

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 19th April, 2024

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Black (Chairperson); Alderman McCoubrey; and Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Cobain, de Faoite, M. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Ferguson, Garrett, Hanvey, Long, Maghie, Maskey, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Nelson, Nic Bhranair, Smyth and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development;
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance Manager.

Also attended: Councillors Groogan and Lyons.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 8th April, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

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Declarations of Interest

Councillors Beattie and M. Donnelly declared an interest in item 5(b) Social Supermarket Fund, in so far as they were employed by organisations which were recommended for funding and left the meeting whilst this item was being considered.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

Update on Temporary Contracts and Agency Workers

The Director of Human Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration a report providing an update on the number of employees on temporary contacts and agency assignees engaged by the Council and outlining the steps being taken to reduce the Council's reliance on those two categories.

She reported that, as at 31st March, 2024, 211 staff had been filling posts on a temporary basis, 120 of whom had substantive Council posts to return to when no longer required. The other 91 were fixed term contract employees who did not have a substantive post to return to. Between 1st January and 31st March, 14 staff had joined the Council on a temporary contract, with 6 having a substantive post and 8 being on fixed term contracts.

She reported further that 261 agency assignees had been engaged by the Council as at 31st March, 34 of whom were seasonal workers. She outlined the cost of employing agency assignees for the three-month period ending on 31st March and pointed out that this did not represent a financial burden, as it was met through departmental underspends.

Following the General Operative recruitment, 51 appointments were in progress. Of those, 21 candidates had been appointed, two further candidates would be appointed this week and the remaining candidates were completing pre-employment checks. Of the 51 appointments, 23 were agency workers, 20 from General Operative roles and three from other agency roles. There were 152 candidates on the reserve list. Of those, 57 were agency workers, 51 from General Operative roles and six from other agency roles.

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The Director then stated that the Corporate Contract Manager, who had been in post since February, had established regular compliance and challenge meetings across Departments, with a view to driving down long-term agency usage and that data was being reviewed to assess the potential for creating some permanent flexible roles.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

**Producer Responsibility Obligations
(Packaging and Packaging Waste)
Regulations 2024**

The Committee considered a report on discussions which had been held at a national level with regard to agreeing proposals across the four UK nations in respect of proposals/draft regulations for Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) for packaging scheme.

The Committee granted approval for SIB to recruit a shared waste specialist to deal with the implications of EPR, representing and assisting District Councils and NILGA on national forums with regard to policy development for EPR, a Deposit Return Scheme (DRS) and Common Collections Guidance in consideration of meeting waste, circular economy and climate goals.

It agreed also to provide £5K per annum for 2-year period as the Council's contribution and noted that all other councils had been asked to make the same financial commitment, subject to further information being provided on why the post was being recruited by SIB and not the Councils.

City Centre Regeneration Scheme

(On the advice of the Chief Executive, Members of the Planning Committee, that is, Councillors Groogan, Hanvey, Ferguson, Garrett, Maskey and Whyte, left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion.)

The Committee considered a report which provided an update in relation to various matters associated with the Tribeca scheme, including the Assembly Rooms, following various Council decisions.

The Committee:

- i) noted the update in relation to various matters associated with the Tribeca Scheme;
- ii) noted that a further report will be brought back to Members in respect of the Assembly Rooms following the pending LPS inspection and valuation;
- iii) noted that further work is ongoing in respect of the previous Council decision on the possibility of vesting and/or acquisition of the Tribeca site by agreement, with a report to be brought back to Members;
- iv) agreed that a further invite be extended to Castlebrooke seeking a meeting with Members; and

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- v) agreed to the establishment of a Members' Working Group to provide focus and progress these issues.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Notices of Motion Quarterly Update

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 update Committee on the progress of all Notices of Motion for which SP&R Committee is responsible for.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

- Note the updates to all Notices of Motion that SP&R Committee is responsible for and
- Agree to the closure of Notice of Motion 138 as referenced in Appendix 1 and paragraph 3.4 below.

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1 At SP&R Committee on 25th October 2019, the following Notice of Motion was agreed:

‘That this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting, detailing the following:

1. Date received
2. Notice of motion title
3. Submitted by which Councillor
4. Council meeting date
5. Committee motion is referred to
6. Outcome of committee where Notice of Motion will be debated
7. Month it will be reported back to committee
8. Other action to be taken.’

- 3.2 Following a review exercise, a new database containing all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance at Committee

was created and quarterly reporting to Committee commenced in March 2021. Appendix 1 is the latest quarterly update showing all active Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which SP&R Committee is responsible for.

Closure of Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance

3.3 At Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on 20th November 2020, it was agreed that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:

1. Notices of Motion which contained an action(s) that has been completed; and
2. Notices of Motion have become Council policy.

3.4 SP&R Committee are asked to agree that the following Notice of Motion is now closed:

Category 2 Recommended Closure:

- World Environment Day (138) – This NOM called on the Council to support biodiversity and take positive actions towards tackling the climate emergency by working with partners in range of areas, including marking World Environment Day on June 5th and through the development of awareness raising content and development of a programme of digital or physical events to support our citizens in challenging climate change. The Climate Team is developing a calendar of key dates with Corporate Communications, ensuring appropriate messaging is developed in advance. The Communication Plan will be delivered through the BCC Climate Action Plan. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.

3.5 **Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no additional financial implications required to implement these recommendations.

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

There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.”

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The Committee:

- noted the updates to all Notices of Motion that the Committee was responsible for;
- agreed to the closure of Notice of Motion 138, that is, World Environment Day; and
- that a report be submitted to a future meeting on the Motion approved by the former Brexit Committee on the Commission of a report to examine the opportunities for economic development.

