. A special meeting of SP&R Committee was held in June 2025 in relation to this matter. It is proposed that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed.

	<p>Category 2 Recommended Closure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising box at the City Hall Christmas Tree (411): This Issue Raised in Advance called on the Council to locate a fundraising box at the City Hall Christmas Tree. A fundraising box has been located alongside the City Hall Christmas Tree in recent years with the monies raised donated to charity. It is proposed that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed. • The installation of dual language signage in Olympia (455): This Issue Raised in Advance called on the Council to install dual-language signage in Olympia, including GLL/BETTER information signage. This is being progressed as part of the Physical Programme workstream. It is proposed that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed. • The installation of signage on the Forth-Meadow Greenway (456): This Issue Raised in Advance called on the Council to install dual-language signage on the Forth-Meadow Greenway. This is being progressed as part of the Physical Programme workstream. It is proposed that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed. • Together – Building a United Community Strategy (474): This Notice of Motion called on the Council to remove the interface barrier in Alexandra Park as part of the Reconnecting Waterworks and Alexandra Park project and bring forward an accompanying programme of work with local stakeholders to establish support to assist with the transition. This programme of work is being progressed under the PEACEPLUS Reconnected Belfast project. It is proposed that this Notice of Motion is now closed.
3.5	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional financial implications required to implement these recommendations.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Notices of Motion Live Database – SP&R Committee</p>

Belfast City Council Notice of Motion Database

Ref	Type	Meeting Date	Motion Title	Proposed by	Party	Reporting Cc	Reporting Officer	Lead Department	Status	Status Update
23	Notice of Motion	01/07/2019	Removal of Banners and Paramilitary Flags in Belfast	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	Since the decision by SP &R in 2019, the FICT report commissioned by the Executive was published which covers similar issues. Extensive consultation was undertaken between 2016 – 19 on this and the contents of this report have the agreement of the 5 main political parties represented on the Commission Report to be brought to CMT and potentially Party Group Leaders for discussion on way forward.
25	Issue Raised in Advance	23/08/2019	Abortion Imagery	Cllr Aine Groogan	Green Party	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	A report to consider draft bye laws for the city centre in relation to amenity issues and the display of graphic imagery was presented to SP&R in February 26. Committee agreed to authorise officers to consult with DfC on the draft byelaws. This decision was later called in and now awaits legal opinion.
35	Notice of Motion	02/12/2019	Pedestrian Animation	Cllr Matt Garrett	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Keith Forster	Place & Economy	Ongoing	Following the September meeting of SP&R Committee, officers considered DfI Western Division in relation to the existing pride flag crossing at the Foyle Bridge in Derry–Londonderry. The Department confirmed that careful consideration was given before permitting the rainbow markings on Foyle Embankment, (which were installed in 2021) to make sure it did not conflict Traffic Signs regulations. Following the introduction of the coloured markings, safety concerns were raised from a number of sources including IMTAC. DfI subsequently decided that following the representation from IMTAC, that no further such installations would take place. On a local level, the DfI Western Division confirmed that they were unaware of any safety issues that members of the public have experienced at the Foyle Embankment crossing; however they recognise that the concerns raised by IMTAC are often of a sensory and perception nature and that these issues may not always be reported to the Department and that the absence of a reported problem may not mean that the issue does not exist. On a practical level, the Department also highlighted the durability of such markings (https://url.uk.m.mimecastroect.com/s/3fMJC9g2kFxM92gFofqHqPeP87domain=google.co.uk). Further contact is being made with the Eastern Division to understand the latest status of the pedestrianisation of Union Street and discuss options for alternative designs like those implemented elsewhere in the UK and Ireland.
49	Notice of Motion	03/02/2020	Market Gardens and Urban Farming	Cllr Seamas de Faioite	SDLP	SP&R	John Tully	City & Organisational	Ongoing	Draft Food Strategy, Action Plan and Communications Plan developed. Internal discussions ongoing on costings and delivery.
50	Notice of Motion	03/02/2020	Belfast Zoo	Cllr Conor Maskey	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Keith Forster	Place & Economy	Ongoing	At the June 2025 meeting of the CG&R Committee, members requested a specific governance structure be established to look at a range of issues within Belfast Zoo. An initial meeting of the Zoo Long-Term Financial Sustainability Group was held on Wednesday 10th December 2025, the minutes of which were reported to the January 2026 meeting of the CG&R Committee. This motion will be addressed by this group.
51	Notice of Motion	03/02/2020	Growth Deal	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Sharon McNicholl	Corporate Services	Ongoing	Deputy CEx has had discussions with Cllr Beattie to recommend closing - awaiting further info
131	Notice of Motion	02/11/2020	Sealing of the Records of Mother and Baby Homes	Cllr Michael Collins	PBP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	Response from Irish Gov still outstanding - 06/09/21
176	Notice of Motion	04/05/2021	Mater Hospital Services	Cllr Fiona Ferguson	PBP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	This motion related to provision of services during the pandemic - this was resolved with services returning to normal from November 2022. 12.03.23 This motion recommendation for closure was rejected at Feb 2023 SP&R and therefore remains on-going
187	Notice of Motion	01/06/2021	Local Government Pension Scheme - Responsible Investment Strategy	Cllr Ryan Murphy	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	Letter sent 2/7/21. Meeting with NILGOSC requested by S P and R 20/8/21 - to be arranged
199	Notice of Motion	01/09/2021	Four Day Working Week	Cllr Matt Garrett	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Christine Sheridan	Human Resources	Ongoing	Workshop held on the NOM for management and Trade Unions on 26 March 2026. Management to meet with Four Day Week Foundation May 2026.
203	Notice of Motion	04/10/2021	Electric Charging Points	Ald George Dorrian	DUP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic	Ongoing	Responses from Ministers being considered by officers
209	Notice of Motion	04/10/2021	Environmentally Sustainable Event Spaces	Cllr Matt Garrett	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Sinead Grimes	Property & Projects	Ongoing	A report is required to SP&R Committee to outline the next steps. Progressing.
228	Notice of Motion	10/01/2022	Playing Pitches in Belfast	Cllr David Brooks	DUP	SP&R	Jim Girvan	City & Neighbourhood Services	Ongoing	This is part of the Pitches Strategy and will go on the agenda for the 24th April SP&R.
235	Notice of Motion	22/02/2022	Energy Price Crises	Cllr Brian Smyth	Green Party	SP&R	John Tully	City & Organisational	Ongoing	The climate team have recruited a Net Zero Officer, to support the development of the priority energy projects highlighted within the Local Area Energy Plan.
243	Notice of Motion	14/03/2022	Cost of Living	Cllr Matt Garrett	Sinn Fein	SP&R	John Tully	City & Organisational	Ongoing	£75k hardship funding was provided to Family Support Hubs across the city. Refreshed Cost-of-Living Support Guide 2025/2026) disseminated across the city signposting those in need to sources of support and advice. Council provided evidence to the NCS Committee for Communities on the draft DFC 'Anti-Poverty Strategy'.
264	Issue Raised in Advance	19/08/2022	Electric Vehicle Charging Points Strategy	Cllr Michael Long	Alliance	SP&R	John Tully	City & Organisational	Ongoing	An internal task and finish working group continue to coordinate work on the implementation of phase 1 and phase 2 of the Low Emission Vehicle Strategy which will allow Council to bring forward locations for low emissions infrastructure investment. Site assessment and market testing has been completed. A tender is being prepared based on a concession
284	Issue Raised in Advance	18/11/2022	Use of the Ceremony Room, City Hall	Cllr Michelle Kelly	Alliance	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Recommend Close	Category 1 closure Following a report on City Hall Income Generation Project that went to SP&R Committee in May 2024, considerations relating ceremonies and location was clearly set out and
297	Notice of Motion	05/01/2023	Comber Greenway	Cllr Anthony Flynn	Green Party	SP&R	Sinead Grimes	Property & Projects	Ongoing	Project has significant resource and financial implications. Officers are starting the process of reengaging with DfI on the Comber Greenway.
298	Notice of Motion	05/01/2023	School Street Schemes	Cllr Seamas de Faioite	SDLP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	Letters issued to DfI on 17 Apr 2023 in relation to Rosetta Way "quietway" and also to DAERA on 12 Feb 2024 re School Streets Air Quality but no letter specifically on School Streets Schemes appears to have been issued to DfI
305	Notice of Motion	24/01/2023	Support for striking Health Workers	Cllr Matt Collins	PBP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Recommend Close	Category 1 closure Correspondence requested was issued. This is now recommend close on the basis that the disputes were resolved in 2023-24.
308	Notice of Motion	21/02/2023	Overdose Prevention Facility in Belfast	Cllr Mal O'Hara	Green Party	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	At SP&R on 24th November 2023 the Committee agreed that, at the request of Councillor Smyth, that a report be submitted at its next monthly meeting with specific reference made to meetings held, legal advice sought and partners engaged with - see no. 346 for reference. A report was brought back to SP&R in January 2024. The Committee noted the contents of the report and that engagement would continue to take place with all the relevant agencies and stakeholders to advocate for such a facility in Belfast.
319	Notice of Motion	27/06/2023	CPR Training and Circuit	Cllr Christina Black	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic	Ongoing	The Committee agreed to adopt the motion, with a report to be submitted to a future meeting outlining how it could be facilitated.
326	Issue Raised in Advance	18/08/2023	Data Protection	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	Agreed at SP&R that a report will be brought back to Committee
330	Notice of Motion	29/08/2023	Clean Indoor Air Motion	Cllr Jenna Maghie	Alliance	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic	Ongoing	The Committee agreed to adopt the motion, with a report to be submitted to a future meeting outlining how it could be managed, resourced, and facilitated.
331	Notice of Motion	29/08/2023	Save West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness	Cllr Michael Collins	PBP	SP&R	Trevor Wallace	Finance & Resources	Ongoing	Update August 24: At the request of Councillor Collins, the Council agreed that the Motion on Save West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness which had been recommended for closure, remained open and be brought back to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for further discussion. A paper was brought to SP&R on 19th April where committee further discussed and agreed that the request be dealt with via the discretionary payments process. The Discretionary payment processed opened at the end of June and closed on 2nd August. Again, West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness did not apply for funding. Update Jan 25 - at Dec Cttee meeting it was decided that this would remain
337	Notice of Motion	26/09/2023	Right to Food Campaign	Cllr Paul Doherty	SDLP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic	Ongoing	Response presented to S P and R 24/11/23 - Referred to Social Policy Working Group
347	Notice of Motion	28/11/2023	Cost of School Uniforms and P.E. Kits	Cllr Sarah Bunting	DUP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Recommend Close	Category 1 closure The School Uniforms (Guidelines and Allowances) Act (Northern Ireland) 2026 came into operation, in February 26, with immediate effect. This means that families across Northern Ireland will pay less for school uniforms and school uniform policies for the 2026/27 school year must follow all the requirements set out in the new statutory Guidelines. This is recommended to close on the basis there is legislative provision in place.
356	Notice of Motion	04/01/2024	Memorial Wall - Covid-19	Cllr Emmett McDonough	Alliance	SP&R	Sinead Grimes	Property & Projects	Ongoing	Discussed at the City Hall/ City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group on 18 November 2025. Officers exploring a suitable location in one of our existing parks.
358	Notice of Motion	04/01/2024	Ulster Bank Closures	Cllr Geraldine McAttee	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Recommend Close	Category 1 closure In January 2024, Council wrote to Ulster Bank and the Commissioner for Older People as outlined in the NoM. No return correspondence has been received. In addition, the Financial Services Union addressed Council on 8th January 2024 in relation to these branch closures. All 10 branches were scheduled to close in 2024 and have now closed. This will be considered as part of the governance review.
360	Notice of Motion	23/01/2024	Transparency by Default at Belfast City Council	Cllr Gary McKeown	SDLP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic	Ongoing	Motion referred to SP&R. The draft Ethical Procurement Policy is currently under consideration by the Social Value Policy working group which is due to meet on 17th June 2025.
361	Notice of Motion	23/01/2024	Rights-based Ethical Procurement Policy	Cllr Bronagh Anglin	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	
375	Notice of Motion	28/03/2024	Endorsement of Plant Based Treaty	Cllr Paul Doherty	SDLP		Nora Largey	Legal & Civic	Ongoing	No Committee allocated as adopted at S&BC
376	Notice of Motion	28/03/2024	Bilingual Signage at Weavers Cross	Cllr Rois-Maire Donnelly	Sinn Fein		Nora Largey	Legal & Civic	Ongoing	No Committee allocated as adopted at S&BC
385	Notice of Motion	30/04/2024	Plant Based Councils Initiative	Cllr Anthony Flynn	Green Party	SP&R	John Tully	City & Organisational	Ongoing	Internal engagement with Procurement around how to take this forward ongoing. Report to SP&R in due course. To be considered as part of a Council Sustainable Food Policy which is under development. April update: Food Systems Officer in post in December 2025 and development of Food Policy underway with internal engagement with officers

