

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 18th December, 2020

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Black (Chairperson);
Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston and Sandford;
Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Carson, Garrett,
Groogan, Heading, Long, Lyons, McAllister,
McDonough-Brown, McLaughlin, McReynolds,
Murphy, Pankhurst and Walsh.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Wylie, Chief Executive;
Mr. R. Cregan, Director of Finance and Resources;
Mr. J. Walsh, City Solicitor;
Mr. A. Reid, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational
Strategy;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services
Officer; and
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 20th November, omitting those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee, were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st December, subject to the omission of the minute under the heading "Commercial and Procurement Service - Pricing Policy", which had been referred back to the Committee for further consideration.

Declarations of Interest

Alderman Sandford and Councillors Garrett and Groogan declared an interest in relation to item 4c – Northern Ireland Local Government Association Consultation – Transformation and Driving Practical Change in Local Government, on the basis that they represented the Council on the Association, but were not required to leave the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Alderman Kingston declared an interest in respect of item 7a – Minutes of the Meeting of the Shared City Partnership, in that he worked on a part-time basis for the Forward South Partnership, which had been recommended for funding, and left the meeting whilst the item was being considered.

Councillors Beattie and McLaughlin declared an interest in relation to item 7b – Equality and Diversity – Five Year Review of the Equality Scheme 2015 – 20 and Annual Report 2019 – 20, on the basis that they represented the Council on the West Belfast Partnership, one of the Council's consultees on the revised Equality Scheme, but were not required to leave the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Restricted Items

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

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

Restricted Items

Medium Term Financial Plan and Efficiency Programme

The Director of Finance and Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2021/22 - 2023/24 and the rate setting process for 2021/22.

He reported that the business as usual cost pressures and growth proposals set out within the report would require additional Council funding of £4,565,990 for the next financial year. Based on the assumption that the Estimated Penny Product would remain the same as this year, a 1.98% increase in the District Rate would yield an additional £3,312,943 of rates income. Council officers had identified efficiency savings of £1,253,000 which could be delivered without impacting significantly upon the quality of services and the delivery of Council priorities.

He explained that the validity of this assumption was dependent upon work which was being carried out by the University of Ulster on the modelling projections to identify the potential impact of Covid-19 upon district rates income. It was dependent also on the Northern Ireland Executive guaranteeing rates income for 2021/22, based on the Estimated Penny Product for 2020/21. The Committee, at its meeting in January, would receive an update on these and on the Estimated Penny Product position and Party Briefings would take place over the course of that month.

The Director reported further that the 2021/22 District Rate process would, at best, secure the Council's current position and that, next year, it would not be possible to provide additional investment in priority areas such as inclusive growth and climate. Members had also indicated that they had further ambitions for capital investment. In addition, existing budgets for repairs and renewals/maintenance and the progression of the Waste Plan were under pressure. For those reasons, it would be necessary to review the Council's overall financial strategy at the beginning of the next financial year.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the information which had been provided; and
- ii. agreed, in principle, to a District Rate increase of 1.98%, subject to a further report on the outcome of the analysis by the University of Ulster of the Estimated Penny Product being submitted to the Committee meeting in January.

Finance Update

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 20th November, it had received an update on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic upon the Council's financial position and on a strategy to address the forecast deficit and the mitigation measures which had and would be taken as the situation evolved. Accordingly, the Director of Finance and Resources submitted a further report which provided details of the latest forecast update, the Council's reserves and cash flow and the additional support which had been provided by the Northern Ireland Executive in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Update on the Operational Recovery of Council Services

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the recovery of Council services and the response to and ongoing management of Covid-19 restrictions. It provided also details of compliance checks which were being conducted across Council sites and on specific services, such as community centres, Belfast Castle and Malone House, waste collection, including Christmas arrangements, recycling centres and fly-tipping enforcement.

The Director of City Services reminded the Committee that the Northern Ireland Executive had, on the previous evening, announced that a second lockdown would come into effect on 26th December. She confirmed that this would again have implications for the Council and that officers had sought clarification from the Executive on a number of issues and would be reviewing the updated legislation.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided and that it would receive regular updates as the lockdown progressed.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Director of Physical Programmes reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 17th December, 2019, it had agreed to establish a Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund of £8m, which would form an integral part of the Council's Recovery Framework document for the City. Work on the development of the new fund had, until now, been delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

She reviewed the key elements of the Fund and the proposed timeline for its implementation and, accordingly, requested the Committee to adopt the following recommendations:

i. Underpinning Principles

- a. only capital projects would be supported;
- b. there would be no ongoing revenue implications for the Council;
- c. projects must be located within the Belfast City Council area;
- d. projects must be within the vires of the Council;
- e. the project proposer must not be an individual, sole trader or profit-making organisation;
- f. the project must not be placed on a Council asset, unless the Council has leased the asset to a third party on a long-term basis; and
- g. applications would be invited by way of an open call process.

ii. Minimum Threshold for Investment

That, given the ambition of Members and in order to ensure that projects being delivered are substantial and transformational, the minimum threshold level for projects be set at £250k.

iii. Thematic Areas

That the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund should focus upon a number of key thematic areas and reflect the priorities agreed within the City Recovery Framework, that is, environmental/sustainable projects, neighbourhood tourism and social enterprise.

iv. Funding Allocation Model

That the Committee adopts either option 1 or option 2, as set out below:

Option 1 – Allocation based on Population

Area	Allocation £8m/10 (10 DEAs) x numbers of DEAs per Area Working Group
North - Castle and Oldpark DEAs	£1,600,000

South – Balmoral and Botanic DEAs	£1,600,000
East – Lisnasharragh, Titanic and Ormiston DEAs	£2,400,000
West * – Black Mountain, Collin and Court DEAs	£2,400,000

* (Proportional allocation to Shankill from the overall West area:
West - £1,894,800 Shankill - £505,200)

**Option 2 – Allocation based on % Population
and % Multiple Deprivation Measure**

	Population			Multiple Deprivation (Top 20% in NI)		Budget allocation (£8m)
	Population	%	£	%	£	-50/50 proportion
NORTH	63,807	19.1	£764,783	29.58	£1,183,200	£1,947,983
SOUTH	68,597	20.6	£822,195	17.94	£717,600	£1,539,795
EAST	98,249	29.4	£1,177,601	16.31	£652,400	£1,830,001
WEST *	103,073	30.9	£1,235,421	36.17	£1,446,800	£2,682,221
TOTAL	333,726		£4,000,000		£4,000,000	£8,000,000

* (Proportional allocation to Shankill from the overall West area:
West - £2,117,613 Shankill - £564,608)

After discussion, it was

Moved by Alderman Dorrian,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the Committee agrees to adopt recommendations i., ii., iii. and option 2 of recommendation iv., as set out above.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Lyons,
Seconded by Councillor Groogan,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the report to enable Members to consider it in greater detail.

On a vote, seven Members voted for the amendment and thirteen against and it was declared lost.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Councillor McAllister,

That the Committee agrees to adopt recommendations i., ii. and iii. above and agrees also:

- a. to adopt option 2 of the funding allocation model, subject to the level of funding for each area being calculated on the basis of 75% population and 25% multiple deprivation, rather than on the 50/50 basis which was being proposed; and
- b. that funding be allocated on the basis of North, South, East and West Belfast and that no budget be allocated specifically to the Shankill area.

On a vote, four Members voted for the amendment and thirteen against, with three 'no votes' and it was declared lost.

Original Proposal

The original proposal, standing in the name of Alderman Dorrian and seconded by Councillor Beattie, to adopt recommendations i., ii, and iii. and option 2 of recommendation iv., was thereupon put to the meeting.

On a vote, thirteen Members voted for the proposal and four against, with three 'no votes', and it was declared carried.

The Committee noted that a report would be submitted to its next monthly meeting providing further information on the decision-making, application and assessment processes, transparency/accountability and outcomes, the potential for participatory budgeting and providing evidence of the impact of neighbourhood tourism.

Recruitment of Inclusive Growth Posts and Establishment of Poverty Commission

The Committee approved the creation and recruitment of the following posts:

- i. Inclusive Growth/Poverty Champion (Chief Officer) – City and Organisational Strategy Department;

- ii. Inclusive Growth Policy and Programme Officer - City and Organisational Strategy Department;
- iii. Inclusive Growth Development Officer – Place and Economy Department;
- iv. Inclusive Growth Capacity Building and Engagement Officer – Place and Economy Department; and
- v. Inclusive Growth HR Post (Employability and Skills) - Corporate HR Section.

The Committee agreed to amend the title of the Chief Officer post to Inclusive Growth/Anti-Poverty Champion and noted that a report would be submitted to a future meeting providing details of the role and remit of the proposed Poverty Commission.

Update on DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme

The Committee:

- i. noted that £3.585m had been received to date through the Department for Communities' Covid-19 Programme, with work packages put in place to roll out Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 work streams, on the basis of previous Committee approvals;
- ii. noted that a further Letter of Offer for £454k for additional business grant support had on 8th December been received from the Department for Communities;
- iii. agreed, given that Department's requirement for in-year capital spend, to align the aforementioned funding to grant schemes already in operation and, in so doing:
 - a) extended the Covid-19 Business Support Grant by up to £154k to meet the demand already in the system; and
 - b) extended the Business Cluster and Community Grants scheme by up to £300k, with £150k to be made available to business clusters within the City centre and £150k to clusters on arterial routes, subject to completion of the eligibility assessment set out within the conditions of the scheme.
- i. noted that the Council would seek from the Department for Communities clarification on the potential for extending the length of time required for capital spend, in light of the latest Covid-19 restrictions which had been announced by the Northern Ireland Executive on the previous day; and
- ii. agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (a) (2) (c), that the foregoing decisions would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that an unreasonable delay could be prejudicial to the Council's or the public's interest.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Motion – World Environment Day

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting on 1st December, the following motion on World Environment Day had been proposed by Councillor Garrett and seconded by Councillor McLaughlin:

“We commend the progressive steps and actions which this Council, its partners and community have begun to take in challenging the existential threat facing the planet through what we recognise as the climate emergency.

In recognising this crisis, it is our duty as a Council to take proactive steps in educating, supporting and resourcing our communities to do whatever we can to face down the emergency.

The United Nations World Environment day takes place on 5th June 2021, with the theme this year focused on Biodiversity. The United Nations has also proclaimed 22nd May as International Day for Biological Diversity, to increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues.

To support biodiversity and positive actions in tackling the climate emergency, we call on the Council, working with partners to develop a similar initiative to that which other authorities have successfully developed, to freely distribute wildflower seed packs for city residents, schools and community and voluntary organisations.

In building on this initiative, the Council will also mark World Environment Day on June 5th by illuminating the City Hall green, animating our social media channels with awareness raising content and developing a programme of digital or physical events within health guidance to support our citizens in challenging climate change.”