**Response received from the Department for
Communities Re Motion - Anti-Poverty Strategy**

The Committee was reminded that, at the Council meeting held on 4th March, 2024, it was agreed to write to the Minister for Communities, Mr Gordon Lyons, advising him of the Motion in relation to Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The Committee was advised that a response has been received from Mr Carl Savage, Deputy Director Central Policy Division, Department for Communities.

In his response he advises that addressing poverty in all its forms was a key priority for Minister Lyons and he was committed to delivering long-term sustainable solutions to poverty in all its forms for our communities right across Northern Ireland.

He continues that poverty was a complex and multi-faceted issue, and the Minister was considering work to date and the next steps to be taken in relation to the development of the Executive's Anti-Poverty Strategy. He would be engaging with his Executive colleagues over the coming weeks and months to ensure that the Anti-Poverty Strategy was taken forward in the most effective way possible and that the actions in the Strategy are deliverable and can make a lasting difference.

As this was an Executive Strategy, they would be seeking input from all Ministers and their Departments.

The Committee noted receipt of the correspondence and agreed that letters be forwarded to the Minister for Communities, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister requesting that the Strategy be brought forward as soon as possible.

**Response received from Department for
Infrastructure re Living With Water (LWW)**

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services reminded the Committee that, at its meeting held on 19th January, 2024, it was agreed to write to Dr. Denis McMahon, Permanent Secretary, Department for Infrastructure, inviting him to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the review of the Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan for Belfast.

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The Committee was advised that a response has been received from the Permanent Secretary.

In his response he advises that Department officials were continuing to engage with stakeholders to gather views and comments which would inform the recommendations within the review report, and he understands Simon Richardson, Director of the Living with Water Programme, would be providing further presentations to a number of other Belfast City Council Committees. A major contributing factor to the review recommendations would be the outcome of the Utility Regulator's Mid-Term Review of NI Water's PC21 Business Plan. The publication of that had been delayed and was expected in June, so the LWW review would conclude after that.

At this stage there was no significant update that could be provided over and above the information provided at the January Committee meeting. Any further comments, to be considered as part of the LWW review, could be provided through the Belfast City Council representative on the LWW Board, and would be greatly welcomed.

He concluded by stating that, since the presentation at the Committee meeting on 19th January, Ministers had returned to the NI Executive and Mr John O'Dowd MLA had taken up the post of Minister for Infrastructure. The Minister would consider the recommendations within the LWW Review Report and decide on the most appropriate way forward.

Noted.

**Response received from Minister
of Finance re Setting Rates**

The Committee was advised that, at the Council meeting held on 1st February, 2024, it was agreed to write to the Minister of Finance to ask the Department to consider adopting the same model used by the Scottish Government of setting its own business rates to help pay for local services.

The Committee was informed that a response has been received from the Minister of Finance, Dr Caoimhe Archibald.

In her response she advises that her Department is currently engaging with the Ulster University on the potential for new research on the issue of rate poundage differentials across Council areas here, how this operates within the wider non-domestic rating system and any economic effects.

She points out though that any structural changes to the rate striking process for non-domestic rates would be a complex one. District Council rate setting sits outside her Ministerial portfolio, local government finance falls within the Minister for Communities' policy and legislative competency.

The Committee noted the response.

Finaghy Festival

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The Committee is asked to note that this event was approved at the People and Communities committee held on Tuesday 05th March however was deferred at the meeting of full Council on Monday 08th April pending exploration by Council officers into whether the event has been delivered in previous years without issue.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to grant authority to the applicant for the proposed event on the dates noted and to delegate authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to ensure satisfactory terms and conditions of use via an appropriate legal agreement prepared by the City Solicitor, including managing final booking confirmation dates and flexibility around ‘set up’ & take down’ periods, and booking amendments, subject to:

- The organizers resolving any operational issues to the Council’s satisfaction.
- The organizers carrying out appropriate resident & community engagement.
- The organizers meeting all the statutory requirements of the Planning and Building Control Service including the terms and conditions of the Park’s Entertainment Licence.

2.2 Please note that the above recommendations are taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for ‘Events’, which is currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Key Issues

The event organisers are Finaghy Community Association. The group formed in 2020 in response to COVID and successfully operated a foodbank in the area supporting elderly and vulnerable people during difficult times. The group then started volunteering and organising events for the

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community delivering their first festival event in 2021 and again in 2022.

- 3.2 Since forming back in 2020 the group have been building capacity to deliver a range of community-based support.
- 3.3 Council received this year's event booking form from the organisers in January 2024. Since receipt of the booking form the organisers have further submitted their event management plan.
- 3.4 The festival will take place over 3 days from Friday 16th August to Sunday 18th August. The event involves family fun entertainment during the day and live music at night. Other activity includes a history exhibition and walk, a seniors tea dance and a food tasting session.
- 3.5 The live music element will be serviced with a bar serving alcohol so a drinks license will be in place.
- 3.6 The group have applied to the Police Property Fund to help fund the event.
- 3.7 The entertainment license for the park will be transferred to the organisers via an appropriate site legal agreement.
- 3.8 Colleagues in building control are aware of the application made to City and Neighbourhood services and will be engaging with the event organiser to ensure the terms of the entertainment license are adhered to.
- 3.9 Building control have checked their previous files on this event for issues and have noted some noise disturbance at the 2021 event that was addressed and rectified for the 2022 event with no further issues or complaints received.
- 3.10 The PSNI have confirmed that they have no issues recorded specific to the running of the event in 2021 or 2022. The only note they have on record was the need for the entertainment license to be in place prior to them making a recommendation to the courts to grant the liquor license.
- 3.11 **Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no known financial or resource implications with these requests.

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

There are no known implications.”