391	Notice of Motion	23/05/2024	High Costs of Childcare	Cllr Paul Doherty	SDLP	SP&R					Recommend Close	Category 1 closure Since this motion was proposed, the NI Executive introduced the NI Childcare Subsidy Scheme providing access to tax-free childcare or reimbursements through Universal Credit. As part of the initial development of the Early Learning and Childcare Strategy, in May 25 the DE Minister announced a £55 million package of measures for early learning and childcare which included an extension of the Northern Ireland Childcare Subsidy Scheme to cover school-age children. Within the PiG, the NI Executive aims to put an early Learning and Childcare Strategy in place. The public consultation on the draft NI Early Learning and Childcare Strategy closed in March 26. The council response to the draft strategy was agreed in March 26 and therefore this motion is proposed for closure.
392	Notice of Motion	23/05/2024	Going for Growth Strategy	Cllr Brian Smyth		Green Party						Held back due to upcoming election
393	Notice of Motion	23/05/2024	Ireland's Ancient East	Cllr Gary McKeown	SDLP							Held back due to upcoming election
395	Issue Raised in Advance	24/05/2024	Transfer of Powers - Licensing of Bus Tour Operators in the City	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		Discussions ongoing with DFI in relation to bus tour operators generally.
396	Issue Raised in Advance	24/05/2024	Connection of Water Supply to Social Homes	Cllr Michael Donnelly	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		
402	Issue Raised in Advance	20/09/2024	Sunday Trading - Pilot Scheme	Cllr Sam Nelson		SP&R	Kate Bentley	Place & Economy		Ongoing		Following Council's decision in July 2025, a public consultation will be launched in March to progress the Holiday Resort designation citywide, enabling extended Sunday trading hours.
409	Notice of Motion	24/10/2024	NILGOSC - Disposal of Government Bonds	Cllr Carl Whyte	SDLP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		
411	Issue Raised in Advance	25/10/2024	Fundraising box at the City Hall Christmas Tree	Cllr Gary McKeown	SDLP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Recommend Close		Category 2 closure A fundraising box has been located alongside the City Hall Christmas Tree in recent years. The monies raised are donated to charity.
417	Notice of Motion	21/11/2024	Addressing Educational Inequalities in Belfast	Cllr David Bell	Alliance	SP&R	John Tully	City & Organisational		Ongoing		Engagement continues with Departmental Officials and designated RAISE locality coordinators in the context of the Belfast Agenda and Community Planning partnership structures.
432	Notice of Motion	20/02/2025	Action to Address Empty Homes	Cllr Michael Collins	PBP	SP&R	Cathy Reynolds	Place & Economy		Ongoing		This motion is being progressed by the Planning and Building Control and City Regeneration and Development directorates, and a report will be brought to a future meeting.
433	Notice of Motion	20/02/2025	Developing a Sponsorship and Philanthropy Network in Belfast	Cllr Michael Long	Alliance	SP&R	John Tully	City & Organisational		Ongoing		A workshop was held with the Council's Social Policy Working Group in February 2026. Work continues on the development of a draft Corporate Social Responsibility Framework which will reflect the intention behind the NOM.
439	Issue Raised in Advance	21/03/2025	LORAG - Youth Club Development - Council Land	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Sinead Grimes	Property & Projects		Recommend Close		Assignment of the Lease from The Trustees of St John Vianney to LORAG has been completed in November 2025 and Ministerial consent has been approved. Recommended to close.
440	Issue Raised in Advance	21/03/2025	Bi-weekly meeting of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee: Efficiency/Consultancy Paper	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Recommend Close		Category 1 closure A special meeting of SP&R Committee was held in June 2025 to consider a report on efficiency savings; consultancy fees; and fees and charges.
446	Notice of Motion	28/04/2025	Pathways to Work Green Paper	Cllr Paul Doherty	SDLP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		Democratic Services sent letter to OFMDFM & Minister for Communities on 15/05/25. Awaiting response.
447	Notice of Motion	28/04/2025	US War Planes out of Belfast	Cllr Michael Collins	PBP	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		Democratic Services sent letter to OFMDFM, Westminster Government and Aldergrove Airport re NOM - Awaiting response.
448	Notice of Motion	28/04/2025	National Famine Commemoration Day	Cllr Conor McKay	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		Democratic Services sent letter to Irish Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media on 15/05/25. Awaiting response.
455	Issue Raised in Advance	23/05/2025	The installation of dual-language signage in Olympia, including GLL/BETTER information signage.	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Sinead Grimes	Property & Projects		Recommend Close		Recommended to close. Project being progressed under the Physical Programme.
456	Issue Raised in Advance	23/05/2025	The installation of dual-language signage on the	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Sinead Grimes	Property & Projects		Recommend Close		Recommended to close. Project being progressed under the Physical Programme.
457	Issue Raised in Advance	23/05/2025	An update on the next stage in the development of the Irish Language Policy	Cllr Ciaran Beattie	Sinn Fein	SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		The draft Irish Language Policy was agreed and ratified by Council on 1st October 2025. The decision was later called in and now awaits legal opinion.
460	Notice of Motion	24/06/2025	Nitrates Action Plan	Cllr Andrew McCormick	DUP		Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		Passed by Council on 1 July 2025. Democratic Services to issue letter to DAERA after Call-in period expires.
474	Notice of Motion	23/10/2025	Together - Building a United Community Strategy	Cllr Sam Nelson		SP&R	Sinead Grimes	Property & Projects		Recommend Close		Recommended to close. Project being progressed under PEACEPLUS Reconnected Belfast project.
478	Notice of Motion	23/10/2025	Parents' Attendance Records at Council	Cllr Jenna Maghie		SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		
479	Issue Raised in Advance	24/10/2025	Levels of criminality and violence in the City Centre	Cllr Ciaran Beattie		SP&R	Jim Girvan	City & Neighbourhood Services		Ongoing		Update from SP&R and ratified by Council on March 2nd that Levels of criminality and violence in the city centre remains open, so that a further update could be provided.
491	Issue Raised in Advance	23/01/2026	Public Art - 2 Royal Avenue	Cllr Seamas de Faioite		SP&R	Cathy Reynolds	Place & Economy		Ongoing		
492	Notice of Motion	27/01/2026	Faith-Based Organisations and Addiction Services	Ald Dean McCullough		SP&R				Ongoing		
493	Notice of Motion	27/01/2026	Fleadh Cheoil 2026 Legacy Monument	Cllr Paul Doherty		SP&R	Damien Martin	Place & Economy		Ongoing		
495	Notice of Motion	27/01/2026	City Centre Gritting Feasibility Study	Cllr Brian Smyth		SP&R	Stephen Leonard	City & Neighbourhood Services		Ongoing		27/2 - Ongoing - The Committee noted that the notice of motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report would be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications, to include information on funding options from the Department for Infrastructure, the gritting of footpaths on arterial routes and highest points of elevation, together with the legal implications. The Dfi has been written to.
501	Issue Raised in Advance	20/03/2026	Procedures of the Irish Street Sign Consultation	Cllr Michael Long		SP&R	Nora Largey	Legal & Civic Services		Ongoing		
503	Notice of Motion	24/03/2026	Disused and Derelict Phone Boxes	Cllr Christine Bower		SP&R						
504	Notice of Motion	24/03/2026	Gender Budgeting	Cllr Aine McCabe		SP&R						
505	Notice of Motion	24/03/2026	Proposed City Ambassadors Programme	Cllr Michael Long		SP&R						
506	Notice of Motion	24/03/2026	Costed Support for the Childcare Sector	Cllr Jenna Maghie		SP&R						