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion had been referred without discussion to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

In response to a request from a Member, Councillor Garrett agreed to amend his motion to the effect that Translink would be invited to give consideration to planting wild flowers on top of its bus shelters. He agreed also, at the request of another Member, to amend his motion further to provide that, in line with the approach taken by the Council in supporting the World Wildlife Fund's Earth Hour initiative, all lighting in the City Hall would be turned off for the entire night on World Environment Day.

The Committee adopted the motion, as amended, and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting providing details on how it would be progressed.

**Motion - Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland –
Response from Minister of Agriculture Environment
and Rural Affairs**

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 2nd November, had passed the following motion on a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland, which had been proposed by Councillor O'Hara and seconded by Councillor Groogan:

"This Council recognises our failure to meet European Union legal limits on air pollution values despite significant progress made over recent years. The World Health Organisation and the UK Government recognise that air pollution is the largest environmental health risk we face today. The Council recognises that air pollution leads to between 28,000 and 36,000 early deaths each year in the UK. The Council also recognises that medical evidence is mounting around the dangerous link between Covid-19 and air pollution.

The Belfast Agenda aims for Belfast to be a city which is vibrant, attractive, connected and environmentally sustainable, where everyone experiences good health and wellbeing. In order to achieve that vision, we must address air pollution. This Council already supports adopting the more stringent World Health Organisation air pollution limits where appropriate and has moved ahead with the first detailed assessment of air pollution sources across this city since 2010 with the welcome support from the Department. Our ambition for Clean Air Zones in the city cannot be achieved without enabling legislation from the Assembly. This Council passed a motion supporting more stringent targets and ambition for Clean Air Zones in September 2019 and has included addressing air pollution in our corporate priorities. The Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has committed to bringing forward a 'Clean Air Strategy discussion document' which is a roll back from previous commitments in response to Assembly questions. Further delay will lead to continuing early deaths and ongoing breaches of the EU legal limits.

The Council also recognises that deprived communities are more likely to suffer from the impact of air pollution, and accordingly also recognises this issue as a class issue, impacted by socioeconomic inequalities.

The Council, therefore, agrees to write to the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs requesting the immediate development of a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland, rather than a discussion document which further delays progress on addressing harmful air pollution in the City."

The City Solicitor informed the Committee that a response had now been received from the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

The Minister had welcomed the Council's interest in the development of the first Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland and its commitment to protecting public health. He had pointed out that both he and his officials shared the Council's concerns around the environmental health risks created by air pollution and that they were working to

develop an effective strategy which would deliver meaningful improvements in air quality across Northern Ireland. They also supported the Council's detailed assessment of Nitrogen Oxide and particulate matter within Belfast and had offered £125,000 in this financial year to assist with that project.

He had then addressed the call within the Council motion for the immediate development of a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland, rather than a discussion document. He explained that air quality was a complex and cross-cutting issue and that it was influenced by policy across government through, for example, agriculture, domestic heating, industry and transport. The impacts of poor air quality could be felt across our society and had consequences for health, the environment and the economy. He had, therefore, adopted a two-stage approach for the development of the Strategy. In the first stage, a discussion document, which presented an-depth analysis of air quality in Northern Ireland and set out currently policy and evidence, had been launched for a twelve week consultation period on 23rd November. The document sought views on a wide range of matters relating to air quality and had included a series of questions aimed at promoting discussion around air quality issues. It was envisaged that issues relating to Clean Air Zones, World Health Organisation standards and socio-economic deprivation would be raised, which the Minister welcomed. However, the document did not set out policy options or articulate a particular policy position.

The public consultation would, he had pointed out, help to identify gaps in current policy, contribute to developing effective outcome-based measures aimed at reducing levels of air pollution across Northern Ireland and provide an opportunity for stakeholders to put forward suggestions.

The Minister had gone on to state that, in the second stage, all responses received as part of the consultation would be reviewed and a range of proposals would be formulated. Once he had decided upon a policy direction, officials would begin the process of drafting the first Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland. The Strategy would be more focused and shorter than the discussion document and would contain specific proposals around policy and other measures to improve air quality. It would, he added, be subject to additional public consultation and, due to the cross-cutting nature of the policy area, would require Executive approval.

The Minister had stressed that the adoption of a two stage approach for the development of the Clean Air Strategy, based upon an analysis of the evidence, assessment of current policy and stakeholder views, would ensure that it received stakeholder buy in. Rather than delaying the process, this ongoing, thorough best practice approach would result in an effective Clean Air Strategy which would deliver positive improvements in air quality for Northern Ireland. He had concluded by encouraging the Council to review the discussion document and by stating that he would welcome its response.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Motion - Access to Maternity Wards for Birthing Partners – Response from Minister of Health

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 2nd November, had passed the following motion on Access to Maternity Wards for Birthing Partners, which had been proposed by Councillor T. Kelly and seconded by Councillor Bunting:

“This Council notes with concern the current restrictions placed around access to maternity wards for birthing partners due to COVID-19.

Furthermore, it recognises the varying measures across the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area and the additional availability of 15 minute COVID-19 testing, agrees to write to the Health Minister asking that further consideration is given to a consistent approach thus allowing birthing partners to be afforded increased access to antenatal, maternity and neonatal services.”

The City Solicitor informed the Committee that a response had now been received from the Minister of Health.

The Minister had explained that the restriction of visitors to hospitals had been a key strategic component of managing the Covid-19 pandemic and that it had been introduced to protect patients, visitors and staff from the risk of infection.

As a result of the Executive's decision to invoke limited additional restrictions across Northern Ireland, in response to increasing Covid-19 transmissions, updated visiting guidance for maternity services had been published and had taken effect from 23rd September. The guidance had confirmed that the specific restrictions for each care setting were aligned to the pandemic alert levels/R value and were based on the best scientific advice available, with restrictions applying in line with the current regional alert level position. The Minister had pointed out that the alert level was currently at Level 4, which was defined as “a high or rising level of transmission – enforced social distancing”. This had meant that, for expectant mothers:

“Birth partners will be facilitated to accompany the pregnant women to dating scan, early pregnancy clinic, anomaly scan, in the event of pregnancy loss and bereavement, Foetal Medicine Department, when admitted to individual room for active labour (to be determined by midwife) and birth and, to visit in antenatal and postnatal wards for up to one hour once a week.”

The Minister had referred to the fact that the motion had stated that varying measures were being applied across the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area. He pointed out that these restrictions applied equally to all Health and Social Care Trust maternity settings across Northern Ireland. However, it should be noted that the decision to permit visitors into a facility on a day-to-day basis still rested with the midwife in charge and that it would be based on a risk assessment of that specific setting and was dependent upon the ability to ensure the safety of patients, staff and visitors.

The Minister had then addressed the request for clarification on whether an additional availability of fifteen minute Covid-19 testing would allow for further consideration to be given to the restrictions. He explained that one of the key priorities of the Department of Health was to ensure that there was sufficient capacity to test everyone in Northern Ireland who required a test, in line with current policy. This included anyone who had symptoms, as well as testing to support the risk assessment and management of clusters and outbreaks. Routine Covid-19 testing, including fifteen minute testing, had not been implemented for partners of expectant mothers and there were no plans to do so. However, this position would be kept under review, as new scientific evidence and new technologies became available.

The Minister had stressed that these restrictions were not just in place to protect patients and their visitors but were necessary due to the need to protect the safety of others, including other families, all health and social care staff and the wider population, through social distancing and the following of all infection control procedures.

He confirmed that the visiting guidance, which was structured to take account of variances in the ongoing rate of infection across Northern Ireland, would remain in place for the duration of the pandemic. The guidance had been written in such a way as to require different levels of restriction, based upon the regional position in terms of surge assessment and that, whilst his officials kept the guidance under review, no significant changes were anticipated currently.

The Minister had concluded by recognising that this has been a challenging time for all families and that the management of the crisis had meant that many difficult requests had been made and would continue to be made of the public around all aspects of health service provision. Normal maternity care provision, in particular, had had to be adapted to reduce the spread of infection and to protect expectant mothers, their families and those staff providing care.

After discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

**Commercial and Procurement Service –
Pricing Policy**

The Committee considered further the minute of the meeting of 20th November which had been referred back to the Committee by the Council at its meeting on 1st December. An extract of the minute is set out hereunder:

Extract from minutes of:-

MEETING OF STRATEGIC POLICY AND
RESOURCES COMMITTEE

20th November, 2020

Commercial and Procurement Service - Pricing Policy

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or summary of Main Issues

The 3-year Transformational Strategy prepared by the Commercial and Procurement Service (CPS) is due to be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in November.

1.2 This Strategy includes details of our first Commercial Plan, which formalises our future ambitions relating to commercialisation and income generation.

1.3 To support our specific ambition to generate additional income, the Commercial team within the CPS has developed:

- A corporate Pricing Policy; and
- A framework document, 'Setting Prices - Getting it Right', to guide Council officers when introducing pricing or increasing/decreasing prices.

1.4 The above policy and framework was presented to the SP&R Committee on 23rd October.

1.5 At that meeting, the Committee agreed to defer any decisions relating to the above in order to allow the policy and framework to be considered alongside the Commercial Plan.

1.6 The purpose of this report is to:

- provide members with an update on the pricing policy and framework;
- provide further details on the rationale for selecting the four priority projects in order to support the decision-making process; and
- obtain approval on related actions (detailed below).

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

1. approve the Commercial Plan and Pricing Policy, as detailed in the appendices; and
2. agree that the following priority areas be researched in line with the above policy and framework (all findings and proposals to come back to the SP and R Committee).
 - a. Malone House - explore possible alternative commercial uses for the building to maximise asset and reduce annual operating costs;
 - b. Events - develop a Council-wide events policy & procedures to include establishing transparent, fair and consistent pricing options;
 - c. Bulky Waste - explore potential pricing options for the bulky waste service to reduce annual operating costs; and
 - d. Pest Control - explore potential pricing options for the pest control service to reduce annual operating costs.

3.0 Main Report

Introduction

3.1 The Commercial Plan formalises our future ambitions relating to commercialisation and income generation.

3.2 Fundamentally, this is about integrating commercial activities and a commercial mind set into the core of how we operate as an organisation.

3.3 The overarching aim of our Commercial Plan is to generate a greater financial return that contributes to the Council's investment plans and its efficiency programme, and assists to safeguard services that are delivered in our local communities.

3.4 To support our specific ambition to generate additional income, the Commercial team, in partnership with relevant individuals/departments, has commenced a strategic programme of work that includes (amongst other things):

- Preparing a Corporate Pricing Policy and associated procedures;**
- Developing a Council-wide Advertising and Sponsorship Strategy;**
- Supporting the development of an agreed Asset Management Strategy;**
- Identifying commercial best practice across other local authorities and organisations; and**
- Creating a framework to identify, develop and deliver existing and new (and innovative) income generating opportunities across the Council's commercial operations.**

3.5 Alongside this, work has also commenced to enhance our commercial culture and competency, including the roll-out of a competency training programme and commercial awareness raising sessions.