After discussion, Committee granted authority to the applicant for the proposed event on the dates noted and delegated authority to the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services to ensure satisfactory terms and conditions of use via an appropriate legal agreement prepared by the City Solicitor, including managing final booking confirmation dates and flexibility around ‘set up’ and take down’ periods, and booking amendments, subject to:

- The organisers resolving any operational issues to the Council’s satisfaction.
- The organisers carrying out appropriate resident and community engagement.
- The organisers meeting all the statutory requirements of the Planning and Building Control Service including the terms and conditions of the Park’s Entertainment Licence.

**Response received from Linen Quarter Bid
re Trademark Belfast's request to take over
land at Bankmore Square**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting held on 15th December, 2023, it was agreed to write to the Linen Quarter BID to outline the Council's support in regard to Trademark Belfast's request to take over the short-term lease of a portion of land on Bankmore Square.

The Committee was advised that a response has been received from Mr Christopher McCracken, Managing Director, Linen Quarter Bid.

In his response he advises that he was delighted that the City Council had approved planning permission the previous night for two major developments on the Dublin Road, the Kainos Headquarters and the Queen’s University Belfast student accommodation. Those flagship developments were a vote of confidence in Belfast City Centre and will help kickstart wider regeneration on Dublin Road and southern Great Victoria Street. LQ BID are delighted to support both major anchor institutions as they develop those exciting schemes.

He continued that, unfortunately, that meant that the lease for Trade Market would expire as planned on 31 July 2024. LQ BID had actively supported Trade Market since inception, including providing a grant of £5,000 for a new mural, lending its professional PR support to secure positive press coverage, and running successful events within their space to boost footfall. However, he recognised the facility was always designated as a meanwhile use and stated that he was grateful to Kainos for generously enabling the use of their land in the first place.

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He added “As you are aware LQ BID has a short-term lease to operate the adjacent Bankmore Square as a public green space until March 2025. However, it was not permitted to transfer this lease, so any requests from third parties would initially be a matter between the landowner (the Department for Infrastructure) and the potential applicant. LQ BID would fully consider any request from the Department to surrender or modify our lease prior to its expiry, but to date no such request has been received.”

With the consent of the Chairperson, Councillor Murray addressed the Committee and asked the it consider agreeing to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to communicate the Council’s support for Trademarket moving to Bankmore Square as an important catalyst for local business activity and as a unique offering to tourists, and ask that the Department ask LQ BID to surrender their lease and award Trademarket the lease of Bankmore Square, with all the due diligence required, from July 2024 in order to protect jobs and reduce any disruption to their business and the dozens of small independent businesses which rely on Trademarket.

The Committee noted the receipt of the correspondence and acceded to the request.

Governance

**Local Government Ability to Hold
Remote Meetings - March 2024**

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services advised the Members that the Department for Communities had written to Council Chief Executives) advising that Minister Lyons was committed to giving councils the flexibility to hold meetings by remote/hybrid means and would be bringing forward regulations, as soon as possible, using the powers in the Local Government (Meetings and Performance) Act (NI) 2021. The Minister considered this to be more appropriate than continuing to use powers under the Coronavirus Act 2020, which was intended as emergency legislation, and would ensure that councils would have powers for remote/hybrid meetings but based upon more regularised legislation.

The Council had previously responded to a Call for Evidence from the Department for Communities back in early 2022 indicating that it supported proposals to have legislation put in place which would allow remote/hybrid meetings to be held on a permanent basis.

Accordingly she had responded to this most recent letter to indicate the Council support for the draft regulations.

She explained that it was officers’ understanding that the Minister intended to bring the regulations in as soon as possible so as to allow councils to reinstate remote meetings as soon as possible. The legislation was intended to be permissive, in other words it empowers councils to establish their own rule in relation to how and when meetings can be held remotely or in hybrid version. It was anticipated that the legislation would be in place in the coming months.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that the Minister be requested to bring forward the Regulations as quickly as possible.

**Appointment of Members to the Board
of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To consider the process to be used to identify between 10 and 12 elected Members to be considered under a public appointment’s process to fill 4 places on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is recommended to employ a one-off proportionality exercise, using the Sainte Lague method, for the purpose of identifying the political nomination of between 10 and 12 members for consideration for appointment to the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 The Committee will recall that, at its meeting on 23 February, it had considered correspondence dated 30 January from the Public Appointments Unit regarding the submission of Council nominees to be considered by the Permanent Secretary for the Department for appointment to the Board of the Belfast Harbor Commissioners.

3.2 The letter had indicated that there were currently three Councillors in post with one vacancy. One Councillor had served two terms of appointment and cannot be reappointed after 31 March 2024. The remaining two Councillors were due to complete their first term on 31 March 2024 and the DfI Permanent Secretary had decided that he was minded reappointing them for a further term to ensure continuity on the Board. If both eligible Councillors accepted the reappointments, then the DfI would be recruiting for two vacancies with the terms due to commence from 1 April 2024.

3.3 Accordingly, the Council has been asked to nominate at least six Councillors for appointment for the remaining two places.

3.4 In discussing the matter, the Committee was of the view that this was a step change from previous years when Councillors currently serving on the Board had to submit an application and be subject to an open and transparent recruitment process.