Subject:	Correspondence Received – Hardship Fund
Date:	24th April, 2026
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To consider the correspondence received in response to the Council's concerns in relation to Hardship Funding and School Meals for children as agreed by the Council at its meeting on 8th January, 2026.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the correspondence as set out in the report.
3.0	Main Report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	At its meeting in January, the Council agreed to the following request: <i>"The Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 19th December, 2025, under the heading "Hardship Programme 2025/26 - Response from the Department for Communities Minister" be amended to provide that the Council writes to:</i>
3.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>the Minister for Communities to express its objection to the confirmation that the Department for Communities hardship funding, provided in 2023/24, would not be available in future years, and to encourage the Minister to look at more equitable ways to tax the profits of energy companies to help fund the service going forward; and</i>
3.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>the Minister of Education to express its concern in relation to the Education Authority's decision to increase the price of school meals, and to state its support of the campaign by trade unions for the delivery of free school meals for all children."</i>
3.4	Accordingly, Democratic Services wrote to both the Minister for Communities and the Minister for Education and responses have been received (Appendix 1 and 2).
3.5	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None associated with this report.
3.6	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None associated with this report.
4.0	Appendices - Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 – Letter from Gordon Lyons MLA, Minister for Communities Appendix 2 – Letter from Department of Education

From: The Minister

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

Via email: MealeyC@belfastcity.gov.uk

Dear Mr Mealey

Hardship Programme Funding

Thank you for your letter dated 16 February 2026.

The Hardship funding provided by my Department in 2022/23 was non-recurrent and councils were advised that funding in future years would not be available.

As previously noted in my letter to your Chief Executive, Mr John Walsh, I will continue to remain committed to providing services that help people who have fallen on hard times through initiatives such as the Social Supermarket Scheme, Discretionary Support Scheme, Affordable Warmth Scheme as well as the Winter Fuel Payments to those who are eligible.

My Department does not have any responsibility for taxation, including energy company profits.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gordon Lyons', written in a cursive style.

Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities

FROM THE OFFICE OF THE MINISTER



Mr Craig Mealey
Committee Services Officer
Belfast City Council

Email: mealeyc@belfastcity.gov.uk

Rathgael House
43 Balloo Road
Rathgill
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

private.office@education-ni.gov.uk

27 February 2026

Your reference: CL160226

COR-0232-2026

Dear Mr Mealey

Thank you for your letter dated 16 February 2025 in relation to Council's concern in respect of the Education Authority's (EA) decision to increase the price of school meals from January 2026 and its support for the provision of free school meals (FSM) for all children. The Minister notes the Council's position on these matters has asked me to respond on his behalf.

When the EA made its announcement of the school meals price rise in November 2025, it noted that was facing a significant funding shortfall of around £300m in the current financial year. More recently, the Education Minister stated in the Assembly that the Finance Minister's draft budget for 2026-2029/30, currently out for consultation, would require the Department of Education to make savings of approximately £826 million in 2025/26, just over £1 billion in 2027/28 and £1.15 billion in 2028/29. Such a budget would require very severe and damaging cuts to the education system.

The Minister has stated that it is regrettable that an increase in the EA's school meal prices has been necessary. However, it is important to note that the EA had maintained the same school meal prices since 2017/18 despite significant rises in costs during that period. The EA's cost of producing a meal is more than 70% higher than it was in 2017/18. This approach was no longer sustainable in the current budgetary circumstances. Despite the EA's price rise in January, it remains well below its cost of producing a meal and the school meals service therefore continues to operate at a substantial loss.

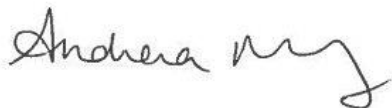
In relation to providing FSM for all children you may be aware that this was debated in the Assembly on 25 November 2025. The Minister recognised the importance of pupils having access to a healthy lunch but emphasised the importance of only seeking to take forward policy changes that are both affordable and deliverable. As the Minister stated in the debate, the current and anticipated future severe budgetary pressures on

the education sector means that no significant expansion of free school meals provision can be taken forward.

The more detailed response that the Minister provided as part of the Assembly debate can be found in [Hansard for 25 November 2025](#).

I hope you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrena Murray". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping 'M' at the end.

Andrena Murray
Private Secretary to the Minister of Education
Department of Education



Subject:	Gender Pay Gap Report
Date:	24 April 2026
Reporting Officer:	Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources
Contact Officer(s):	Cherie Cooper, Senior HR Advisor

Restricted Reports					
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.					
Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>					
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 					
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?					
After Committee Decision After Council Decision Sometime in the future Never	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px;"> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"></td></tr> <tr><td style="height: 20px;"></td></tr> </table>				

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To present the findings of the Gender Pay Gap report to Strategic Policy & Resources Committee.

2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>It is recommended that SP&R Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of this report
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>The Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 22nd February 2024 considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 4th March 2024.</p>
3.2	<p>Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting</p> <p>“That this Council will lead the way in Northern Ireland, adopting robust, transparent and accountable processes for gender pay gap recording and reporting.</p> <p>The TUC calculated that in 2023 in the UK, the day when the average woman stops working for free compared to the average man is the 23rd of February. The average woman in paid employment effectively works for free for nearly two months of the year compared to the average man in paid employment. Average figures disguise wider disparities, for instance the gap tends to widen if a woman is a mum, or works in education, finance or insurance.</p> <p>There is no legal obligation to record and report gender pay gap data in Northern Ireland. However, if we don’t transparently measure pay by gender, how can we understand and address structural inequalities in our organisation?</p> <p>Therefore, this Council will record and report:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its mean gender pay gap in hourly pay • Its median gender pay gap in hourly pay • The proportion of males and females in each pay quartile • A statistical overview of progression/promotion rates for male and female Staff <p>And will use guidance such as the UK Government Equalities Office - What Works guidance to address the gap.</p> <p>After the first gender pay gap report, the Council will move to include Disability and ethnicity pay reporting.”</p>

3.3	<p>Report findings:</p> <p>Median gender pay gap</p> <p>At 31 March 2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> women earned £1.27 for every £1 that men earned (comparing median hourly pay) women made up 51.04% of employees in the highest paid quarter, and 21.93% of employees in the lowest paid quarter.
3.4	<p>Mean gender pay gap</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> women’s mean (average) hourly pay was 16.3% higher than men’s. <p>The gender pay gap results for this reporting period shows a pay gap in favour of women, both at the median and mean levels. This outcome is closely linked to the structure of the workforce and the distribution of roles across the organisation. The full Gender Pay Gap Report is attached Appendix 1.</p>
3.5	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional financial implications required to implement these recommendations.</p>
3.6	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The data shows that women are well represented in senior and higher-earning roles within the organisation and under-represented in basic entry non-traditional roles. Despite effort to attract more females to apply to these roles it remains challenging. The Council continues employability outreach efforts and affirmative action messaging to promote applications from relevant genders where gender balance needs addressed.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Gender Pay Gap Report</p>

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Gender Pay Gap Report

Purpose of this report

The Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 22nd February 2024 considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 4th March 2024.

Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting

“That this Council will lead the way in Northern Ireland, adopting robust, transparent and accountable processes for gender pay gap recording and reporting.

The TUC calculated that in 2023 in the UK, the day when the average woman stops working for free compared to the average man is the 23rd of February. The average woman in paid employment effectively works for free for nearly two months of the year compared to the average man in paid employment. Average figures disguise wider disparities, for instance the gap tends to widen if a woman is a mum, or works in education, finance or insurance.

There is no legal obligation to record and report gender pay gap data in Northern Ireland. However, if we don't transparently measure pay by gender, how can we understand and address structural inequalities in our organisation?

Therefore, this Council will record and report:

- Its mean gender pay gap in hourly pay
- Its median gender pay gap in hourly pay
- The proportion of males and females in each pay quartile
- A statistical overview of progression/promotion rates for male and female Staff

And will use guidance such as the UK Government Equalities Office - What Works guidance to address the gap.

After the first gender pay gap report, the Council will move to include Disability and ethnicity pay reporting.”

Agreed approach

Appendix 1

In the absence of statutory guidelines applicable to Northern Ireland, a decision was taken to apply UK legislation as set out in the Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017.

The gender pay gap (GPG) is the difference between the average pay of men and women in an organisation. Any employer with 250 or more employees on a specific date of the year (the 'snapshot') must report their gender pay gap data to the UK Government Gender Pay Gap Service. The snapshot date is 31st March in any year for most public authority employers. Therefore, for the purposes of this report a data snapshot was taken as of 31st March 2025.

Gender Pay Gap (GPG) reporting is different from equal pay reporting. GPG measures the difference in average pay whilst equal pay is a legal requirement to ensure men and women are paid the same for equal work.

Gender Pay Gap Definitions

Median Gender Pay Gap Figure

The median gender pay gap figure is the difference between the hourly pay of the median man and the hourly pay of the median woman in an organisation. The median for each is the man or woman in the middle of a list of hourly pay, ordered from highest to lowest paid.

Median Hourly Pay Figure

The median hourly pay figure shows women's pay as a percentage of men's pay. Simply how much women earn relative to men.

Mean Gender Pay Gap Figure

The mean (average) gender pay gap figure uses hourly pay of all employees to calculate the difference between the mean hourly pay of men, and the mean hourly pay of women. It involves subtracting the average hourly rate for female employees from the average hourly rate for male employees and dividing by the average hourly rate for male employees and multiplying by one hundred.

Example

$$\text{Mean gender pay gap (\%)} = \frac{\text{Men's mean hourly pay} - \text{Women's mean hourly pay}}{\text{Men's mean hourly pay}} \times 100$$

Pay quartiles

Pay quartiles show the percentage of men and women employees in four equally sized groups based on their hourly pay.

Report and Analysis

An analysis was carried out to identify, if a gender pay gap exists within the Council . The information provided is based on the guidance as set out above.

Median gender pay gap

At 31 March 2025

- women earned £1.27 for every £1 that men earned (comparing median hourly pay)
- women made up 51.04% of employees in the highest paid quarter, and 21.93% of employees in the lowest paid quarter



Mean Gender Pay Gap

- women's mean (average) hourly pay was 16.3% higher than men's

Pay quarters

Women made up:

- 51.04% of employees in the upper hourly pay quarter (highest paid jobs)
- 43.87% of employees in the upper middle hourly pay quarter
- 25.39% of employees in the lower middle hourly pay quarter
- 21.93% of employees in the lower hourly pay quarter (lowest paid jobs)

Bar chart to show the percentage of men and women in four equally sized groups based on their hourly pay.

Appendix 1

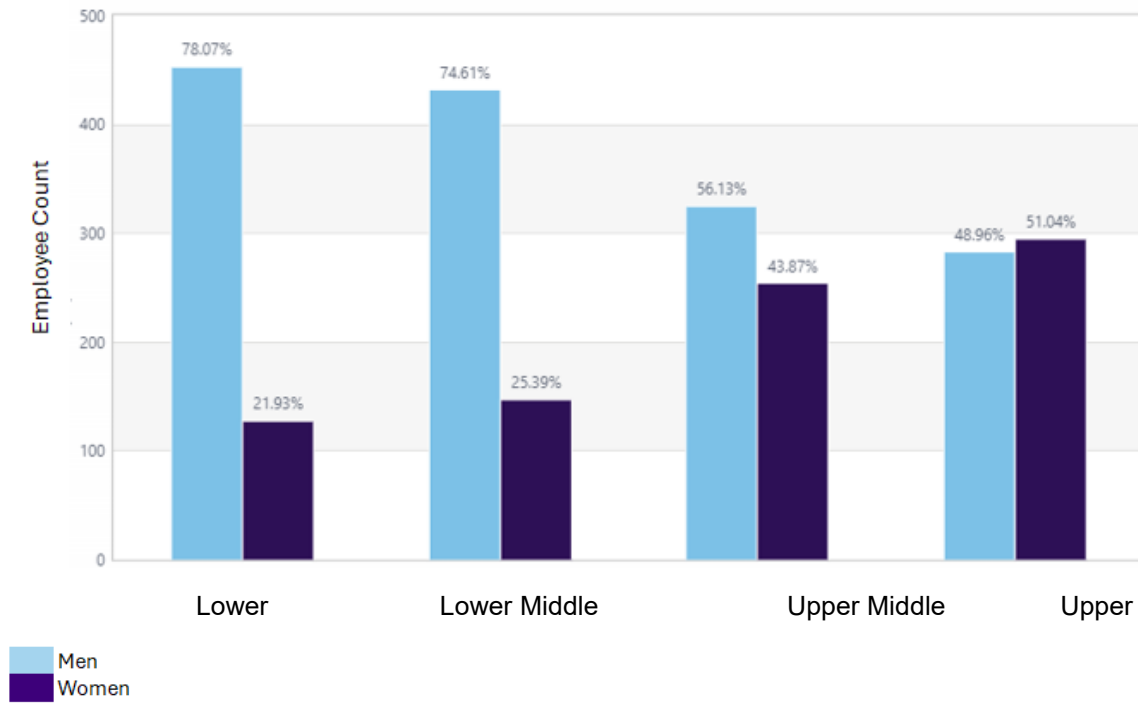


Table to show the show the percentage of men and women in four equally sized groups based on their hourly pay

Pay Quartiles	Women (%)	Men (%)	Total (%)
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Appendix 1

Upper hourly pay quarter (highest paid)	Percentage in this pay quarter	51.04	48.96	100
	Percentage of all employees	12.8	12.2	25
Upper Middle hourly pay quarter	Percentage in this pay quarter	43.87	56.13	100
	Percentage of all employees	10.9	14.1	25
Lower middle pay quarter	Percentage in this pay quarter	25.39	74.61	100
	Percentage of all employees	6.4	18.6	25
Lower hourly pay quarter (lowest paid)	Percentage in this pay quarter	21.93	78.07	100
	Percentage of all employees	5.5	19.5	25

Promotions

The Equality Commission for Northern Ireland defines a promotee as a person who fills all four of the following conditions:

- (i) the employee has moved from one job to another within the concern; and
- (ii) in doing so the employee fills a job which was restricted to persons already employed in the concern; and
- (iii) the employee remained in the new job or was notified in writing that he would so remain, for a continuous period of not less than 6 months; and
- (iv) as a direct result of the move the employee received an increase in pay (excluding expenses).

- In the rolling year, specifically between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 of all promotees in the Council 42.1% were women and 57.9% were male.
- In the rolling year, specifically between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 of all internal applicants 52.8% were women and 47.2% were male.

Conclusion

The gender pay gap results for this reporting period shows a pay gap in favour of women, both at the median and mean levels. This outcome is closely linked to the structure of the workforce and the distribution of roles across the organisation.