Corporate Pricing Policy

3.6 The charges and fees levied for our services represent an important source of income each year, which is used to support the delivery of our corporate objectives. Whilst charging for services is, therefore, a recognised feature within the Council, some demand-led services are provided at little or no direct charge to the user. The provision of

services at low, or no, charge (or fee) means that all ratepayers are subsidising the cost of delivery.

3.7 The recent financial uncertainty created by the COVID-19 pandemic and 'Brexit' have now made it essential that the Council makes best use of pricing and charging opportunities and to recognise the importance of using pricing as a means of recovering the costs of delivering our services.

3.8 To support this, the Commercial team has developed:

- A corporate Pricing Policy; and
- A framework document, 'Setting Prices - Getting it Right', to guide Council officers when introducing pricing or increasing/decreasing prices.

3.9 The key aims of the policy include:

- Promoting consistency and fairness in the treatment of service users; and
- Striking a balance addressing the financial needs of the Council through optimisation of income and the social needs of customers.

3.10 Any decision to vary or introduce charges must be aligned to strategic priorities and financial objectives. Council officers must adhere to the following principles set out in the policy:

- Efficiency – charges are simple and not cumbersome to administer.
- Transparency – the nature and use of the service are understood by users
- Effectiveness – the charges provide value for money.
- Clarity – users are clear about when and how charges apply.
- Equity – the charges are fairly applied across a range of users.
- Ethics – users with special needs are charged appropriate fees.

Priority Projects

3.11 We currently provide many discretionary services (i.e. those that are not required to be provided by law but are provided

at our discretion) that all ratepayers are subsidising the cost of delivery. The table below provides some examples¹:

Service	Expenditure	Income	Net Expenditure i.e. cost to the Council
Events ²	£1,464,026	£89,700	£1,374,326
Bulky Waste	£993,851	£19,534	£974,317
Zoo (including Shop)	£2,842,409	£1,902,035	£940,374
Pest Control	£289,702	£5,137	£284,565
Bike Scheme	£478,594	£245,254	£233,340
Belfast Castle	£450,397	£256,000	£194,397
Malone House	£332,626	£186,000	£146,626
Mary Peters Track	£137,040	£0	£137,040
Consumer Advice	£106,725	£0	£106,725
Home Safety	£178,976	£82,610	£96,366
Catering Services	£463,917	£399,280	£64,637
City Hall Tours	£53,400	£18,850	£34,550

3.12 If approved, it will not be possible, in the current circumstances, to review all of the Council's services and activities (such as those set out above) at this point in the context of the policy.

3.13 That being the case, it is recommended that the following four projects be examined in the first instance:

- Malone House - explore possible alternative commercial uses for the building to maximise asset and reduce annual operating costs;
- Bulky Waste - explore potential pricing options for bulky waste service to reduce annual operating costs;
- Pest Control - explore potential pricing options for pest control service to reduce annual operating costs; and
- Events - develop a Council-wide events policy and procedures to include establishing transparent, fair and consistent pricing options.

3.14 Further details on each have been circulated.

¹ Based on budget figures for the 2019/20 financial year.

² Includes Events unit, Major Events, Sports Events and Grants.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.15 This programme of work will be managed as part of the CPS's annual revenue budget.

**Equality or Good Relations implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

- 3.16 No implications at this stage.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Long,
Seconded by Alderman Dorrian and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations set out within the report and agrees also that Party briefings be held, once more detailed proposals are worked up, to allow for them to be considered in advance of a future meeting.”

After discussion, the Committee agreed that Party Briefings be held to consider the matter and that an update on the work of the Council's Pest Control Service, including any work which it undertook on behalf of other agencies, should be included in those briefings.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Update on City Region Growth Deal

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 This report is to provide an update to Committee on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD), including an update on the development of Outline Business Cases (OBCs) and progress on agreeing a phased deal with the NI and UK Governments.
- 1.2 The Committee receives regular reports on projects within the BRCD which are led by Belfast City Council and considered a report last month on the OBC for the Belfast Destination Hub. The Committee will also be separately considering a report on the Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership, which will play a key role in supporting the delivery of the Belfast Innovation/Smart district, the delivery of which is dependent on BRCD funding for global centres of innovation excellence and for next generation digital infrastructure to support testbeds within the district.
- 1.3 A summary is also attached to this report which provides a brief overview of key regional innovation and digital projects

funded through the BRCD that will transform the region's economy, including Belfast's economy, tackling fundamental barriers to inclusive growth, driving increased productivity and helping to drive economic recovery.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked:

- note the programme overview and the progress that has been made in Outline Business Case (OBC) development for all projects and on the development of an agreed approach with the UK and NI Governments to the delivery of a phased deal; and
- note the summary attached which includes an overview of the regional innovation and digital projects that will transform the region's economy including Belfast.

3.0 Main Report

Programme Overview

- 3.1 In November, the Committee was advised that OBCs were progressing towards completion with work continuing on resolving key issues and challenges particularly in respect of budget profiling and scalability. Detailed engagement has also been taking place with Finance Directors to ensure that financial information within the OBCs has been subject to appropriate levels of assurance and that financial plans are in place in relation to capital investments and revenue financing, so that the transformative investments included within the BRCD can proceed with confidence.
- 3.2 A full list of projects and the current position in relation to OBC completion have been circulated. The table confirms that OBCs will have been completed for all projects by the end of December, though as outlined below it is recognised that further revision of OBCs may still be required for projects that are an earlier stage of development. Once these are considered by the relevant BRCD Advisory Board they will be submitted to the BRCD Executive Board. In addition to ensuring that projects are delivering on the priority outcomes for the BRCD, a key role of the Advisory Boards and the Executive Board will be ensuring that the projects which are being recommended for inclusion in the Deal are capable of being delivered within the agreed budget envelopes for each pillar. Significant progress has been made in this regard with, for example the projects and programmes within the innovation and digital pillar now aligned with the £350 million government funding envelope. Work is continuing to ensure alignment of the tourism and

regeneration and infrastructures projects within the available funding envelope.

Proposed Timescale/Approach

- 3.3 As previously reported in order to have a deal in place so that funding can begin to flow from 1st April 2021. Discussions are ongoing between Partners and the NI and UK Governments in relation to agreeing a 'phased' deal to enable a 'Deal Document' to be signed off by the end of the financial year. As with all City Deals, given the long-term nature of the programme, projects are at various stages of development. However, agreeing a deal document is essential to enable delivery and for funding to flow. With sufficiently developed OBCs now created for all projects, the partners are confident that the necessary detail is available to agree with confidence the financial and implementation plans that underpin the deal.
- 3.4 The approach proposed will see the most advanced projects which are recommended for inclusion in the deal submitted for formal consideration through the Executive Department's casework committee process in parallel with the work to agree the deal document. For those projects which are recommended for inclusion in the deal, but which are less advanced Partners will seek agreement as part of the Deal on release of an initial funding stream to allow the further development of these projects and business cases so that their development can also progress at pace. When sufficiently developed, these projects will then be submitted formally to casework, enabling approval of expenditure on ongoing basis.
- 3.5 This approach recognises the varying states of readiness of projects across the programme, allowing the Deal Documentation to be completed & agreed and phased delivery to commence. Once the details of the 'phased' deal are agreed with government partners a further update report will be brought back to Members.

Investment Priorities

- 3.6 Since signing Heads of Terms more than 18 months ago and against the challenging backdrop of the COVID pandemic, BRCD partners have continued to develop OBCs for more than 20 ambitious programmes and projects, aimed at driving economic recovery and boosting the competitiveness of the city region. Outlined below is an update on each of the pillars of investment and the timescale for OBC completion for each project/programme has been circulated.
- 3.7 The attached summary provides an update on regional projects that will harness the potential of our most resilient sectors - life and health sciences, digital and creative

industries, advanced manufacturing- and drive digital innovation and skills development which are so critical now to creating inclusive growth for both businesses and communities.

Tourism and Regeneration

- 3.8 With the exception of one project within Antrim and Newtownabbey, all tourism and regeneration OBCs are developed and will be reviewed by the Tourism and Regeneration Advisory Board in December. Members are reminded that the OBC for the Belfast Destination Hub was agreed at the November SP and R Committee.
- 3.9 The tourism industry has taken a serious hit due to Covid-19 and it is vital that the industry is not only able to recover but thrive in a post Covid-19 environment. BRCD is by its nature a long-term capital programme and the timing of investment in tourism aligns strongly with the need to provide globally visible tourism products to aid travel recovery. The regeneration elements of projects will also enable town and city centres to respond due to the intensified challenges following the pandemic.

Innovation

- 3.10 As previously reported, the innovation projects within the BRCD have been significantly rescaled and are now broadly in line with the funding available to support this Pillar. OBCs for the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC), Global Innovation Institute (GII) and Institute for Research Excellence in Advanced Clinical Healthcare (i-REACH) have been submitted to the Executive Board and it is anticipated that a revised OBC for the Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology (CDHT) will be submitted in January. A first draft OBC for the Screen Media & Innovation Lab (SMIL) has now been considered by the Innovation Pillar Board and submitted to the Executive Board, before being considered by the UK and NI Governments.

Digital

- 3.11 Detailed development of the draft Digital Innovation Programme Business Case (PBC) is nearing completion. The business case will prioritise a flexible 'funds-based' approach with the increased use of Challenge Funds alongside an Infrastructure Enabling fund which will support connectivity infrastructure, as well as physical enabling infrastructure needed for the development of the Belfast Smart District and Regional Testbeds. It will also ensure that innovation support reaches across priority sectors and the region, through investment in Regional Innovation Hubs. Approval of programme business case by the NI and UK

Governments would enable funding to be released for the detailed development of project business cases for challenge funds and an infrastructure enabling fund that would support both the Belfast Smart district and Regional Testbeds.

Infrastructure

- 3.12** Interim OBCs for the Newry Southern Relief Road and Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2 have now been reviewed by the Department for Infrastructure Economists. Interim OBCs have been produced for these projects due to the very early stage of their development, in advance of the necessary consultations on route development. Given the early stage of development of Newry Southern Relief Road and Belfast Rapid Transit Phase 2 there are high levels of optimism bias included in their financial cases and this has contributed to the affordability challenges across the programme. An OBC has been completed for the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge.

Employability and Skills

- 3.13** The Employability & Skills Programme continues to be refined with proposals developed on the following themes, Skills for Growth; Skills for Inclusion and Skills for the Digital Future. Aligning the range of skills and employability programmes of partners, including Further Education Colleges, Universities and Local Councils, with the capital investment projects and needs of industry, is a vital component of delivering the ambitions and benefits of the overall city deal investment. The partners have, therefore, committed to aligning £30M of existing resources to maximise the impact of the City Deal programme and are working closely with government partners to ensure that plans are strongly aligned with the new skills strategy and NI wide employability programmes. It is anticipated that a final E&S Proposition will be submitted for approval to the Executive Board in February.