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- 3.5** Accordingly, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter on the appointment of Members to the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and requested that a letter be forwarded to the Minister stating that it was the Council's view that all 4 positions on the Board should be subject to an open recruitment/selection process as in previous years.
- 3.6** Further correspondence has now been received from the Public Appointments Unit which states the following: *'When I first wrote to the Council on 30 January 2024, it was on the basis that, in the absence of Ministers, the Department had taken decisions under powers provided by the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2022 to temporarily set aside the previous Ministerial decision that required all public appointments made by DfI to be via open competition (as opposed to renewing appointments for second terms without a competition). This was in the context of the Department facing an unprecedented resource budget position with difficult decisions required on how best to prioritise available funding.'*
- 3.7** *However, since then, we have seen the return of Ministers and John O'Dowd MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, has recently reviewed this decision and decided that all public appointments made by the Department should revert to open competition to attract a wider pool of candidates and improve diversity. In light of this, and in recognition of the Council's concerns, the Minister has confirmed that he is content that all four Councillor positions be appointed via open competition. The two Councillors that were scheduled to be reappointed have been informed of this decision. I would therefore be grateful if you could provide me with 10-12 nominees to be considered for the four Councillor positions. This will help ensure a choice of nominees, as required by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland. Please note that the process remains as set out in my letter of 30 January 2024, with the only exception being that the Minister will decide who to appoint, not the Permanent Secretary. Can you please provide the Council nominees by 12 noon on Friday 3 May 2024'*
- 3.8** In November 2019 in considering the appointment of Members to the Board, the Council agreed to a one-off selection process using the Sainte Lague system.

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3.9 In keeping with that principle, the Sainte Lague system would provide the following result:

1	SF
2	DUP
3	ALL
4	SF
5	SDLP
6	DUP
7	SF
8	ALL
9	SF
10	Green
11	DUP
12	SF

Financial and Resource Implications

3.10 There are not any financial implications for the Council associated with this report.

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

3.11 The suggested approach to be employed to select Members for consideration for appointment to the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners is in keeping with the principles of proportionality established in the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. Therefore, there are not any equality or good relations considerations associated with this report.”

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Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Whyte,

That the Committee agrees to employ a one-off proportionality exercise, using the Sainte Lague method, for the purpose of identifying the political nomination of ten members for consideration for appointment to the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

On a vote by show of hands, seven Members voted for the proposal and twelve against and it was accordingly declared lost.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed that up to twelve names be submitted, that is, Sinn Fein 5, DUP 3, Alliance 2, SDLP 1 and Green Party 1.

Corporate Seal S76 agreements

The Interim City Solicitor/Director Civic and Legal Services advised the Members that the Council routinely entered into planning agreements (“Section 76 Agreements”) with landowners pursuant to Section 76 of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (the “2011 Act”). Those Section 76 Agreements were used where it was considered that a development would have a significant impact on the local area that cannot be moderated by a condition contained in the planning permission.

Whilst most of the Section 76 Agreements were subject to Committee scrutiny and were sealed by the Chief Executive and the Lord Mayor with the corporate seal when complete, there were occasions when such agreements were entered into on foot of planning decisions which were delegated to officers pursuant to the Council’s Scheme of Delegation. She explained that, pursuant to Section 31 of the 2011 Act, the Council operated a planning scheme of delegation.

In those instances where, pursuant to the scheme of delegation, Section 76 Agreements were not brought through the Committee scrutiny process, it was therefore recommended that formal authority be delegated to the Planning Committee to authorise the Director of Planning and Building Control to present agreements to the Lord Mayor and Chief Executive to affix the corporate seal.

The relevant pieces of legislation relating to the corporate seal were as follows:

- Section 100 of the Local Government (Northern Ireland) Act 1972 (the “1972 Act) provides that a seal must be attached to any document which is a deed or a contract that has a value of over £30,000.
- Section 120 of the 1972 Act provides that instruments executed by a council under its seal if otherwise valid shall have full force and effect notwithstanding that Council authority has not been given or that the use of the seal is not in accordance with standing orders.
- Section 76(10) of the 2011 Act provides that planning agreements may not be entered into except by an instrument under seal.

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In addition, the Council's Standing Order 52(b) states in summary that anything requires the corporate seal has to be subject to Council approval by way of a resolution.

The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to affix the corporate seal to Section 76 Planning Agreements that are entered into under delegated authority by the Planning Service.

It was agreed also the monthly report to Planning Committee providing an update on Section 76 Agreements also be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for information.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

City Development and Regeneration

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To provide Members with an update on the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Development Tracker, capturing regeneration and development activity which took place in the City Centre during 2023, as aligned to the eight core policies of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS). The detail of this report will be provided by way of a presentation at Committee. This also follows the agreement at the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in February 2024 that a regular update on city centre developments be included on the SPR agenda.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i) Note the overview of city centre development and regeneration activity during 2023 as provided within the attached Regeneration Tracker (Appendix 1). The tracker is aligned to the eight core principles set out in the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy - the regeneration policy for the city centre. This follows a presentation of the Regeneration Tracker made to the City Growth & Regeneration Committee in April and the agreement at the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee in February 2024 that a regular update on city centre developments be included on the SPR agenda. A brief overview of the Regeneration Tracker presentation will be provided at SPR Committee.**

- ii) Note that this presentation provides a high-level overview of some of the challenges and proposed next steps to help unlock the next stage of the delivery of the Regeneration & Investment Strategy priorities. Further reports will be brought back on a number of these issues including proposals for a reframed City Centre Investment Fund, the Place Based Growth Proposition, the Regeneration Framework, A Bolder Vision and updates on the outworking's of the All-Party Roundtable on housing led regeneration.
- iii) Note that, as agreed at the February meeting of the SP&R Committee, a special meeting will be held to consider the Regeneration Framework, city centre development and heritage assets.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 At the February meeting of the SP&R Committee it was agreed that a regular update on city centre developments would be included on the SPR agenda. Regular reports are brought to the CGR Committee on the Future City Centre Programme, the Regeneration & Development Tracker and other workstreams including the Housing Led Regeneration Programme, Bolder Vision and the Place Based Growth Proposition. However, given the role that the City Centre plays at a regional and local level in terms of job creation, economic impact opportunity and rates income, regular updates on these issues will also be brought to the SP&R Committee which will help inform the Council's position in terms of policy, corporate priorities and investment decisions. This is particularly relevant as the Council moves towards agreeing a new Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan and in light of the Belfast Agenda Refresh.