Appendix 1

Women are highly represented in senior and higher-paid positions, making up 51.04% of employees in the upper pay quartile and 43.87% in the upper-middle quartile. These roles typically carry higher levels of responsibility and correspondingly higher rates of pay. In contrast, women make up a much smaller proportion of employees in the lower-paid quartiles, representing 25.39% of the lower-middle quartile and 21.93% of the lowest-paid quartile.

This distribution has a direct impact on both the mean and median pay gaps. Because women are more likely to hold higher-paid roles and less likely to be in lower-paid positions, the typical (median) woman earns more than the typical man, and the average (mean) hourly pay for women is also higher. These patterns explain why women's median hourly pay is 27.4% higher than men's and why women's mean hourly pay is 16.3% higher.

Overall, the data suggests women are well represented in senior and higher-earning roles within the organisation and under-represented in basic entry non-traditional roles. Despite effort to attract more females to apply it remains challenging. The Council continues employability outreach efforts and affirmative action messaging to promote applications from relevant genders where gender balance needs addressed.

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To present the draft Bullying & Harassment Policy and draft Equal Opportunities Policy for approval.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the contents of this report; • And agree to adopt the Bullying and Harassment and Equal Opportunities Policies.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	One of the people goals in our People Strategy is to make Belfast City Council ‘a place for everyone’, and we have committed to developing a culture of respect and inclusivity by increasing awareness and understanding of diversity issues and implementing policies and procedures that aim to achieve this.
3.2	The Draft Bullying & Harassment Policy and Draft Equal Opportunities Policy demonstrate our commitment to an inclusive workplace where all employees feel welcome, valued and respected. These policies were developed and consulted on through the IR Framework with management and Trade Unions. The policies were agreed at JNCC on 26 March 2026.
	<u>Draft Bullying & Harassment Policy</u>
3.3	The Council is committed to providing a good and harmonious working environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation and victimisation and where all employees are treated with dignity and respect and their rights are protected. The purpose of this policy is to ensure a working environment in which bullying and harassment are understood to be unacceptable and where individuals have the confidence to complain about bullying and harassment, should it arise, in the knowledge that their concerns will be dealt with promptly, appropriately and fairly and that they will not be made to feel disadvantaged in any way for having raised or pursued a concern in good faith.
3.4	This policy covers behaviour in any work-related setting both inside and outside the workplace, by and against fellow employees or customers, suppliers or the public during or outside of working hours, for example business trips or work-related social events or by way of electronic communication including email, social media or by phone such as by text message or app.
3.5	This policy applies to all employees of Belfast City Council (the ‘Council’). Casual workers will be treated in accordance with the principles inherent in the policy.

	<u>Draft Equal Opportunities Policy</u>
3.6	The Council is committed to providing equal opportunities and promoting a good and harmonious working environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation and victimisation and where all employees are treated with dignity and respect and their rights are protected.
3.7	The purpose of this policy is to ensure equal opportunities for employees and job applicants and a working environment in which all employees and job applicants will be treated on the basis of merit in a fair, consistent and objective manner and where unlawful discrimination and victimisation is understood to be unacceptable and individuals have the confidence to complain about it, should it arise, in the knowledge that their concerns will be dealt with promptly, appropriately and fairly and that they will not be made to feel disadvantaged in any way for having raised or pursued a concern in good faith.
3.8	This policy covers behaviour in any work-related setting both inside and outside the workplace, against fellow employees, job applicants, customers, suppliers and the public and during or outside of working hours, for example business trips or work-related social events or by way of electronic communication including email social media or by phone such as text message or app.
3.9	This policy does not cover alleged incidents of unlawful discrimination or victimisation of Council employees by those who are not Council employees. Such matters will be dealt with in accordance with the Protection of Staff from Workplace Violence and Abuse from the Public – Roles and Responsibilities.
	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
3.10	None
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.11	The policies promote equality of opportunity for people within Section 75 groups by promoting an inclusive workplace and showing our commitment to the creation of a work environment that is free from discrimination, harassment and bullying, where everyone is treated with dignity and respect and no one is treated less favourably than any other person or group of persons on the grounds of their sex, age, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment status, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership status or any other characteristic.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix One - Draft Bullying & Harassment Policy Appendix Two - Draft Equal Opportunities Policy

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Bullying and Harassment Policy

Draft at March 2026

DRAFT



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DRAFT



1. Introduction and Scope

- 1.1 The Council is committed to providing a good and harmonious working environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation and victimisation and where all employees are treated with dignity and respect and their rights are protected.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to ensure a working environment in which bullying and harassment are understood to be unacceptable and where individuals have the confidence to complain about bullying and harassment, should it arise, in the knowledge that their complaints or concerns will be dealt with promptly, appropriately and fairly and that they will not be made to feel disadvantaged in any way for having raised or pursued a complaint or concern in good faith.
- 1.3 This policy applies to all employees of Belfast City Council (the 'Council') including casual workers. For the purpose of this policy, any reference to "an employee" or "employees" will include casual workers.
- 1.4 This policy covers behaviour in any work-related setting both inside and outside the workplace, by and against fellow employees or customers, suppliers or the public including job applicants, during or outside of working hours, for example business trips or work-related social events or by way of electronic communication including email, social media or by phone such as by text message or app.
- 1.5 This policy does not cover alleged incidents of bullying or harassment of Council employees by those who are not Council employees. Such matters will be dealt with in accordance with the Protection of Staff from Workplace Violence and Abuse from the Public - Roles and Responsibilities.
- 1.6 Northern Ireland equality legislation provides specific protection against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the following "protected" grounds:-
 - age;
 - disability;
 - gender reassignment;
 - marriage and civil partnership status;
 - pregnancy and maternity;
 - race, colour, ethnic or national origins, nationality;
 - religious or similar philosophical belief;
 - political opinion;
 - sex and sexual orientation

Further detail in relation to this can be found in the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy.

- 1.7 There is a need for employee performance to be managed in order to achieve the aims of the Council and this policy does not seek to diminish a manager's ability to do this.
- 1.8 This policy does not form part of an employee's terms and conditions of employment or terms of engagement. It may be amended from time to time, as necessary, in accordance with the Council's Industrial Relations Framework.

2. Definition

2.1 Harassment

Harassment is unlawful and is defined as occurring when a person engages in unwanted conduct which is connected to those characteristics of another person which are protected by equality legislation (see 1.6 above) and which has the purpose or effect of violating their dignity, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Harassment can take many forms, such as verbal, psychological, or physical, in person or via a virtual platform, or through other methods of contact, and may be directed at one person or a number of people.

It is not the intention of the person accused that decides whether harassment has taken place, it is instead whether the behaviour is unacceptable by reasonable standards and if the person on the receiving end considers it unwelcome.

Intentional harassment, not limited to protected characteristics, may also constitute a criminal offence pursuant to the Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

2.2 Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment occurs where an individual is subjected to unwanted conduct of a sexual nature and where that conduct has the purpose, or the effect, of violating their dignity, or of creating for them an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Sexual harassment may also constitute a criminal offence.

2.3 Bullying

Is similar to harassment but is not restricted to the equality grounds listed at 1.6 above.

It is not the intention of the person accused that decides whether bullying has taken place, it is instead whether the behaviour is unacceptable by reasonable standards and if the person on the receiving end considers it unwelcome.

2.4 Examples of behaviour which may amount to bullying and/or harassment under this Policy include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Physical conduct such as gestures, facial expressions, assaulting a person (sexually or otherwise)
- Misogynistic behaviour
- Verbal misconduct such as derogatory comments, jokes, mimicry, singing songs
- Visual or written material such as posters, graffiti, letters, emails, text messages or social media posts
- Isolating a person (e.g. "sending them to Coventry") or refusing to co-operate or help them at work or by excluding them from work-related social activities
- Forcing a person to take part in activities, or penalising them for rejecting such requests or pressure
- Intruding on a person's private space by pestering, stalking or spying on them whether in or outside of the workplace.

2.5 Malicious Complaints

Although it is extremely rare, an investigation may reveal that a complaint has been made maliciously. If this happens, the person who made the complaint may face disciplinary action. It must be stressed that this should in no way deter genuine complaints of bullying or harassment.

2.6 Anonymous Complaints

Complaints received anonymously are recognised as difficult to investigate however, management will conduct as thorough an investigation as possible with the information available, which will involve notifying the accused person and the person who it is alleged has been bullied or harassed.

3. Employees' Responsibilities

- 3.1 All employees must ensure that they have read, understood and comply with this policy.
- 3.2 All employees must treat each other with dignity and respect.
- 3.3 Employees must not commit any acts of bullying or harassment against any other person, such as their co-workers, job applicants or customers.
- 3.4 All employees should discourage bullying and harassment by making it clear that they find such behaviour unacceptable and by supporting co-workers who suffer such treatment. Any employee who is aware of any incidence of harassment or bullying should alert a manager or supervisor to it.
- 3.5 All employees should understand they can be held personally liable for acts of bullying and harassment in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, job applicants, customers, suppliers and the public and that some matters may also be criminal offences.