Inclusive Growth

- 3.14** Inclusive growth is an underlying commitment of the BRCD spanning across all investments and associated work streams. Collaborating partners have sought to integrate inclusive growth across all investment projects and through the employability and skills programme proactive approaches will be undertaken to address skills imbalances and create socially inclusive pathways to support individuals into and progress further in employment. Partners have also committed to delivering collaborative approaches aimed at supporting overall inclusive growth ambitions by embedding inclusive growth commitments through their procurement practices, effectively creating additional benefit

through their supply chain. As employers, partners are also working collaboratively to explore opportunities for joint delivery of social value through, for example, workforce development, upskilling lower skilled employees, pre-employment programmes for disadvantaged client groups and creation of public sector apprenticeship opportunities.

Next Steps

- 3.15 Agreeing the detail of the ‘phased’ deal is now of critical importance and would deliver much needed momentum, confidence and impact whilst recognising the long-term nature of the programme of investment and the further work required. The proposed approach was discussed at the recent meeting of the Council Panel and engagement is taking place with NI and UK Governments to seek to confirm agreement on the process. All the projects included in the Deal Document will have agreed budgets and indicative financial profiles and implementation timescales.

Financial and Resource Implications

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

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

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

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

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Belfast Innovation District

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To outline plans for the development of a world-class ‘Innovation District’ that would seek to attract talent and investment and support the wider aims of the new Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership and to seek Committee approval for funding to support a twelve-month development programme for the District.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to agree that the Council contributes £50,000 to the development phase of the creation of an Innovation District (as part of a total BDIP co-investment of £325,000).**

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 The new ‘Belfast Digital Innovation Partnership’ (BDIP), which includes the Council, Queen’s University, Ulster University, Belfast Harbour, Invest NI, and Catalyst, is seeking to exploit the power of digital innovation to enhance wider regional productivity and generate more and better jobs for all.**

- 3.2 It aims to foster the conditions in which our most exciting SME clusters can grow; our workforce are re-skilled for new jobs; and the world-class research of our universities can translate rapidly into innovative new businesses, products and services.**

- 3.3 In doing so, BDIP partners are also committed to nurturing an urban environment through the development of a Smart District in which industry, academia and the public sector can collaborate on urban challenges such as climate change, technological disruption and the health of our communities. The Covid-19 crisis has not only amplified these challenges and opportunities but has greatly accelerated the time scales against which this environment should be developed.**

- 3.4 The Smart District covers three initial zones that offer rich environments for our innovation community to collaborate on research, for businesses to form and scale; for investments to flourish and next generation urban services to emerge. (See attached Summary Booklet presented to Members in June 2020) The first project underway in the programme is the development of the an Innovation District – a 400 acre area that will extend from the new Ulster campus in the city centre, along Queen’s Island, to include the Northern Ireland Science Park and Queen’s University’s ECIT campus. This will be a world-class, inclusive, mixed-use urban environment for research, innovation, entrepreneurialism and investment.**

- 3.5 The location is already primed as a digital innovation multiplier. There is already a substantial knowledge economy activity with Catalyst supporting a community of over 200 innovative SMEs, and a number of international companies in areas such as fintech and cybersecurity.**

- 3.6 There are also plans for major physical investment both public and private sector investors that can contribute to the**

ambition. These include proposals for four university centres of excellence which will be partially funded by the Belfast Region City Deal; plans for an advanced wireless network; the city investment in the 'Sixth' building; and the opportunities represented by the new Ulster University campus.

3.7 Lessons have been drawn from elsewhere and show that a successful district requires:

- City wide collaboration with strong, influential leadership of the type that BDIP is offering;
- An acknowledgement of the power and importance of 'place' and the need to place inclusion and community and its heart;
- An internationally recognisable brand that reinforces and aligns with the city's own vision;
- A strong business model with adequate resources to mobilise effectively; and
- Proximity of businesses and academia to be able to collaborate and cluster

3.8 Drawing on the success of similar innovation districts in other cities (including Dublin, Liverpool and Eindhoven) the Belfast district would offer:

- An internationally high quality location acting as a beacon for talent and inward investment;
- The critical 'density' to sustain a world-class ecosystem for start-ups, SMEs, academia and multinationals;
- A place-based multiplier for sustainable, high productivity jobs for the region and for neighbouring communities; and
- A driver to enhance the existing quality of life in the area - a 'go to' location for residents, workers and visitors.

3.9 Following a series of partner workshops, BDIP partners now wish to commence with the delivery of a twelve-month programme to fully develop the Innovation District proposition.

This would include three major strands of work:

- Creating the commercial proposition and brand strategy
- Building an approach to citizen inclusion and skills
- A programme for cluster growth (likely to include fintech, Greentech and Healthtech)

3.10 Partners have costed the twelve-month development programme at £325,000 which would fund the necessary resources, staffing, and technical support. Members are asked to agree that Belfast City Council will contribute £50,000 to this programme budget.

Financial and Resource Implications

3.11 £50,000 will be financed from the existing Smart Cities budget.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

3.12 None.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations.

Northern Ireland Local Government Association Consultation – Transformation and Driving Practical Change in Local Government

The Committee approved the following corporate response to the Northern Ireland Local Government Association’s consultation on ‘Transformation and Driving Practical Change in Local Government’:

COUNCIL RESPONSE

**NORTHERN IRELAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION
TRANSFORMATION AND DRIVING PRACTICAL CHANGE IN LOCAL
GOVERNMENT**

Belfast City Council (the Council) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NILGA consultation on Transformation and Driving Practical Change in Local Government.

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Council believe that this is an important and timely piece of work given that five years has passed since the 2015 local government reform programme. We have also experienced the impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic, and the unprecedented impacts that this has placed on society as a whole, and on local government and the future sustainability of local councils.

This engagement exercise presents a real opportunity for local government, as a cohesive sector, to coalesce and create a common agenda which will help inform, influence and establish a strong collegiate position.

Local government reforms that came into effect in April 2015 significantly shifted the role of local government towards one of active place-shaping. These arrangements provided councils with greater responsibility for important powers such as spatial and land-use planning, off-street car parks, local economic development and tourism. However, a residual sense exists across local government that the powers which transferred to councils did not go far enough. It is our position that this could be addressed by implementation of a second tranche of reform.

Further devolution of core place-shaping functions will allow for a more responsive approach to communities' needs and aspirations. Councils have a greater understanding of, and engagement with, their local communities enabling the tailoring of services, improved decision-making and the delivery of local outcomes.

However, given the previous experience of the 2015 reform programme, we must emphasise the importance that if there is to be any further devolution of powers to local government this must be supported by greater resource, clarity of purpose and occur in a planned and phased manner to ensure continuity and certainty for all stakeholders.

In summary the main issues relating to the future role of local government that the Council wish to highlight include:

- Central government commitment to work in partnership with local councils, by providing the necessary funding and policy backdrop, from which councils can play a leading role in the sustainable recovery of their local areas;
- enhanced devolution to local government including regeneration, planning, skills investment and planning, and local transport planning;
- greater powers regarding local taxation measures and enhanced local investment powers, to ensure that that councils have the fiscal levers to tackle issues at community and city level; and
- the introduction of legislation/measures that strengthen the relationship between central and local government, including a duty to collaborate to provide for responsive and integrated service delivery at regional, city and community level.

These issues are discussed in detail in this our submission and our responses to the questions posed.

- 1. Covid 19 to date – please highlight the biggest sustainability, strategic and operational issues *facing Council going into 2021*, as triggered primarily by Covid 19. Additionally, how might some or all of these be alleviated by further legislation, policy and/or resource changes in wider government? Council can send additional materials to augment the synopsis presented here.**

The outbreak of COVID-19 has obviously caused massive economic disruption for Belfast, along with the rest of the NI, UK and the world at

large. The council have welcomed the range of support measures and interventions that the NI Assembly have put in place to date to help mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 and to minimise economic and financial disruption.

While we continue to provide critical support to local communities, businesses and the local economy through this Pandemic this ongoing situation has highlighted significant and stark sustainability, strategic and operational issues for the council in moving forward.

The issues set out below relating to finance, place and sustainability provide an overview of the concerns which the council face going into 2021 and beyond. It is the view of this council that without further funding, based on continued Barnett consequentials and remodelling how local government is financed in future years the future outlook for local communities, workforce and service delivery is bleak.

Finance (loss of rates and income)

Typically, 75% of a council's income comes from rates. The other 25% of income (grants, rents and fees & charges) has been significantly lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has impacted on ability to deliver services.

All councils are experiencing significant impacts on their rates and income base and they are not in a position to compensate for this loss without cutting back on essential services. This has been recognised by the Department for Communities with a series of funding packages brought forward to supplement some of the losses incurred. These packages must continue, and a constructive dialogue and shared diligence between councils and central government must continue. The public health restrictions which have been required to manage Covid-19 has resulted in business closures in key sectors as well as key visitor and recreational facilities of councils and has had real economic impacts on this council's finances and ability to sustain important services.

In addition to loss of income, the council has also experienced additional costs as a result of Covid-19 and ensuring appropriate social distancing and safety measures are in place. Councils have also played a critical role in providing exceptional support for local communities and businesses and have had to dedicate significant resource to support vulnerable individuals and families, administer government grants and provide forums for engagement with local businesses, across the city.

The council is particularly concerned that these reductions in income and increased costs are likely to continue into the next number of years. While it is appreciated that efficiency measures will be needed, the most critical concern is the impact that vacancy levels (due to failure of business) will have on the rates income which provides the core element (70-80 %) of our budget. If this is significantly reduced, the council will struggle to provide the services our citizens require and expect.

To address these issues, the council believe that the NI Executive needs to guarantee sustainable level of rates income for the next three years as a minimum. This guarantee will need to be supported by councils undertaking significant exercises to identify and make savings, to also meet the losses that they will continue to suffer from their commercial activities.

Impact on Place

The prolonged and uncertain nature of the pandemic and the range of measures and restrictions brought forward has had a devastating impact upon the vitality and functionality of businesses and city/town centres across Northern Ireland. Whilst the uptake of financial support schemes for businesses across all sectors of the economy has been high, many businesses have been faced with closure, significant losses in revenue and disruptions to their cash flow. The scale of impact on the tourism, arts, entertainment and hospitality sectors – key economic sectors and employment drivers - is significant and the future viability of the high street and retail and hospitality is at risk with decreased levels of footfall resulting from safety concerns, social distance measures as well lack of tourists and the shift from office-based to home-working.

Investing in sustainable recovery

This council has and will continue to proactively bring forward measures to mitigate the social and economic effects, across the city, of the Covid-19 crisis on people, jobs, businesses and the local economy. It will be important that central and local government work together with communities, businesses and partners to assess the longer-term impact of the pandemic and on local economies and society.

In relation to a recovery plans for Belfast, the council recognise the need for a two-pronged approach of immediate interventions and support during the current pandemic, as well as building important foundations and identifying key levers to support medium-longer term recovery.

Given the scale and complexity of the challenges we face, it will be important that we work in partnership and bring forward financial support and other policy instruments to help rebuild and stimulate recovery, recognising that businesses/councils have limited cash flow to allocate to planning, administration or match funding arrangements at this time.