3.2 The city centre provides an important role for Belfast, the Council and the wider region given Belfast's role as the regional driver and the critical role the city centre in particular plays in terms of employment, investment, tourism, education and a place to live and to visit. The city centre makes up 2.6% of Belfast's spatial area but represents the largest employment base employing over 86,000 workers across the various sectors, representing c37% of Belfast's workforce. Approx 80% of the Councils income comes from the district rate, with the city centre accounting for 42% of Belfast's non-domestic rates income equating to 27% of the Councils total rates income. The sectors contributing greatest to city centre rates are the office sector (60% of city centre non-domestic rate or 16% of Councils total rate income) and retail (22.5% of city centre non-domestic rate or 6% of Councils total rate income).

From 2020/21 to 2022/23 the city centre non-domestic rate has increased year on year going from £42.19m to £46.52m over this 3-year period.

3.3 The Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) sets out our collective ambition for the continued growth and regeneration of the city core and its surrounding areas for the period 2015 to 2030. It contains a road map of policies to guide city centre decision-making and key projects that translate those policies into action, aligned to our overarching ambitions outlined within the Belfast Agenda. BCCRIS seeks to address the universal elements of a thriving city centre as well as challenges and conditions that are unique to Belfast and is underpinned by the following eight core principles:

- Increase the Employment Population;
- Increase the Residential Population;
- Manage the Retail Offer;
- Maximise the Tourism Opportunity;
- Create Regional Learning and Innovation Centres;
- Create a Green, Walkable, Cyclable Centre;
- Connect to the City Around, and
- Shared space and social impact.

3.4 To facilitate the implementation of the eight policies for the city centre, BCCRIS identified a series of projects aimed at creating a liveable and economically thriving city, alongside, identifying the following five Special Action Areas:

- Inner North
- Inner West
- North East Quarter
- Transport Hub and South Centre
- Oxford Street and the Eastern Bank

3.5 The purpose of the annual Regeneration & Development Tracker (Appendix 1) is to provide an overview of regeneration and development activity which has taken place in Belfast City Centre and Titanic Quarter during 2023 (1st January – 31st December), aligned to the eight core policies outlined within the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy. An overview of the Future City Centre Performance Dashboard (as reported to the City Centre All Party Working Group and CGR) is also included, providing an overview of footfall, jobs, vacancy, and cleanliness and safety among other indicators to provide a health check overview of the performance of the city centre.

- 3.6 A number of the core principles and projects and developments identified within BCCRIS have progressed well since 2015 to date, including during 2023 which is the focus of the attached Regeneration Tracker presentation. This has included significant office development, hotel and tourism, purpose-built student accommodation and major developments identified in BCCRIS such as the relocation of the University Ulster, progression of the new Transport Hub and Weavers Cross development, progression of City Deal projects including the Belfast Stories tourist attraction, waterfront development etc. Whilst retail across the UK has remained challenging, previous reports to the CGR Committee have highlighted that footfall figures have recovered well in the city centre, and that primary retail core ground floor vacancy levels have decreased from 23% to 21% with a number of new first to Belfast /first to market brands and the Vacant to Vibrant scheme assisting in this transition.
- 3.7 It is however recognised that challenges remain around city centre living, place-shaping and public realm, dereliction, and infrastructure investment. As reported to CGR and SP&R in February 2024 the lack of regeneration related funding for Belfast (and the wider region) as compared to other UK city regions has put Belfast at a distinct disadvantage in terms of city competitiveness and addressing issues of viability, place making and progressing development and regeneration including housing and increased city centre living. As highlighted to Committee there are a number of funding streams available in other UK cities that have helped accelerate development inc the Brownfield Infrastructure and Land Fund, Future High Streets Fund, Transforming Cities Fund etc. The experience from other cities has shown that these have been critical in order to realise the full regeneration potential of their city centres and to meet wider city region requirements.
- 3.8 Notwithstanding the lack of this external funding, the Regeneration Tracker presentation highlights positive development activity during the 2023 period across the private and public sectors. In order to deliver the growth ambitions as set out in the Belfast Agenda to 2035 it has been estimated that this will require c £5.5bn investment and clearly the role of the private sector is critical in this. The Regeneration Tracker details the extensive private sector development delivered in 2023 along with highlighting a number of projects and initiatives where Belfast City Council are leading on the delivery of and addressing some of our key sectors for growth and aligning to our corporate priorities. This includes the Housing Led Regeneration Programme, the Bolder Vision, Strategic Property Acquisitions, Belfast Region City Deal

Projects inc Belfast Stories, Cathedral Gardens redevelopment, 2 Royal Avenue, the Vacant to Vibrant Programme, Belfast 2024 cultural activities etc.