4. Guidance to staff who feel that they are being subjected to bullying or harassment

- 4.1 If an employee considers that they are experiencing bullying or harassment, a number of options are available to them:
 - Keep a record of events and incidents
 - Get advice from the line manager, Trade Union representative or a member of the departmental HR team
 - Consider following the informal procedure outlined at 4.3 in this policy
 - Consider following the formal procedure outlined at 4.4 in this policy
- 4.2 Depending on the nature of the complaint, the allegation of bullying or harassment will be investigated under the Council's Grievance Procedure and/or Disciplinary Procedure. Any decision in respect of how the allegation will be progressed will be made in consultation with the employee.

4.3 Informal approach to resolving complaints.

This stage is an optional approach and is appropriate where the employee simply wants bullying or harassment to stop. Employees can seek to resolve matters informally by approaching the person or people concerned directly, making it clear that they consider the behaviour in question to be offensive, unwelcome and should be stopped immediately. This may be enough to resolve the situation, particularly if the person concerned was unaware that their conduct was unwanted. If it is too difficult or the employee is reluctant to do this personally, employees may request a supervisor or manager approach the person or people concerned on their behalf. There may however be occasions where an informal resolution may not be appropriate given the seriousness of the complaint or concern raised.

4.4 Making a formal complaint

An employee may elect to raise any allegation of bullying or harassment formally. The council may also determine that, due to the seriousness of the complaint or if the behaviour persists following an informal approach, that the matter should be dealt with formally.

Should an employee wish to initiate a formal complaint they should do so by notifying their line manager in writing, specifying the grounds upon which the complaint is based. If the person the employee is complaining about is their line manager, they should submit their complaint to their line manager's manager or to Departmental HR. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the allegation of bullying or harassment will be investigated under the Council's Grievance Procedure and/or Disciplinary Procedure. Any decision in respect of how the allegation will be progressed will be made in consultation with the employee who has complained. Employees will have the right to be accompanied by a TU representative or colleague in accordance with the aforementioned Council Procedures.

5. The Council's Responsibilities

- 5.1 The Chief Executive and Senior Management have responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy. Senior management, together with all managerial and supervisory staff have responsibility for promoting equality and for ensuring this policy is implemented.
- 5.2 The policy will be communicated to all employees through induction training.
- 5.3 Complaints of bullying and harassment must be taken seriously, dealt with promptly and confidentially and in accordance with relevant procedures.

6. Confidentiality

- 6.1 Complaints of allegations of bullying or harassment and any related investigations and outcomes must be treated in strict confidence with only the necessary and relevant people involved as it is vital that employees who may wish to raise a complaint can be assured that the matter will be handled in the strictest confidence. Equally an employee who is accused of bullying or harassment is entitled to the same protection.

Appendix 1

Associated Policies

- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Local Government Employee & Councillor Working Relationship Protocol
- Computer Use Policy
- Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Gender Identity and Gender Expression - Guidance and information for all staff
- Protection of Staff from Workplace Violence and Abuse from the Public
- Social Media Policy

Associated Legislation

- The Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 (as amended)
- The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended)
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (as amended)
- The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (as amended)
- The Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006

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Equal Opportunities Policy

Draft at March 2026

Approved Date	
Review Date	
Replaces	Equal Opportunities Policy 2004
Policy Lead (Name, Position, Contact Details)	Christine Sheridan Director of Human Resources Ext 3242
Directorate	Human Resources
Version	Three

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1. Introduction and scope

- 1.1 The Council is committed to providing equal opportunities and promoting a good and harmonious working environment free from unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation and victimisation and where all employees are treated with dignity and respect, and their rights are protected.
- 1.2 The purpose of this policy is to ensure equal opportunities for employees and job applicants and a working environment in which all employees and job applicants will be treated on the basis of merit in a fair, consistent and objective manner and where unlawful discrimination and victimisation is understood to be unacceptable and individuals have the confidence to complain about it, should it arise, in the knowledge that their concerns will be dealt with promptly, appropriately and fairly and that they will not be made to feel disadvantaged in any way for having raised or pursued a concern in good faith.
- 1.3 This policy covers behaviour in any work-related setting both inside and outside the workplace, by and against fellow employees, casual workers, placement students or job applicants, during or outside of working hours, for example business trips or work-related social events or by way of electronic communication including email social media or by phone such as text message or app.
- 1.4 Northern Ireland Equality legislation provides specific protection against discrimination, harassment and victimisation on the protected grounds listed at 1.4.1 and 1.4.2, below. The Council is committed to complying with its obligations pursuant to applicable equality legislation and with section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which requires the Council to:
- 1.4.1 Have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:
- persons of different religious belief; political opinion; racial group; age; marital status or sexual orientation;
 - men and women generally;
 - persons with a disability and persons without;
 - persons with dependants and persons without.
- 1.4.2 Promote equality irrespective of:
- Gender (including sex, pregnancy, maternity leave, and gender reassignment);
 - Marital status and civil partnership status;
 - Religious belief and / or political opinion;
 - Race and / or Ethnic Origin; (throughout this document the word “race” is interpreted in line with the Race Relations (NI) Order 1997, as amended, to include colour, race, nationality or ethnic or national origins. Irish Travellers are recognised by the Order as being members of a racial group.)
 - Age;
 - Sexual Orientation.

1.4.3 In addition to the protected equality grounds set out at 1.5.1 and 1.5.2 above, the Council will comply with relevant legislation as it relates to:

- Trade union membership or non-membership
- Gender identity and gender expression
- Offending background*

*for the purposes of assessing an applicant's suitability for employment purposes, consideration will be given to all relevant circumstances including the background of the offences and other disclosures, the role, and such other matters that might be considered relevant to the position concerned, e.g. the responsibility of employers for child protection, for the care of funds, resources, the public and other employees.

1.5 This policy does not form part of and is not intended to vary the employment contract. It may be amended from time to time, as necessary, in accordance with the Council's Industrial Relations Framework.

1.6 This policy applies to all employees, casual workers, students on work placements and job applicants.

1.7 This policy should be read in conjunction with the other Council policies including the Code of Conduct; Bullying and Harassment Policy, Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure, LGSC Code of Procedure on Recruitment and Selection. See Appendix 1.

2. Definitions

2.1 **Direct Discrimination** occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another on the protected grounds set out at 1.4 above.

2.2 **Indirect Discrimination** occurs where a provision, criterion or practice is applied, which although equally applied to others, has the effect of disadvantaging a particular group of people, and cannot be justified.

2.3 **Victimisation** occurs when a person is treated less favourably than others because that person has, for instance, complained of alleged discrimination or has assisted someone to do so.

2.4 **Harassment** is unlawful and is defined as occurring when a person engages in unwanted conduct which is connected to the protected characteristics of another person and which has the purpose or effect of violating their dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Further information can be found in the Bullying and Harassment Policy.

3. Employees' Responsibilities

- 3.1 All employees must ensure that they have read, understood and comply with this policy.
- 3.2 All employees must treat each other with dignity and respect.
- 3.3 Employees must not commit any acts of unlawful discrimination or victimisation against any other person, such as their co-workers, job applicants or customers.
- 3.4 Any employee who is aware of any incident of unlawful discrimination or victimisation is encouraged to bring it to the attention of a manager or supervisor.
- 3.5 Allegations of unlawful discrimination or victimisation may be investigated in accordance with the Council's disciplinary and/ or grievance procedure and may result in a sanction up to and including dismissal.
- 3.6 All staff should understand they can be held personally liable for acts of unlawful discrimination or victimisation in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public and that some matters may also be criminal offences.

4. Guidance to staff who feel that they are being subjected to unlawful discrimination or victimisation

- 4.1 If an employee considers that they are experiencing unlawful discrimination or victimisation, a number of options are available to them:
 - Keep a record of events and incidents
 - Get advice from their line manager, Trade Union representative or a member of the departmental HR team
 - Consider following the informal procedure outlined at 4.3 in this policy
 - Consider following the formal procedure outlined at 4.4 in this policy.
- 4.2 Depending on the nature of the complaint, the allegation of unlawful discrimination or victimisation will be investigated under the Council's Grievance Procedure and/or Disciplinary Procedure. Any decision in respect of how the allegation will be progressed will be made in consultation with the employee who has complained.
- 4.3 Informal approach to resolving complaints.

This stage is appropriate where the employee simply wants the unlawful discrimination or victimisation to stop. Employees can seek to resolve matters informally by approaching the person or people concerned directly, making it clear that they consider the behaviour in question to be offensive, unwelcome and should be stopped immediately. This may be enough to resolve the situation, particularly if the person concerned was unaware that their conduct was unwanted. If it is too difficult or the employee is reluctant to do this personally, employees may request a supervisor or manager approach the person or people concerned on their behalf. Employees should understand that this informal approach is optional.

There may however be occasions where an informal resolution may not be appropriate given the seriousness of the complaint or concern raised.