Examples of opportunities to support future recovery include:

- Accelerating City & Growth Deals to secure investment, creating jobs and acting as a catalyst for supporting recovery.
- Support and investment in local skills programmes and employability schemes, working with local employers, further and higher education and training providers, so that local skills supply can better match future demand. This is also a key area where there needs to be a new relationship between central and local

government, both in designing the new skills strategy and in developing local funding strategies and programmes.

- Investing in communities, creating local assets and facilities and building community capacity and resilience.
- Investing in the revitalisation of our high streets and town centres to support key sectors of the economy, provide economic stability and sustain jobs.
- Maximising the opportunities presented through digital innovation to support key growth sectors, repositioning the economy and enhancing skills and employability.
- Investing in green stimulus as a key driver for economic recovery, with the potential for Northern Ireland to be at the forefront of innovation and clean growth.
- Investing in local regeneration programmes to support business growth and promote and secure FDI and real estate investment.

Q2: RPA to date (new councils since 2015) – please highlight at least two major corporate successes for your Council that RPA has triggered and at least two barriers to success which might be overcome by further legislation, policy and/or resource changes in wider government.

As suggested within general comments on page 1 the local government reform programme has assisted the council in terms of successful delivery in some areas. However, it has by no means removed all barriers by which councils deliver for its citizens and communities.

Two major corporate successes related to the local government reform programme have been:

Belfast Agenda

- The 2015 reform programme provided councils with the responsibility for leading the community planning process to produce a community plan for its district. The purpose of community planning is to improve the connection between all the tiers of Government and wider society work through partnership working to jointly deliver better outcomes for everyone. Community plans identify long-term priorities for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of districts and the people who live there.
- Locally our view of what local government can deliver has been illustrated in the [Belfast Agenda](#), our city's community plan. The Belfast Agenda was developed in collaboration with partners from across the city, and set the long term outcomes that all stakeholder across the city want to achieve. The Belfast Agenda has demonstrated the potential for collaborative working to create changes in the economy, jobs, skills, tourism, and culture.

Providing a vision for the city agreed across the public, education, business and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors.

Transfer of planning powers

- The transfer of most planning functions to the district councils necessitated the creation of a new planning system for Northern Ireland: requiring new roles, responsibilities and relationships for all those involved in the planning process. Councils took responsibility for:
 - Local development planning – creating a plan which will set out a clear vision of how the council area should look in the future by deciding what type and scale of development should be encouraged and where it should be located;
 - Development management – determining the vast majority of planning applications;
 - Planning enforcement – investigating alleged breaches of planning control and determining what action should be taken.
- Coming up to five years since councils took on this responsibility, it is widely acknowledged that the majority of planning decisions are taken at the most appropriate level, which is by locally elected representatives, who understand the needs their local areas, and can balance their decisions against the legal and policy framework which governs the planning process.
- The ability for councils to create their own local development plan has also been a welcome power particularly given the ability to link with community plans. This approach ensures that councils can take a holistic approach, spatial and needs based, in planning for their areas.

Barriers to success

As well as successes from the 2015 reform programme, the Council accept that barriers remain which cannot be overcome in the absence of changes to the overarching policy and legislative framework which governs the operation of local government.

To address these prevailing barriers some of the main areas that the Council would wish to see greater devolved powers for to address local issues and support citizens, communities and the city would be in relation to:

Regeneration Powers

- The Council reiterates the view that the 2015 reform programme did not go far enough in terms of the powers provided to the council. In particular, the decision not to transfer regeneration powers has restricted the Council's ability to deliver transformative place-based plans for local areas and communities. It has also tempered the ambitions and aspirations of local communities, given the separation of local regeneration powers between central and local government. This has diluted our ability to connect land use planning, community planning with wider regeneration ambitions for the city.
- The transfer of Comprehensive Development Powers and the ability to acquire land for regeneration purposes, when used alongside community and land use planning, would help to strengthen and enhance our ability to drive strategic regeneration activity, unlocking and realising the potential of major/flagship schemes and reinvigorating key areas across the city.
- The transfer of regeneration functions would have provided the Council with the ability to ensure an integrated approach to regeneration, addressing blighted areas across the city including, greater alignment of physical regeneration with the future Local Development Plan; and enhance the vitality of the city and further developing the rates base supporting further investment in front-line services.

Duty to co-operate

- Although the production of the city's first community plan the Belfast Agenda is rightly regarded as a success. The Council would suggest that to truly translate the clear benefits of community planning, there is a need for greater collaboration between local government and government departments, in the planning, development, delivery and monitoring of interventions in order to increase their effectiveness for citizens and, in turn, creating a more cohesive society.
- Our existing community planning powers and thematic boards present an opportunity to deliver services tailored to the needs and expectations of local communities. However, it is critical that central government departments and partner organisations work in partnership with local government to ensure these ambitions can be realised across the network of services that communities require.
- The Council would suggest that to address this issue may require future consideration by central government of creating a 'statutory duty to co-operate' in respect of community planning. This duty would place a legal requirement on community planning partners to share information and resources, as appropriate, to ensure that

the agreed priorities and outcomes of community plans are achieved.

Q3: Mindful of NI's recovery in a fragile economic period now emerging, should further reform ("RPA part II") - an expansion of Council's role - be accelerated or pushed back in 2021? Would Council support at this time commissioning (across the whole sector) actual evidence of real benefits, during early & mid 2021 in preparation for future reform, working also with the Partnership Panel?

Given its experience with phase one of local government reform, in terms of the lengthy process undertaken, and the number of false start-stops and significant dilution of functions that ultimately transferred to councils. In the event of "RPA part II", the Council will require early assurance and commitment by the NI Executive as to the parameters for a second programme of local government reform, which includes a clear programme timetable, benefits of reform and desired outcomes.

Subject to broad agreement between stakeholders across local and central government as to the nature of a second reform programme. The Council understand that the process for managing any future reform programme will require agreement between local government, the NI Executive and relevant government departments. This collaboration between both tiers of government must be informed by evidence collection and supported by direct engagement on the basis of transparency and partnership.

The Council also believes that any future review of the role of councils and associated reforms recognises the importance of councils as place based leaders. Local government understands its local communities and places it represents. This again highlights the need for any future transfer of powers to be meaningful and to be of substance. The lack of regeneration powers currently residing in councils curtails our ability to fully deliver and meet the needs of local communities.

Given the current situation we all face due to the Covid-19 Pandemic an immediate expansion of place and regeneration powers to councils would be transformative in promoting strong recovery of local areas out of the Pandemic. Therefore, the council do feel that some aspects of reform should be accelerated and linked to Covid-19 recovery. These additional powers would provide councils with the necessary architecture to deliver on the priorities contained in local area recovery plans.

In addition, the Council would hold the view that any further devolution of powers to local government be considered in the first instance to those authorities that have demonstrated a real impact in terms of the successful delivery of the powers that were devolved to them during the first iteration of local government reform. An assessment should be carried out to ensure authorities have a track record of delivery to include appropriate management of costs.

Any further programme of reform much also recognise that each of the 11 councils have unique and different priorities in relation to their local

areas. While there will always be a need for a regional consistency in terms of the broader role of local government. It would be valuable if a second reform programme explores the value and potential benefits of transferring specific functions and tailored devolution to individual councils or in clusters to address local area need.

Q4: At strategic policy level rather than concentrating on specific functions (see 4.), would Council prefer greater legislative powers e.g. to better enable community planning, regeneration, growth / city deals, and locally led decision taking requiring government departments to agree to Council's investment priorities? What specific legislation or actions does Council wish to see?

The Council recognises that our society is currently faced with a myriad of seemingly intractable issues such as Covid-19, employment, climate change, place shaping, housing and poverty that require strong leadership and well managed and resourced intervention.

We believe that some of these issues are best addressed by government at a local level, and in some areas this will require a change in our top-down centralised form of government. This requires central government providing local government with greater powers and responsibilities, provided for in legislation, in areas such as community planning, regeneration, planning, skills investment and local transport planning.

At a strategic policy level the principle of place-based leadership underpins the current direction of this Council in creating inclusive growth and delivering collaborative approaches to addressing many of the intractable social and economic challenges facing the city and its communities.

When properly resourced, it is our belief that this approach is the most powerful tool that local government has to address some of the biggest challenges we now face including, for example; climate change; productivity gaps; skills and employability, tackling inequalities and positioning our place to compete.

Place based policy is crucial for the success of local government, for four main reasons.

1. Cities and city regions can harness local and global economic capacity.
2. Place provides a coherent way to organise.
3. Place offers a way to reconnect and empower people.
4. A focus on place supports community identity and cohesion and is key in addressing exclusion, inequalities and participation by those normally under-represented.

It is important to understand that place-based policy doesn't necessarily mean devolving all powers and functions to local government. There are many areas in which the need for regional and national governance and

policy is required. However, it does mean there needs to be an earnest conversation with communities and across government and wider society as to the right level and scale of local government that is needed.

For this whole place approach to succeed, we would strongly advocate for the further devolution of core place-shaping functions, provided for in legislation, from central government to enable local government as a sector to deliver on these ambitions. These include:

Urban Regeneration: This power is important as it would enable alignment with other council functions to encourage positive and sustainable development at both community and city level. Historically, BCC has consistently put forward the case for the transfer of regeneration functions to Councils to enhance our ability to provide a coherent place-making model across the city. It remains our position that the anticipated transfer of regeneration powers to councils under the 2015 reform programme should be reviewed and extension or devolution of these regeneration powers should be brought forward as soon as practicable to enable BCC to fulfil its ambitions for transforming the city and its communities, based on the wishes and needs of local areas. This issue is also set out in our answer to Q2.

City Skills Agenda: While there is a range of activity taking place across Belfast and work is underway between relevant central government departments and the Council to explore how we can address the skills issues facing the city and constraining growth, the pervasive challenges of long-term unemployment, economic inactivity and a better match of skills demand and supply are not being addressed in a sustainable manner.

The Council recognise that planning at a local place level is the only way to match demand and supply across the City's skills network ensuring a tailored approach as required. The Council need to work alongside over relevant organisations in the public, private, voluntary, community and social enterprise sector to use our shared information to plan better around skills needs and training provision to meet these needs and support inclusive economic growth. To date a one size fits all approach has not addressed the systemic issues facing communities and business, this disconnect has greatly constrained economic growth and hampered the council's ability to address underlying social problems.

Planning: Extended planning powers, particularly around regeneration and local transport planning, would unlock more effective place shaping and provide for the sustained delivery of the physical aspects of the Belfast Agenda. This would also support more effective approaches to statutory masterplanning and development partnerships with the potential to harness the full benefits of regeneration for local communities often blighted by inequalities. Broader responsibility in relation to built heritage should also be considered to provide for more efficient consideration of both heritage and conservation as part of the planning processes.

Increased functions in relation to roads, transport and housing in order to support place-making and regeneration, would greatly enhance the role of the councils as custodian of place and local communities. While recognising that there is a strategic regional role in these areas for central government departments, we believe that there is scope for local government and departments to work together to ensure that these top level strategic plans can be tailored and varied to suit local issues and needs within each council area.