- 3.9 An update on these various areas of work have been brought previously to both CGR and SP&R Committees. In terms of city centre living specifically it is worth highlighting the update brought to the March CGR Committee in relation to the housing led regeneration programme. This included an update on the Development Partner process where Members had been advised of the progress on the competitive dialogue process with 3 bidders for a significant multi-site, residential led mixed use regeneration development opportunity (c £630m GDV). This followed the development of a number of Concept Regeneration Plans for Council and wider public and private sector lands and PADS for a number of cluster sites, and represents a significant decision by the Council in terms of utilising public sector assets across a number of sites to bring forward a long-term partner to fund, develop and where appropriate own and manage assets through the partnership to deliver residential-led mixed-use regeneration across the city. Members were also updated on the reframed Inner North-West Development Brief which has been forwarded to Housing Associations, following the previous pause at the request of Members and liaison with DfC as landowners and in conjunction with NIHE. An update was also provided in relation to the city-wide Strategic Site Assessments where planning appraisals and feasibility studies are being completed, with updates to be brought initially to the Area Working Groups from May onwards.
- 3.10 It is worth highlighting that there are a significant number of consented residential units / schemes that have come through the planning system in the city centre particularly, and that many of these have not progressed for various reasons including issues around viability, policy, supporting infrastructure etc, most of which are outside Council's responsibility. Notwithstanding this however it is worth noting that there are currently over 1,000 homes under construction across 6 city centre sites, and over 1,550 social homes under construction across the city. As agreed by Members at CGR in March it is also intended to hold an All-Party Roundtable with Party Group leaders or their nominees on Housing Regeneration to consider the various housing regeneration issues in more detail.

Opportunities & Challenges and Future Priorities /Next Steps

3.11 The Regeneration Tracker presentation also provides a brief overview (final slide) on some of the challenges and proposed next steps to unlocking the next stage of the delivery of the Regeneration & Investment Strategy for discussion and future consideration with Members. Updates have been provided to both the SPR and CGR Committees on some of these issues including the disparity of regeneration funding applied to Northern Ireland in comparison to other UK cities and the benefit of a Regeneration Framework that would seek to align the city and Council's strategic priorities to support and strengthen the city's position in relation to investment and funding opportunities to deliver economic, social and commercial outcomes aligned to the Belfast Agenda; the Bolder Vision etc. Further updates on these, alongside proposals for a reframed City Centre Investment Fund will be brought to Committee. As agreed at the SP&R February meeting a special meeting will also take place of the SP&R Committee to consider the Regeneration Framework, city centre development and heritage assets with the meeting date to be confirmed in the near future.

3.12 **Financial and Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

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

3.13 None associated with this report.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Social Supermarket Fund

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 **Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members on the following matters;

- the outcome of the recent open call for applications to the Social Supermarket Fund 24/25.
- the current finance available to support successful applicants to the Social Supermarket fund

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- the finance available to support delivery of a Hardship Programme in 24/25

and; to ask members to;

- consider options for funding successful applicants to the Social Supermarket Fund 24/25 and recommend an option to Council.
- grant delegated authority for the Operational Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations to agreed organisations, based on the agreed option, if further funding becomes available.
- agree that a meeting of the Cost of Living Working Group will be scheduled for May 24 and that a further update on delivery of the 23/24 Hardship programme will be provided at that point when monitoring returns have been collated.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That members consider the following report and note the following;

- the outcome of the recent open call for applications to the Social Supermarket Fund 24/25.
- the current finance available to support successful applicants to the Social Supermarket fund
- the finance available to support delivery of a Hardship Programme in 24/25

Members are also asked to;

- consider the identified options for funding successful applicants to the Social Supermarket Fund 24/25 and recommend an option to Council.
- grant delegated authority for the Operational Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations to agreed organisations, based on the agreed option, if further funding becomes available.
- agree that a meeting of the Cost of Living Working Group will be scheduled for May 24 and that a further update on delivery of the 23/24 Hardship programme will be provided at that point when monitoring returns have been collated.

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 In response to recommendations in the Welfare Reform Mitigations report, the Department for Communities (DfC) has

operated a Social Supermarket Pilot programme since October 2017. Following positive evaluation of the Social Supermarket Pilot Programme, funding was made available through the CSP in 20/21 to expand the concept to all council areas.

The aim of a social supermarket is to offer a sustainable response to food insecurity by seeking to help address the root causes of poverty rather than simply provide food. This is achieved by providing, in addition to food support, a referral network for wraparound support.

Key Issues

- 3.2 Previously, Council has worked with identified partners to develop models for delivery. The People and Communities Committee granted approval on 9 November 2023 to operate an open call for grant applications to the Social Supermarket Fund in 2024/25. Members were advised at this point that because activity is 100% funded by DfC, there was a risk that funding to support successful applications might not be in place from April 24.
- 3.3 However, on balance, it was agreed that it was preferable to undertake the application process so that funding could be issued as soon as it became available from the department. Members agreed that funding of up to £50,000 would be available for each individual project; this in line with other large grant funding programmes.
- The 2024/25 Social Supermarket Support Fund received 28 applications totalling £946,619.70 by the closing date of 12 noon on Friday 26 January 2024. Following assessment and independent moderation the recommendations for awards provided in Appendix 1.
- 3.4 Funding for Social Supermarkets is primarily drawn from the DfC Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer, which includes a 100% DfC funded funding stream for this work. DfC advised on 29th March that the available budget for 24/25, at this stage, is £104,686, which is based on a quarter of the direct award to BCC last year. However, there is no confirmation of the total allocation for 24/25.
- 3.5 Members will recall that as part of the 24/25 Hardship Programme, SP&R approved that £150,000 be allocated to Social Supermarkets in addition to the DfC funding.

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- 3.6** Members of People and Communities committee were provided with an update on the outcome of the open call application process on 9th April and asked to approve delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to approve funding awards to Social Supermarkets as funds become available. Members of P&C were keen that SP&R consider possible support to these projects so that as many as possible could be supported.
- 3.7** DfC issued accounts direction to councils on 16th January to enable any unspent Hardship funding to be transferred to a useable reserve in 2023/24 and ringfenced for Hardship programmes within the 2024/25 financial year. This guidance also states that COVID-19 funding underspends can be carried forward and used for this purpose.
- 3.8** At present the identified underspends that are available for the 24/25 Hardship Programme are £223,400. This figure may rise when financial returns for the 23/24 programme have been provided by delivery organisations. Members are asked to consider the options in the table below and advise if they are content to approve an allocation to Social Supermarkets from the 24/25 budget.
- 3.9** A Cost of Living Working Group was established to consider the development and funding allocations for the 23/24 Hardship Programme, which was agreed by SP&R in December and is outlined in Appendix 2. Members are asked to agree that a further meeting of this group will be convened in May 24 to provide Members with an overview of programme delivery highlights and to inform members decision making in relation to the delivery of a Hardship Programme for 2024/25.
- 3.10** However, given the current lack of available DfC budget, members are asked to consider and approve one of the options below in advance of the next meeting of the Cost of Living working group.