4.4 Making a formal complaint.

An employee may elect to raise any allegation of discrimination or victimisation formally. The council may also determine that, due to the seriousness of the complaint or, if the behaviour persists following an informal approach, that the matter should be dealt with formally.

Should an employee wish to initiate a formal complaint they should do so by notifying their line manager in writing, specifying the grounds upon which the complaint is based. If the person the employee is complaining about is their line manager, they should submit their complaint to their line manager's manager or to Departmental HR. Depending on the nature of the complaint, the allegation of discrimination or victimisation will be investigated under the Council's Grievance Procedure and/or Disciplinary Procedure. Employees will have the right to be accompanied by a TU representative or colleague in accordance with the aforementioned Council Procedures.

- 4.5 If it becomes apparent that a complaint is deliberately false, frivolous, malicious or vexatious, and is not due to a misunderstanding or genuine mistake, it will be treated as a serious matter and may lead to disciplinary action.

5. The Council's Responsibilities

- 5.1 The Chief Executive and Senior Management have responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy and any relevant associated legislative duties. Senior management, together with all managerial and supervisory staff have responsibility for promoting equality and for ensuring this policy is implemented.
- 5.2 The policy will be communicated to all employees through induction training.
- 5.3 Complaints must be taken seriously, dealt with promptly and confidentially and in accordance with relevant procedures.

6. Confidentiality

- 6.1 Complaints and any related investigations and outcomes must be treated in strict confidence with only the necessary and relevant people involved as it is vital that employees who may wish to raise a complaint can be assured that the matter will be handled in the strictest confidence.

7. Commitment to Equality Monitoring and Proactive Measures

We will monitor our workforce composition and undertake periodic reviews as required by the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 as well as carry out regular voluntary employee monitoring exercises. We will review recruitment and promotion outcomes and take proactive steps to reduce inequalities.

APPENDIX 1

Associated Council Policies

- Code of Conduct for Employees
- Local Government Employee & Councillor Working Relationship Protocol
- Computer Use Policy
- Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure
- Bullying and Harassment Policy Gender Identity and Gender Expression - Guidance and information for all staff
- Protection of Staff from Workplace Violence and Abuse from the Public
- Social Media Policy

Associated Legislation

- The Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970 (as amended)
- The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 (as amended)
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 (as amended)
- The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 (as amended)
- The Northern Ireland Act 1998
- Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006



Subject:	Horizon Cities@Heart Project
Date:	24 April 2026
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
Contact Officer:	Kevin Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

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 progress of the Horizon Europe Cities@Heart project which successfully secured funding through the Horizon Europe 'Innovation Health Initiative' programme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee are asked to note the contents of this report including the intention to enter into a MOU with Belfast Healthy Cities in relation to their role in supporting the work required

	from a Belfast perspective, as set out at para 3.6 below, and the proportionate allocation of the €75,000 grant funding secured from Cities@Heart for administration.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background</u>
3.1	Members will recall that at its meeting on the 21 November 2025, the Committee was updated on the continued work of council officials with QUB and Belfast Healthy Cities colleagues to input to a joint funding submission to the Horizon Europe Innovative Health Initiative grant funding call. The intention was to develop and submit an overall €15million funding bid across seven cities (named Cities@Heart) to enable work to be undertaken with the WHO Healthy Cities Network and innovative technology with the aim of reducing recognised cardiovascular risk factors in order to more effectively manage risk and prevent future cardiovascular events.
3.2	The Cities@Heart proposal focuses on obesity, hypertension, dyslipidemia and diabetes as key drivers of cardiovascular disease and poor health. It seeks to improve awareness, prevention, detection and management of cardiovascular disease. The intention is to identify effective public health activities which offer potential to scale-up. The project will also seek to develop and deploy strategies to leverage engagement and citizen empowerment, raise awareness of cardiovascular disease, effective prevention, early detection and optimal management to improve outcomes.
3.3	The bid involves a range of representatives including public sector, academia and industry experts from across seven municipalities including Izmir (TR), Belfast (NI), Łódź (PL), Cork (IE), Udine (IT), Birmingham (EN) and Utrecht (NL). Each have diverse communities and a commitment to deploy multi-disciplinary health strategies and specific interventions.
3.4	Members will be aware of the significant health challenges, including cardiovascular disease, impacting on people across the city and will also be aware that addressing health inequalities has been identified as a key priority set out in the Belfast Agenda. It is intended that the Cities@Heart project would build connections and capacity across a broad array of stakeholders, including citizens, patients, municipalities, healthcare providers, policymakers and industry experts, and support the next generation of health technology to address critical barriers in card
3.5	<u>Current position</u> In January 2026, confirmation was given that the Cities@Heart consortium submission was successful and the €15million funding bid secured. As part of the submission the Council and Belfast Healthy Cities has secured €75,000 for 3 years to assist with the overall administration and input into the emerging programme. It is important to highlight however, that there will be future opportunities for Belfast to develop specific funding bids into the overall €15million programme to support specific Belfast based prototyping or demonstrator projects. Any such bids will be developed in liaison with the other city partners involved (e.g. Healthy Cities, QUB, BHSCT, Public Health Authority and importantly community stakeholders). Any proposed bids would be brought into SP&R Committee for consideration and input in advance of submission.

3.6	As previously highlighted to Members, the Council is working closely with Belfast Healthy Cities (BHC) in relation to their role in supporting the work required from a Belfast perspective including, but not limited to, ensuring all relevant city partners are engaged in the developmental work required, capturing and disseminating key information and data, ensuring effective communication and dissemination of key information (e.g. progress updates, key milestones, funding opportunities available to Belfast etc), as well as assisting with the administration, coordination and programme management of Belfast's participation in the overall programme. As Members will be aware the Council shall enter into a MOU with Belfast Healthy Cities to set out how both parties will work together on the project and how the initial €75,000 administration will be allocated.
	Financial & Resource Implications
3.7	€75,000 grant funding has been secured as part of the overall bid to support the administration of Belfast involvement in the project. Future funding opportunities may become available as part of the implementation of the Cities@Heart programme and any associated Belfast focused bids which may be considered would remain subject to future Committee consideration in advance of submission.
	Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment
3.8	There are no equality/ good relations or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None

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Belfast
City Council

Subject:	Requests for use of the City Hall
Date:	24 April 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Christopher Burns, Interim Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%; text-align: center;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 5%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>								
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>								

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	This paper, together with the attached appendix, contains the recommended approach in

	respect of each of the requests by external organisations for access to the City Hall function rooms received up to 3 April 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is asked to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background Information</u>
3.1	The current criteria for use of the function rooms used to review external applications is set out below.
3.2	Functions are invited for a range of purposes, including those: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • which support other events in the city; are of demonstrable economic benefit to Belfast, • celebrate or commemorate a notable achievement or significant anniversary by an organisation or body with close links to the city or Northern Ireland or those, • organised by recognised local community or voluntary sector groups for non-profit and non-political purposes.
3.3	Functions that may not be allowed; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • are those which have as their primary purpose the advancement of any political or religious cause or campaign or are otherwise potentially contentious or involve significant reputation risks for the council, • or private events or functions which have no compelling links to the council or the city specifically and which could instead use local private sector facilities.
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.4	Committee will recall that at its meeting on 23 rd January 2026 it considered an update on the City Hall Income Generation Project and subsequently agreed the revision of criteria for the use of Belfast City Hall and the provision of room hire fees and additional charges / recharges for event services. The events listed in the schedule of Appendix 1 have been reviewed against this new criteria and room hire prices applied on this basis.
3.5	A report on some of the issues raised at the Committee’s last meeting around additional charging will be presented in May. However due to the proposed date of this event, it was necessary to bring the request to this month’s Committee.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.6	None.

	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.7	None.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Schedule of function requests received up to 3 April 2026.

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APRIL 2026 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGES
Dunlewey Addiction Service	11 June 2026	<p>Celebration of Volunteers – showcase event to celebrate the achievements of service users and recognise the contribution of volunteers.</p> <p>Numbers expected; 50</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NO ROOM HIRE • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></p>

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Subject:	Request for use of City Hall grounds for International Yoga Day
Date:	24 April 2026
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Christopher Burns, Interim Functions and Exhibition Manager

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted? Yes No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in? Yes No

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	To consider request from Hindu Council of Ireland for the use of City Hall grounds on 21 June 2026.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	The Committee is requested to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authorise the use of City Hall grounds on 21 June 2026 for International Day of Yoga Celebrations. 2. Authorise the event to take place on the basis of submission of an event management plan and risk assessment and appointment of an event controller to ensure delivery of a safe public event.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Background Information</u>
3.1	Members will be aware that requests for the use of City Hall are normally dealt with under the authority delegated by the Committee to the Director of Legal and Civic Services using criteria agreed for this purpose. Occasionally however, it is necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the request set out below falls into this category.
	<u>The Proposed event – International Day of Yoga Celebrations</u>
3.2	The proposed event to mark International Day of Yoga would take place on the front East lawn only and areas such as the West Lawn, the Titanic Garden and Cenotaph will remain open to the public. Access to the building will not be affected. The event includes speeches followed by an outdoor yoga session being led to increase the awareness of healthy lifestyles through the benefits of yoga. Organisers welcome the participation of community members from all walks of life regardless of their faith or background. Organisers expect around 100 participants.
3.3	The event would be free to enter. The organiser would provide stewarding/marshalling staff & first aiders and would comply with the Council's standard conditions for hire etc.
3.4	Members will also be aware that for many years the same organisation have used one of the lawns to mark this date and the event has always been successfully delivered without issue.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.5	None. Costs will be met within existing budgets.