Community Planning: Establishing a statutory duty to co-operate for community planning partners, to maximise the likelihood of delivering the outcomes and priorities articulated in community plans. This duty should require partners to work together, specifically in relation to sharing resources. This issue is also set out in our answer to Q2.

In respect of the suggested transfer of functions set out above, we recognise some areas may be best managed through partial transfer, as there are broader aspects to many of these matters, i.e. strategic transport networks, regional regeneration initiatives or policy associated with important retained functions, such as housing.

Q4: Please see below a list of typical neighbourhood services of councils in other jurisdictions which are not the responsibility of councils in Northern Ireland. Does the Council have a corporate wish to see such services as part of its portfolio / directly influenced by it (specific services can be listed as desirable, or not)?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-street car parking • urban and rural regeneration • local roads and footpaths • local maintenance of roads and wider public realm such as gully emptying and gritting • public housing • preventative health services • fire services • trading standards • sewerage infrastructure • libraries and museums • street lighting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband investment – devolved budgetary control • Local public transport • further art, culture, sport policy & budget • further economic development such as Foreign Direct Investment and Skills Development policy & budget • conservation of natural and built heritage • Fisheries • others (please specify)
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In relation to the table above the typical neighbourhood services in which the Council may have a corporate interest in adding to its portfolio are highlighted in yellow.

However, it must be noted that this is early indicative interest and further detailed discussions and engagement with relevant service areas and elected members will be needed before adopting a definite position.

A critical area of concern which would require full clarity, before any transfer of these services could be contemplated, would be in relation to appropriate financing. Some of the service areas set out in this table have significant funding deficits, and the Council on behalf of its rate-payers would not countenance taking liability or ownership of without relevant guarantees being put in place by central government department. **This highlights the need for a New Burdens Doctrine to accompany transferring functions, see Q6.**

The Council believes that service delivery has the greatest impact when it reflect the needs of a local area and is delivered in an integrated and responsive manner. The Council believes that issues relating to the scale and scope of area governance, as far as is reasonably possible, be determined by locally elected representatives chosen by local communities.

Local government has demonstrated that a strong centralised approach does not work, whilst a sense of place and a strong commitment to integrated planning and delivery does. The Council supports devolved decision-making and governance in this regard, with as much local input as possible.

Working with partners, local government is well placed to support the planning of services that affect citizens and communities at a local level. Councils have a greater understanding and engagement with their local communities enabling the tailoring of services, improved decision-making and the delivery of local outcomes. Greater devolution of services at a neighbourhood level would allow for a more responsive approach to communities' needs and aspirations.

Better integrated services at a community level can be secured through the promotion of area based regeneration, using integrated neighbourhood working models (as appropriate to the local district); key stakeholders would have flexibility to align into these models as required, recognising council contributions, to achieve better service integration and desired outcomes.

By way of example of our commitment to this approach we have recently adopted an area based approach for our own services, to ensure better delivery of outcomes for residents. This has been supported through the creation of an 'area manager' who in effect has responsibility for integrated service delivery at local neighbourhood level aligned to broader citywide provision. It is our belief that devolution of neighbourhood services will allow for a more responsive approach to communities' needs and aspirations.

Examples of areas outside of current local government functions which may benefit from an area-based (neighbourhood services) approach include:

- Health and social care: local councils can play a role with partner organisations in promoting some aspects of health and social care, such as improving mental and physical wellbeing through the delivery of a range of programmes across our community facilities.

- Public protection: through better regulation to local communities, i.e. managing Housing of Multiple Occupations.

Q6: To protect and ensure adequate resources for councils, NILGA has produced a New Burdens Doctrine, summarised in appendix C. All councils in the rest of the UK are protected by this, in some form to ensure legally that resources are guaranteed to be adequate to meet transferred responsibilities. Does Council consider this protection a "must have" in advance of any further transfer of powers, resources and / or services?

The Council consider that the New Burdens Doctrine or similar assurances should underpin any future legislation or policy which may signal the transfer of functions or powers from central to local government. However it is vital that the approach to securing the introduction of such a doctrine does not stymie the transfer of certain functions, in particular those of a more strategic nature, such as regeneration. It is important to differentiate between strategic and operational functions in this regard.

The Council would also be supportive of the need to ensure that there is a collectively agreed principle that Government as a whole will ensure that any new burdens which may fall on local councils in moving forward are adequately resourced.

Example - Enhanced enforcement role of councils

The recent regulations brought forward by the NI Executive confers additional enforcement responsibilities on councils in relation to non-compliance by particular businesses and sectors of the NI Executive restrictions and guidance. In addition to this, the councils have undertaken to work in partnership with the police to deal with enforcement issues which arise in the hospitality during their normal operating hours. Councils have taken on this role to support their local areas and businesses. There has been no associated funding provided to councils to support the implementation of the extended enforcement role. If the New Burdens Doctrine had been in place then these transfer of additional responsibilities would have been supported with associated transfer of resources.

Therefore examples such as that provided above, highlights the necessity that new burden provisions should be incorporated into any future legislation which either devolves or transfers powers to councils. The legislation must also clearly identify the lead central government department which is responsible for securing the resources needed to fund the net additional cost falling on councils and ensuring the appropriate transfer of resources.

If the new burdens doctrine had underpinned those powers which transferred in 2015, it is likely that this would have resolved issues between local and central government relating to a lack of clarity over responsibility for when resources have not been commensurate with the functions that transferred.

In any case, the Council would seek assurances that the level of financial resources made available for devolution to NI councils was not only cost

neutral at the point of transfer but also that councils would be indemnified against any potential future shortfall in funding through an extension of the “New Burdens Doctrine”.

Q7: With investment priorities, budgetary constraints and new ways of working being practiced right now by Council, NILGA believes that council led shared services are one element of the future sustainability of local government. Is Council open to engaging in sector wide, strategic discussions around shared services, building on existing work, in order to define a strong vision and approach to this? What are Council's key requirements, if any, in terms of taking such discussions forward?

The Council would be willing to engage in discussion and explore potential around this suggested approach, as we believe there is real opportunity to deliver value for money services alongside service improvements.

However, in light of previous experience relating to a shared services approach, we would note with caution the previous the local government lead, ‘Improvement, Collaboration and Efficiency (ICE) Programme’ which was taken forward in lead up to the first local government reform programme. This process was extremely resource intensive and there was a number of false dawns regarding moving towards agreed shared services approaches, and many councils chose not to adopt a shared services approach when it came to actual operational implementation, preferring to maintain existing service provision.

Therefore, any approach towards council led shared services must be supported by a coalition of willing partners across the local government sector. It is essential that any move towards a sector wide approach to shared services has clear parameters, agreed to and supported by elected members, highlighting those areas of collaboration which will result in efficiency savings and value for money for participating councils.

Another key requirement for the Council in terms of a sectoral shared services approach is the need for an evidence based approach. For this vision to succeed will require a significant level of trust and transparency between councils in terms of sharing information and resources, to ensure that decisions taken are sourced in evidence and on the best available data.

Q8 Has Council any additional comments or attachments it wishes to provide at this time?

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

In addition to the answers provided above to the specific questions put forward in this consultation. The Council would also wish to put forward some additional general comments for NILGA’s consideration. These include:

- The Council recommend that there is a commitment within the emerging Programme for Government to transfer important place-shaping regeneration functions, which complement the existing

planning, and economic development functions of councils. If Belfast and the region are to remain competitive and continue to attract investment, it is important that we can respond to the needs and demands of potential investors.

- Any future reform programme provides an opportunity to fundamentally review local government finance particularly if a high degree of devolution was secured. The Council considers that increased financial powers for local government is necessary for securing sustainably funded local government moving forward. The Council believe that any future review of local government powers provides local government with an opportunity to partner to draw together existing interventions at a high level and to offer collective recommendations on financing, including new borrowing powers; simplified loan and borrowing regimes; and government incentives for start-ups in sustainable tax yielding industries.
- The need to consider innovative and new forms of finance and delivery models to unlock development, regeneration and infrastructure priorities within the city and across the region.
- The need to further strengthen the relationship between central and local government on a clear legislative and policy basis. This strengthened relationship should be underpinned by a shared commitment to delivering outcomes for our citizens. Where necessary the Council would recommend that structures are put in place to ensure that each of the 11 councils are engaged in the development of any policy positions and are consulted on all enabling legislation as early and as fully as possible.
- A mechanism should be found for Councils to work alongside government departments in formulating and delivering cross – cutting recovery programmes. It is understood that a Town Centre Task force is to be set up as one potential recovery partnership and Councils would request a seat at this table. However, Councils have many other contributions to make, including the reframing of City Deals as key recovery investments, co-designing future shared prosperity funds, developing innovation hubs and rolling out digital investment.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Update on Physical Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Council’s Capital Programme is a rolling programme of investment which either improves the existing Council facilities or provides new Council facilities. This report provides an update on the New Crematorium project and**

seeks approval from the Committee for the Council to act as the delivery agent for any capital projects as required under the DfC Covid19 Revitalisation Programme including necessary procurement processes.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked –

- i. *Capital Programme - New Crematorium Project* – To agree the recommendations emerging from the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematoria Working Group and the People and Communities Committee in relation to the design options for the new Crematorium as outlined in 3.3 below; and
- ii. *DfC Covid19 Revitalisation Programme* – To agree that the Council acts as the delivery agent for a range of projects proposed under the Revitalisation funding. Members are further asked to agree that any necessary procurement processes for these projects be initiated as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Update on New Crematorium Capital Project

Members are asked to agree the recommendations from the Special Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Working Group meeting held on 25th November 2020 to update Members on the design options for the new crematorium. These recommendations were agreed by People and Communities Committee at its meeting on 8 December 2020 where it was recommended that they should be presented to SP&R to be endorsed.

- 3.2 The £18m new Crematorium Project is at *Stage 3 – Committed* within the Capital Programme. Planning and design stages are underway. An Integrated Design Team presented options of the design development to Members of the Working Group on 25th November. Three options were presented as to how to accommodate 200 people in each of the two chapels, whilst providing a more sympathetic space for the regular smaller services of around 50 people with the three options being -**

- Option 1 – partitioned; provision of 200 seat capacity on ground level with the possibility to partition the space with a moveable wall and curtain;
- Option 2 – use of entrance hall: provision of 150 seat capacity in main hall with the possibility to include the

entrance hall through moveable acoustic screen to provide 200 seat capacity;

- Option 3 – mezzanine: provision of 160 ground floor seat capacity and 40 seat mezzanine

After considering the options the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Working Group noted that the preferred option was Option 3 – mezzanine: provision of 160 ground floor seat capacity and 40 seat mezzanine from both a design and operational perspective. This Option was agreed by the People and Committee on 8th December from an operational and client perspective. In addition, the removal of the function room from the new building development and the potential of the offer of this facility in the re-use of the existing building was recommended by the design team. The integration of a function room in the new crematorium would create the same challenges in the flow of people as in the existing building. This was also supported by the Crematorium Manager who highlighted the operational challenges of a function room in the same building as the chapels where the services take place. Both the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Working Group and the People & Communities Committee agreed this approach

3.3 Members are asked to agree –

- the preferred option (Option 3 - provision of 160 ground floor seat capacity and a 40 seat mezzanine) as recommended by both the Working Group and the P and C Committee
- the removal of the function room from the design of the new crematorium building and explore the option to re-use parts of the existing crematorium as a place where functions can take place.