Option	Detail	Pros	Cons
Option 1	Fund top 13 scoring projects on a 100% basis. Issue 25% of funding initially and increase as total DfC	Follows good practice to support scores of 60 and above. Minimises risk to council by only providing	No indication from DfC on when decision on full allocation will be available. Note: in 23/24 BCC received confirmation of

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	<p>allocation is confirmed.</p> <p>Total Cost - £490,508.70 25% - £122,627.18</p>	<p>funding on a quarterly basis until the annual allocation is confirmed by DfC.</p> <p>Should funding not become available in a timely manner from DfC it is possible that Hardship Programme could provide further funding to these 13 projects for a further time period.</p>	<p>full allocation in July 23. No security of funding for organisations who completed strong applications.</p>
Option 2	<p>Fund 21 projects on a 70% basis. Issue 25% of funding initially and increase as total DfC allocation is confirmed.</p> <p>Total Cost - £550,021 25% - £196,436</p>	<p>This option is based on projected total DfC allocation and £100,000 allocation from Hardship Programme and is therefore within anticipated budget.</p> <p>Provides funding for all 21 projects and ensures service delivery to a larger number of individuals.</p>	<p>No indication from DfC on when decision on full allocation will be available and no confirmation of what final allocation will be. Note: in 23/24 BCC received confirmation of full allocation in July.</p> <p>Any reduction in % of funding may impact on viability of delivery for</p>

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			individual projects. If the Hardship programme finances are directed towards supporting social supermarkets there is limited budget available to support other initiatives through a 24/25 Hardship programme.
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3.11 Further detail on the outcome of the Social Supermarket Fund application is provided in the full People & Communities committee paper attached in Appendix 3.

3.12 Financial implications

At present the identified underspend from 21.22 and 22.23 Hardship Programmes is £60,300. A further £163,100 has been identified to date from Covid funding underspends. Members may wish to note that Covid underspends cover a number of grant programmes, Micro/Medium grants in 20/21, 21/22 and 22/23 as well as Kitchen Equipment Grants 20/21 and 21/22 and Thematic and Strategic Partner funding awards 20/21 and 21/22. This provides a total available Hardship budget of £223,400 for 24/25.

3.13 DfC advised on 29th March that the available budget for 24/25, at this stage, is £104,686, which is based on a quarter of the direct award to BCC last year. However, there is no confirmation of the total allocation for 24/25. DfC have advised that they will include the balance of their funding to Footprints Women's Centre (funded directly through the DfC pilot) in the CSP contract. This is likely to be in the region of £50,000, which will create a potential contribution from DfC of £468,744, although this is not confirmed.

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Confirmed DfC budget 25%	£104, 686
Projected DfC budget 100% (based on 23/24 and Footprints allocation)	£468,744
Current available Hardship Programme 24/25 budget (from identified underspends)	£223,400*

***Note - Additional funds may be identified following financial returns for 23/24 programme**

3.14 Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment

The 24/25 Social Supermarket Fund open call has been screened for Equality, Good Relations and Rural Needs Implications.”

The Committee noted the following;

- the outcome of the recent open call for applications to the Social Supermarket Fund 24/25.
- the current finance available to support successful applicants to the Social Supermarket fund
- the finance available to support delivery of a Hardship Programme in 24/25

The Committee:

- agreed to adopt option 2 for funding successful applicants to the Social Supermarket Fund 24/25.
- granted delegated authority for the Operational Director of City and Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations to agreed organisations, based on the agreed option, if further funding becomes available.
- agreed that a meeting of the Cost of Living Working Group be scheduled for May 24 and that a further update on delivery of the 23/24 Hardship programme be provided at that point when monitoring returns have been collated.

Gaeltacht Quarter dual language street signs proposal

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

At the meeting of the Strategic Policy and resources Committee on 20th October 2023, ratified at Council on 1st November 2023, it was agreed to proceed with the proposal for the erection of dual language street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter, in line with the process set out in the report.

- 1.2 This report is to update members on the results of the work undertaken to consult with the occupiers of the streets within boundary agreed by the Committee on the 20th October. It also updates members on the progress made in considering the proposal for the erection of new signage.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the contents of the report and to:

2.2

- a. Agree to the erection of dual language street nameplates, with the second language being Irish, in the list of 301 streets contained in Appendix A which were included in the consultation and where any level of objections raised did not meet the agreed 15% threshold, including the following 10 streets in the list, for which there are no occupiers:

- 2.3 Ardmonagh Way, Ballymurphy Street, Dairy Street, Divismore Way, Monagh By Pass, Mulhouse Road, Springview Street, Stanley Street, Theodore Street, Turin Street

2.4

- b. Agree that a full survey be carried out for Clovelly Street for which the level of objections to the proposed approach met the 15% threshold.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Strategic Policy and resources Committee on 20th October 2023 it was agreed:

- i. to proceed with the erection of Dual language Street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter, in line with the process outlined within the report;
- ii. that the threshold for objections to this process which would trigger the requirement for an application and engagement of the current full process for a specific street within the Gaeltacht Quarter be set at 15% of residents;

- iii. that applications which are deemed subject to the full process due to the threshold of objections being met be dealt with alongside existing applications;
- iv. that the project be added to the Capital Programme as a capital project and prioritised; and
- v. that those streets which form the boundary of the Gaeltacht Quarter also be included as part of the area, with only that portion of the Donegall Road within the boundary of the Gaeltacht Quarter, as set out in the appendix to the report, to be included.