	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
3.6	There are no direct good relations, equality or rural needs implications arising from this report.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None

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Disability Working Group

Tuesday, 24th March, 2026

MEETING OF DISABILITY WORKING GROUP

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson); and
Councillors de Faoite and Smyth.

In attendance: Mr. R. Connelly, Policy, Research and Compliance Officer;
Mr. M. Johnston, Language Officer;
Ms. L. Wilson, Client Manager (Physical Programmes);
Ms. C. Donnelly, Committee Services Officer; and
Mr. A. McMullan, Member Services and Digital
Support Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Alderman Copeland and Councillor Abernethy.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th September, 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Disability Action Plan

Mr. Johnston provided the Working Group with an overview of the draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2029. He reminded the Members that the Action Plan would demonstrate the Council's compliance with Section 49A and Section 49B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) which placed a duty on designated public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons and to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life.

He reminded the Working Group that the development of the Action Plan was guided by four themes, namely: Leadership, Delivering for our Communities, Knowing our Communities, and Skilled and Diverse Workforce.

Members of the Working Group provided feedback to the officers present, expressing their reservations with the level of ambition demonstrated in the Action Plan, and that they were happy to work with officers to develop this further.

After discussion the Working Group noted the contents of the report and agreed to:

- Defer further consideration of the Action Plan to a future meeting of the Working group, to which all Members of the Council would be invited, in advance of the launch of the public consultation;
- Request that the minutes of the Disability Working Group be placed earlier on the agenda for future meetings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee; and
- Invite Black Moon and Gig Buddies Belfast to a future meeting of the Disability Working Group to provide an update on their work relating to accessibility at events. This invitation would also be extended to relevant officers in the City and Neighbourhood Services and the Property and Project Departments

Strategic Roadmap Update

The Working group considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to set out next steps in the strategic roadmap.

2.0 Recommendations

Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

Members were updated at a Disability Working Group meeting on 9 April 2025 of the preliminary work in the development of a strategic roadmap for delivering an accessible city for all by 2035. The Disability Working Group provided important insight into their ambitions for an accessible city.

An internal 'International Day for People with Disabilities' event was held on 3rd December 2026 at the City Hall which showcased lived experiences from people with disabilities and the work the Council is currently doing to make our services and facilities more accessible and inclusive. At the event, Councillor Brooks, the Chair of the Disability Working Group reaffirmed the Council's commitment for Belfast to be an accessible city by 2035.

During the last quarter of 2025/26, a draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2029 was developed. A separate report has been submitted to the Members.

A new action measure has been added to the draft Disability Action Plan, highlighting a strategic and

leadership commitment for the Council to commit to the planning, the design process and the implementation for Belfast to become an accessible city for people with disabilities residing, working or visiting Belfast. The performance indicators for this action measure are:

1. Consult with Members, Corporate Management Team, City Partners, disability stakeholders and people with disabilities to host a large event to gather on what an accessible city roadmap would look like.
2. Establish a working group to deliver the planning and design process of the roadmap.
3. A strategic roadmap paper is produced with a costed plan.
4. The implementation of the roadmap to begin.
5. Provide updated reports at quarterly Members Disability Working Group meetings
6. Provide updated reports at Corporate Management Team meetings

In the draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2029, we have other action measures in place which will support the development and implementation of the roadmap including:

1. Complete an Accessibility Audit
2. Carry out a demographic data scoping exercise on people with disabilities residing in Belfast

4.0 Next Steps

The work undertaken to date in the drafting of the new Disability Action Plan, listing strategic action measures will make a significant contribution to what a roadmap towards an accessible city may look like.

Reports will be brought to the Disability Working Group as work progresses with the proposed timeframes for the below steps including action measures listed in the Disability Action Plan.

1. Host a large disability event in 2026/27
2. The completion of an accessibility audit and a demographic data scoping exercise in 2026/27
3. A report to be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources committee to request the authorisation of holding an all-Members workshop to consider in detail the wide implications associated with delivering the

strategic roadmap to create an accessible city by 2035. The workshop would include the following:

- Presentations on the accessibility audit report and the demographic data scoping exercise, providing a summary of the disability landscape in Belfast through council services and partnerships
- Best practice examples of accessibility in other cities
- Identifying gaps and dependencies on the findings presented and agreeing on the vision for an accessible city.

4. A strategy roadmap paper with a costed plan in place by 2028/29.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

Financial and resource requirements to be provided for a large disability event, an accessibility audit, a demographic scoping exercise and a Members Disability Working Group workshop. There will be both financial and resource implications which will be determined when Members ambitions for an accessible city within the working themes of leadership, partnership and services are further developed.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Implications

The actions outlined in this report are designed to promote equality of opportunity for disabled people.

The Working Group noted the contents of the report.

NI Executive Disability Strategy Response

The Working group considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report

Members are asked to note a response to the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Disability Strategy 2025-2031

2.0 Main report

2.1 The Department for Communities has led the development of the Northern Ireland Executive draft Disability Strategy 2025-2035 on behalf of the Executive and with extensive input from other departments. This is the first 10-year strategy to be developed, and it has been developed in partnership with Deaf and disabled people and their representative organisations. The

Disability Strategy is one of a number of strategies that underpins the Executive's Programme for Government 2024-27.

2.2 The vision of this draft strategy is to make sure Deaf and disabled people are treated fairly and have the same rights as everyone else. The draft strategy has been structured around eight outcomes which will seek to ensure Deaf and disabled people can:

- 1. Effectively exercise their rights and fundamental freedoms and participate in society on an equal basis, free from discrimination.**
- 2. Access built environment, facilities and transport on an equal basis.**
- 3. Access public services, government information and communication on an equal basis.**
- 4. Access and participate in culture, leisure activities and sport on an equal basis.**
- 5. Live independently in the community with choice and control and with a sufficient and sustainable standard of living.**
- 6. Have access to quality health and social care on an equal basis without discrimination.**
- 7. Access and progress within quality employment in an inclusive labour market.**
- 8. Deaf and disabled people and young people can exercise their rights and reach their full educational, social and development potential.**

These strategic outcomes are supported by 58 strategic commitments.

2.3 The Department for Communities has lead responsibility for monitoring and implementation of this strategy and the department will be guided by a Regional Disability Forum. The Council has no input in the implementation of this strategy.

2.4 A public consultation opened for response on 9th December 2025. A response is required by Friday 20th March 2026.

2.5 Comments were received from EDN representatives across all departments, and a response has been drafted, which concludes that the Council strongly agrees with the vision, the eight outcomes and fifty-eight commitments listed in the draft Disability Strategy. The vision, guiding principles and commitments broadly align to Council's own draft Disability Strategy 2026-31.

2.6 The Executive's Disability Strategy Action Plan will detail the individual actions by government departments that will be set out to meet the strategic commitments. The intention is that the action plan will

cover a rolling three-year period which will evolve and develop as work progresses and circumstances change. Given Council's commitment to develop a strategic roadmap to an accessible city by 2035, this may provide scope for the Executive and government departments to work closely with Council to deliver the vision of Belfast as a fully inclusive and accessible city for people with disabilities.

2.7 Next Steps

It is proposed that the draft response will be presented to SP&R for consideration and approval. If approved by SP&R, the draft corporate response will be forwarded on a holding basis, subject to

3.0 Recommendations

The Members to:

1. Note the contents of this report
2. Note the draft response by the Council to the draft Disability Strategy consultation in the appendix.
3. Agree the next steps set out in paragraph 2.7.
4. Note that the corporate response will be considered by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th March and forwarded on a holding basis, subject to ratification by the Council, to meet the submission deadline of Friday, 20th March 2026.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

There will be no financial and resource implications on the Council.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Implications

There are no equality/good relations or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.

The Working Group noted the Council's response to the Northern Ireland Executive's draft Disability Strategy 2025-2026.

Mr. Connelly highlighted that, as the deadline for submissions had already passed, an officer response would be submitted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Chairperson noted that the Working Group was next scheduled to meet on 17th June, 2026. However, it was agreed that that meeting may be brought forward to accommodate further review of the Disability Action Plan.

The Working Group agreed to hold future meetings later in the day to enable more of its membership to attend.

Chairperson

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