DfC Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme

- 3.4** Members were advised on 18th September 2020 that external funding is being sought to support the city's Covid recovery plans. A Letter of Offer is now secured for the second tranche of the Covid-19 Revitalisation Programme from Department for Communities and Department of Infrastructure. Tranche 2 comprises £1,790,000 in capital funding from DfC, £2,000 from DEARA, £749,000 from DfI and an allocation of £160,000 of revenue funding from DfC, bringing the overall funding to £4,039,000 (Tranches 1 and 2). A further

Members are asked to agree that the Council acts as the delivery agent for a range of projects proposed under the next tranche of Revitalisation funding. Members are further asked to agree that any necessary procurement processes

for these projects (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.5 Financial and Resource Implications

New Crematorium – Scheme already at Stage 3 – Committed with £18m ring fenced

Covid-19 Revitalisation Fund – Externally funded

3.6 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Asset Management

The Committee:

i. Finvoy Street – Licence from Walkway Community Association

- approved the entering into a Licence for works, access and use of lands at Finvoy Street/Upper Newtownards Road from Walkway Community Association, to facilitate the removal of its former community centre modular building and the subsequent construction of a new centre funded by the Social Investment Fund.

ii. Proposed Temporary Occupancy of International Conference Centre Waterfront Hall for use as a Nightingale Court

- noted the arrangements for a temporary use of the International Conference Centre as a Nightingale Court to assist with the backlog of cases within the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service and provide adequate social distancing measures.

iii. Little Victoria Street, Belfast – Licence Agreement

- approved the grant of a Licence to Clear Channel NI Ltd. at Little Victoria Street Car Park for an advertising site.

Update on Area Working

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of the North Belfast Area Working Group of 25th November, the West Belfast Area Working Group of 26th November and the East Belfast Area Working Group of 3rd December, including the following recommendations from the North Belfast Area Working Group:

BIF Programme

- i. Marrowbone Millennium Park Project – the reallocation of £250,000 of the anticipated underspend of £305,183 from Cancer Lifeline and Grace Family Centre; and
- ii. Love Works – that a scoping exercise be undertaken in relation to potential capital works for the Love Works Co-operative in Duncairn Gardens.

Finance, Resources and Procurement

Belfast City Council Statement of Accounts 2019-20

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee the Statement of Accounts of the Council, including the Annual Governance Statement, for the period ending 31st March 2020.
- 1.2 The Statement of Accounts are an important element of the council's overall corporate governance framework as they provide assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position.
- 1.3 The Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2020 have been prepared in line with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2019/20 based on International Financial Reporting Standards and the Department for Communities Accounts Direction, Circular LG 03/20 dated 17 February 2020.
- 1.4 I can confirm that the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2020 has been prepared in the form directed by the Department for Communities and in my opinion the Statement of Accounts give a true and fair view of the income and expenditure and cash flows for the financial year and the financial position as at the end of the financial year.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to
 - approve the Council's Statement of Accounts and incorporated Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31 March 2020; and

- agree that the decision should not be subject to call-in (as indicated above) because it would cause an unreasonable delay which would be prejudicial to the Council's and the public's interests given that the statement of accounts must be published by 31st December, 2020.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

Audit Opinion

3.1 It is the Local government Auditors' opinion that:

- the financial statements give a true and fair view, in accordance with relevant legal and statutory requirements and the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2019-20, of the financial position of Belfast City Council as at 31 March 2020 and its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and
- the statement of accounts have been properly prepared in accordance with the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 and the Department for Communities directions issued thereunder; and
- the part of the Remuneration Report to be audited has been properly prepared in accordance with the Department for Communities directions made under the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015; and
- the information given in the Narrative Report for the financial year ended 31 March 2020 is consistent with the financial statements.

Reserves

3.2 General Fund

The credit balance on the General Fund has increased to £28,692,673 (of which £15,791,541 relates to specified reserves). The movement on the reserves balance is summarised in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of Reserves Position

Opening Balance	£25.8m
In year movement in reserves	<u>£ 2.9m</u>
Closing Balance	£28.7m
Specified Reserves at year end	<u>£15.8m</u>
Balance Available	<u>£12.9m</u>

3.3 Capital Fund £19,369,748

The Capital Fund is made up of:

- Belfast Investment Fund (£723) -created to support key partnership projects to regenerate Belfast and help lever substantial funds from other sources.
- Local Investment Fund (£1,171,489) to fund smaller local regeneration projects.
- City Centre Investment Fund (£15,154,012) to support the Belfast City Centre Regeneration Investment Plans.
- Social Outcomes Fund (£3,043,524) to support City Centre projects which might not generate a direct financial return but would enhance the overall City Centre offer and support the attraction of investment.

3.4 Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund £8,000,000

This fund, created in year from the Belfast Investment Fund, is to support neighbourhood regeneration and tourism projects in local neighbourhoods.

3.5 Leisure Mobilisation Fund £887,800

This fund is to support the Leisure Transformation Programme and will cover programme level costs including communications, engagement and procurement costs.

3.6 Capital Receipts Reserve £9,772,458 and Deferred Capital Receipts £342,300

These are capital receipts which have originated primarily from the sale of assets and which have not yet been used to finance capital expenditure.

3.7 Other Fund Balances and Reserves £298,224

This relates to the Election Reserve (£3,300) which has been set up to smooth the cost of running council elections, the BWUH Subvention Fund (£135,499) to support national and international organisations in bringing their conferences to Belfast and the BWUH Sinking Fund (£159,425) to support planned maintenance and future capital works at the new exhibition centre.

3.8 Debt

The overall level of trade debtors had increased this year from £2.5m at 31 March 2019 to £4.1m at 31 March 2020. The main reason is an increase in public authority debt at year end. An analysis of trade debtors, inclusive of VAT, for the last two years is shown below:

Table 2 : Analysis of Trade Debtors

	31 March 2020	31 March 2019
Less than three months	£3,239,834	£2,131,221
Three to one year	£614,739	£128,050
More than one year	£218,298	£285,208
Total	£4,072,871	£2,544,479

3.9 Creditors

The Department for Communities has set councils a target of paying invoices within 30 days. During the year the council paid 67,810 invoices totaling £182,900,458.

The average time taken to pay creditor invoices was 10 days for the year ended 31 March 2020. The Council paid 50,885 invoices within 10 days, 63,385 invoices within 30 days, and 4,425 invoices outside of 30 days. The council endeavours to process invoices as quickly as possible and has an improvement plan to support this process.

3.10 Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

The Statement of Accounts include Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for the year 2019/20, which has been prepared in line with the Accounts Directive provided by the Department for Communities, NIAO guidance and is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government'. Specifically the AGS sets out:

- The scope of responsibility of the Council in relation to governance
- the purpose of the governance framework
- the governance framework in place
- review of effectiveness of the governance framework
- significant governance issues to be disclosed.

3.11 The AGS is approved by the Chair of the Strategic Policy and Resources, the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Resources. It is subject to review by the LGA (NIAO) as part of their annual audit.

3.12 Financial and Resource Implications

None

3.13 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations and granted approval for CLES, the national organisation for local economies, to undertake on an annual basis an analysis of the Council's yearly spend.

Update on Contracts

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders, as per Standing Order 37a, detailed in Table 1 below;
- approved the award of Single Tender Actions, in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions, as detailed in Table 2 below;
- approved the modification of the contract term, as per Standing Order 37a, detailed in Table 3 below; and
- noted the award of retrospective Single Tender Actions, in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions, as detailed in Table 4 below.

Table 1 – Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Estimated Total Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods/ services
Tender for the delivery of Belfast District PCSP's Primary School Aged Cyber Safety Project (fully funded) (T2122)	Up to 45 months	£60,000	S Toland / R Black	Project designed to help keep children safe online
Delivery of PCSP's Adult/Young Person Cyber Safety Project in Belfast (fully funded) (T2130)	Up to 45 months	£75,000	S Toland / R Black	Approval granted in Oct 2020; approval sought for increase in contract duration by 9 months
Tender for the delivery of PCSP's Adults at Risk of Harm Project (T2125)	Up to 42 months	£45,000	S Toland / R Black	Approval granted in Oct 2020; approval sought for increase in contract duration by 6 months
Tender for Educational Awareness Programme (Fully Funded) (T2129)	Up to 45 months	£90,000	S Toland / R Black	Approval granted in Oct 2020; approval sought for increase in contract duration by 9 months
Tender for the provision of West Belfast DPSPC's Community Safety Initiative (T2124)	Up to 45 months	£132,000	S Toland / R Black	Approval granted in Oct 2020; approval sought for increase in contract duration by 9 months
Support to deliver A Bolder Vision) (part funded by DfC & DfI)	Up to 1 year	£120,000	A Reid	Work will include development of delivery scenarios, options for delivery & implementation plan
Tender for the Hire of up to and over 7.5T & Glass Collection Vehicles	Up to 5 years	£550,000	S Toland / R Black	Hire of vehicles to support frontline workers and operations.

Capacity Building Programme for Belfast's Culture & Tourism sector as part of the A City Imagined programme	Up to 2 years	£70,000	A Reid	Development of evidence based projects aligned to the Cultural Strategy Implementation Plan
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Table 2 - Single Tender Actions

Title of Contract	Supplier	Value	SRO
GPS fleet system – support and maintenance	Masternaut	£120,000	R Cregan

Table 3 - Modification to Contract term

Title of Contract	Supplier	Modification	SRO
Provision of continental markets at City Hall (T1677)	Marketplace Europe	12 month extension. Concession contract – projected £100k income.	A Reid

Table 4 - Retrospective Single Tender Actions

Title of Contract	Supplier	Value	SRO
BREXIT support for businesses in the Belfast City Council area (retrospective reporting)	Oxford Innovation	£46,000	A Reid
Removal of Unauthorised Street Signs (retrospective reporting)	Confidential	£19,500	S Toland / R Black
Hardware replacement & engineer time to Housing Benefit system server (retrospective reporting)	Greenblade Solutions Ltd	£7,000	R Cregan

The Five C's Public Realm Catalyst Project

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To seek approval to commit developer contributions secured through the planning process in order to enable delivery of a public realm scheme known as 'The Five Cs Public Realm' catalyst project, which covers Chichester Street, Callender Street, College Avenue, College Court and College Street.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to

- note the update in respect of the use of developer contributions for a proposed public realm project known as 'The Five C's Public Realm Project' in Belfast City Centre.
- grant approval for the commitment of £3,150 secured as a developer contribution following receipt of amended information regarding planning approval at No. 78 College Avenue (LA04/2015/0419/F) to part-fund the Five Cs public realm catalyst project; and
- grant approval for the commitment of an additional £243,310 secured as developer contributions from The Paper Exchange (LA04/2019/0909/F) and Chichester House (LA04/2016/0548F) to part-fund the Five Cs public realm catalyst project, with a further £42,500 to be committed from the Chichester House scheme on receipt of payment which will be triggered by occupation.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 As agreed at the SP and R meeting in November 2018 and the CG and R meeting in December 2018, officers have been working with the Department for Communities (DfC) to develop a programme of public realm catalyst projects utilising historical developer contributions.
- 3.2 These contributions are legally defined by planning agreements and are designed to mitigate the impacts of new development. They can only be required where they are necessary to make the development acceptable and, once secured, are ring-fenced for an agreed purpose.

The agreements through which all contributions referred to in this report have been secured specify that they may only be used for public realm improvements to mitigate the impact of increased footfall and to improve connectivity. The contributions may only be used within a defined geographical area, and must be 'committed' by Council within a specified time period of receipt, or risk being returned to the developer.

- 3.3** Governance arrangements for developer contributions were agreed by the SP and R Committee on 17th December 2019. The commitment of developer contributions requires authorisation by Planning Service and Legal Services for the spending service area (in this case City Regeneration & Development) to proceed, with financial oversight provided by the Business Support Manager. No monies will be paid until all services have provided authorisation.
- 3.4** At its meeting on 23rd November 2018, the SP and R Committee agreed to commit £475,650 of developer contributions from two developments (including No. 78 College Avenue -LA04/2015/0419/F) to part fund (with DfC) a public realm catalyst project in the College Street/College Avenue area. It was also noted that there would be an opportunity for Members and local stakeholders, including traders and residents, to engage in the development of proposals.
- 3.5** Following receipt of amended information in relation to No. 78 College Avenue (LA04/2015/0419/F), a further agreement secured an additional contribution of £3,150 towards public realm improvements. This sum has not yet been committed.
- 3.6** On 9th October 2019, the CG and R Committee agreed to proceed with design development and delivery in partnership with DfC, of further public realm improvements in Chichester and Callender Street utilising developer contributions, subject to approval by SP&R Committee, from two schemes - The Paper Exchange (LA04/2019/0909/F) and Chichester House (LA04/2016/0548F). These contributions total £285,810, though £42,500 is to be paid on occupation of Chichester House.
- 3.7** It was subsequently agreed with DfC that a single pilot project would be taken forward incorporating all of the streets referred to above, involving improvements to footway surfaces, street furniture, lighting and soft landscaping across the 'Five Cs'- Chichester Street, Callender Street, College Street, College Court and College Avenue. The project is being delivered by DfC in partnership with Council through existing governance arrangements established by the Belfast Streets Ahead Board, which includes representation from DfL.

- 3.8 This project is being undertaken in the context of ongoing work to transform connectivity across the city, and will be delivered in line with the principles set out in the City Centre Connectivity Study 'A Bolder Vision'.
- 3.9 As reported to the CG and R Committee on 9th September 2020, a BCC Stakeholder and Engagement Group has been formed to provide cross Departmental input, and initial engagement with key stakeholders including DfI has also been undertaken and will continue throughout the project. A workshop for elected members was facilitated in June during the early stages of design development and a further session took place in mid-September. Following this targeted stakeholder engagement, concept designs have been developed and are currently available as part of a public consultation process running from 30th September to 22nd December 2020 (see the attached Appendix - Five C's Consultation Booklet).
- 3.10 The Five Cs scheme has a total estimated value in the region of £1,900,000. Capital funding by Council will only be provided from the developer contributions referred to above which total £764,610, of which £475,650 has already been committed.
- 3.11 This report proposes commitment of a further £243,310, plus £3,150 secured following receipt of amended information in relation to No.78 College Avenue (LA04/2015/0419/F). In relation to the Chichester House contribution, a further £42,500 will be committed on receipt of payment which will be triggered by occupation.
- 3.12 Each developer contribution will only be spent within the area defined by the relevant S76 agreement, and in line with all other terms of that agreement. Appropriate arrangements will be agreed between Belfast City Council and the Department for Communities, stating the requirement to adhere to the terms of each Planning agreement, including conditions regarding the purpose and location of spend.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.13 Commitment of £243,310 of developer contributions from two schemes - The Paper Exchange (LA04/2019/0909/F) and Chichester House (LA04/2016/0548F).
- A further £42,500 will be committed from the Chichester House contribution, on receipt of payment which will be triggered by occupation.
- 3.14 Commitment of £3,150 of developer contributions in relation to a further agreement entered into following receipt of

amended information regarding the scheme at No. 78 College Avenue (LA04/2015/0419/F).

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.15 The Five Cs Public Realm Catalyst Project is subject to equality and good relations screening with ongoing monitoring which is being carried out by DfC-
<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/5-cs-public-realm-project-screening>
- 3.16 Council's Equality & Diversity Officer has also been consulted on BCC Equality Screening for the Five Cs Public Realm Project to ensure that Equality and Good Relations implications and Rural Needs are fully considered."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Equality and Good Relations

Minutes of the Meeting of the Shared City Partnership

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Shared City Partnership held on 7th December, including the recommendations:

- i. that Councillor O'Hara be elected to serve as Deputy Chairperson for the Shared City Partnership until May, 2021;
- ii. to note the Revised Action Plan 20/21 which was submitted to The Executive Office summarising the subsequent changes that have been approved after the previous submission;
- iii. to note that 5k has been awarded under delegated authority to The Hubb, as previously agreed, as part of the North Belfast Diversionary Project;
- iv. to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that the contribution to the Clean Green Inclusive and Safe Initiative from the Good Relations Action budget be increased to £7,550, so that the project can progress in year;
- v. that Forward South be offered additional support of up to £7k for the Roma helpline, until 31st March 2021, to allow a continuation of service and ensure a smooth transition to the Peace IV project;
- vi. to note the opening of the two funding programmes under the Council's Community Recovery Support Grants Scheme and to forward the information to their contacts as widely as possible;
- vii. to approve the re-profiling request from Duncairn Community Partnership to upgrade their current technology capability to accommodate the on-line delivery of good relations programmes targeting young people and new communities;

- viii. to invite representatives from the IFI Programme to present on their work at a future meeting of the Partnership;
- ix. to recommend that the Council engages in social media and other relevant communication mediums to provide a message of support to EU nationals living in the city, acknowledging their contribution to Belfast and stipulating that the Council wishes them to stay and would encourage them to apply to the EU settlement scheme; and
- x. to also call on all employers and civic society organisations across the greater Belfast area to issue a similar statement to that above, acknowledging the contributions of EU citizens to Belfast, stipulating that they should stay and encouraging them to apply to the EU Settlement Scheme.

Peace IV

- i. to note the report in relation to the PEACE IV Secretariat and agree that further clarification from SEUPB in terms of modifications be sought;
- ii. following a presentation by MDL on Dialogue and Engagement of Forth Meadow Community Greenway, to note the next steps of developing the management model and further engagement with the West Area Working Group;
- iii. to note the report and progress on the Shared Spaces and Services theme;
- iv. to note the report and update in relation to projects within the Children and Young People's theme;
- v. in terms of the Building Positive Relations theme, to agree:
 - a. that costs (£4,500) and time for the BPR3 NICVA researcher be permitted under the current contract;
 - b. BPR3 - the Resource Allocation for Year 1 area cluster projects (£4k) be realigned into the Year 2 cluster area in instances where there is low/no take up and re-engagement; and
 - c. BPR4 - Belfast and the World - to realign Year 3 targets into year 4 targets.

Equality and Diversity Reports

The Committee approved the following documents for submission to the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland:

- i. a five-year review of the Council's Equality Scheme;
- ii. an updated Equality Scheme, which reflected a number of minor structural/functional changes; and
- iii. an annual report for 2019/20 on the progress made by the Council on implementing the arrangements set out within the Equality Scheme to discharge its Section 75 duties.

Operational Issues

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

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 10th December.

**Minutes of the Meeting of
the Audit and Risk Panel**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel of 8th December.

**Request for Donation - Northern
Ireland Children's Hospice**

The Committee was informed that the Northern Ireland Children's Hospice Support Group had, in November, written to the Council seeking sponsorship towards the hosting of an online gala concert entitled "Northern Ireland's Big Night in 2020" which would be taking place on 4th December.

The Chief Executive reported that the Children's Hospice, like many charities, had struggled to raise funds since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and that the support group had stressed that any donation from the Council would be welcomed. She pointed out that it was within the gift of the Council to accede to such a request and, accordingly, she recommended that £1,000 be donated to the Hospice.

The Committee adopted the recommendation and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting providing information on:

- i. the savings to be derived from ceasing the production of Members' corporate diaries and Christmas cards and the process for donating those savings to a chosen local charity each Christmas;
- ii. the potential for distributing surplus food from Committee and other meetings to organisations providing food support in the City; and
- iii. the Lord Mayor's annual hospitality budget.

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

The Committee approved the recommendations made in respect of applications received up to 5th December, as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2021 EVENTS						
British Council of Northern Ireland	On Date to be agreed <i>Dependent on City Hall recovery and COVID guidelines</i>	Mock Council of the European Union – Schools event to encourage debating skills and participation in democracy now in 15th year. Numbers attending – 90 <i>* Numbers and room layout will be reviewed and revised in line with COVID19 social distancing guidelines at the time of this event.</i>	B & D	No (Charity)	No	Recommend to approve, No charge, No hospitality

**Minutes of the Meeting of the
Active Belfast Limited Board**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Active Belfast Limited Board of 14th December.

Other Business

**Bilingual Street Signage – Counsel Opinion
on Call-in**

The City Solicitor reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 23rd October, it had agreed to adopt a new policy position for the erection of bilingual street signage to the effect that an expression of interest by a resident/residents/Elected Member would trigger a consultation and that 15% of residents responding positively would be sufficient to approve an application. That decision had subsequently been called-in, on both procedural and adverse community impact grounds.

He explained that, in line with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2014 and the Council's Standing Orders, Counsel opinion had been sought on the call-in. Counsel had determined that it did not have merit on either ground and that there had been no failure to take into account relevant considerations, including resources. It had been pointed out that the policy, when drafted, would be subject to equality screening and consultation and that the operation of residual discretion would allow for appropriate consideration of any potentially sensitive decisions.

The Committee noted the Counsel opinion and that the minute would now be placed before the Council on 7th January for ratification.

Briefing Session

The Committee agreed that a briefing session be held, on a date to be determined in consultation with the Chairperson, to brief Members on emerging proposals for future kerbside sort collections in inner City areas, in advance of a composite report being presented to the Committee early in the New Year.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Procurement - Employment Academy Framework

At the request of Councillor Beattie, the Committee agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting outlining the legal and other implications associated with restructuring the current Employment Academy framework.

Chairperson