This was ratified by full council on 1st November 2023.

Consultation

- 3.2 Significant work was undertaken to identify and review the streets within the boundary agreed for the Gaeltacht Quarter project which did not already have dual language street signs in place, and also to identify the individual addresses within each of these streets, for consultation. Particular attention was taken along the agreed boundary, where streets continued through the boundary and on either side of the peace line wall and gates, to ensure letters were only delivered to properties within the boundary. This resulted in 8887 addresses being identified for the purposes of the consultation with residents. Letters were issued to all residents through a mail drop using an external company 'Postal Sort'. The purpose of this letter was to advise residents about the proposal to erect dual language street signage and also to give residents the opportunity to object to the proposal for their street.
- 3.3 Elected members were given the list of streets subject to the proposal in advance of the resident consultation to allow for any potential for adverse impacts to be raised.
- 3.4 A public advert was placed in both the Irish News and the Andersonstown News to inform residents of the Gaeltacht Quarter of the approach being taken and how an objection could be made.

3.5 Results

Of the 302 remaining streets identified within the Gaeltacht Quarter which did not already have dual language street signage in place, 10 did not have any occupiers. These are included in the recommendations section above.

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- 3.6** The consultation with residents of 8777 properties in the remaining 292 streets, was issued on 24th January 2024 with a closing date for objections of 4pm on 23rd February 2024
- 3.7** In total, 21 objections were received from residents of 16 individual streets using the reply form provided.
- 3.8** From the analysis of these objections, there was one street (Clovelly Street) where the level of objection to the proposal met the agreed 15% threshold as agreed by members. Of the 15 letters issued to residents in this street there were 3 objectors to the proposal which is a 20% objection rate. One resident provided comment, 'as this is mixed area I think this would cause tension for us and our neighbours'
- 3.9** The remaining 18 objections were spread across 15 streets with no objection rate over 6% for any of these streets.

Additional project tasks

- 3.10** Work and discussions are ongoing between staff within Property and Projects and Building Control to consider the next part of the project, to erect the nameplates. The proposal is to follow the existing process and utilise the current street signage contract and contractor. Whilst the project will be managed by Property and Projects, the Building Control Service will work in conjunction with the project manager to provide the necessary guidance, assistance and oversight. This may also require a resource to be provided by the Building Control Service to carry out some of the duties associated with the project.
- 3.11** It is suggested that the erection of the nameplates will be undertaken in a number of established clusters, potentially clusters of approximately 30 streets. The main tasks associated with the project include:
- On site identification of all existing nameplates in each street to supplement data already collected as a desktop exercise using google street view.
 - Engagement with homeowners where signs are on properties and to advise about the need for access to their property for the erection of new nameplates. (From existing desktop work to date there are approximately 75% of signs erected on private property)
 - A work order to be raised for each street with the location, type of sign and the translation for every identified existing sign using information captured at site survey stage.

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- Quality checks of work orders prior to issue to contractor and also of manufactured signs prior to erection on site.
 - Checks of nameplates once erected and payment of invoices and dealing with any on site issues regarding installation.
- 3.12 The project has been discussed with our street signs contractor who has confirmed they have the necessary capacity to carry out the work within the project subject to agreement of detailed project plan timescales. Our current estimates for the project are based on completion within 6 months following Council ratification of the project moving to Stage 3 – Committed under the Capital Programme.
- 3.13 As discussed above a desktop analysis had found that the majority of the existing street nameplates are erected on the walls of private properties. BCC will need to engage with each resident of these properties to inform them of the proposal to change to a dual language nameplate. This is a more time-consuming exercise and therefore the staffing to carry out this engagement and the tasks associated with identifying the location and type of signage are being considered to avoid any detrimental impact on the current processing times for the existing applications.

Translations

- 3.14 Translations for the streets have been requested from Queens University who intend to have these completed this month.

3.15 **Financial and Resource Implications**

Following consideration at SP&R Committee in March 2024, Members moved the project to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* on the Capital Programme. The Physical Programme Update report also presented to Members this month seeks approval to move this project to *Stage 3 – Committed* in line with the agreed three stage approval process for capital projects.

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

A draft equality screening has been carried out on the decision to erect dual language street signs en bloc within the Gaeltacht Quarter. The decision has been screened out as having minor impacts, but with the additional consultation actions set out in the previous report and agreed by members. The screening finds that the measures proposed align closely with the

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Council's Language and Good Relations strategies. In general, this equality screening indicates that there are sufficient safeguards, within the new procedure, to ensure there are no adverse impacts in relation to equality of opportunity and good relations issues.

3.17 The consultation with residents provided an opportunity for feedback of any equality or good relations issues associated with the proposed approach. Only one comment was received from a resident in Clovelly Street as discussed above at 3.8.

3.18 The consultation actions have now been carried out and results are being brought to committee for consideration."

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor I. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the matter in order to undertake further engagement with those communities on the boundary lines at interface areas.

Amendment

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

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2 of the report.

On a vote by show of hands, fifteen Members voted for the amendment and five against and it accordingly declared passed.

The amendment was put as the substantive motion and passed.

Culture Night

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter to enable a further report to be submitted on the cost to fund each of the three options.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Director of Property and Projects submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The Council’s Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council’s Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents requests for a stage movement approval under the Capital Programme, along with updates on capital letters of offer and contracts awarded.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Capital Programme - Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter project - Agree that this project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* with a maximum budget of up to £170,000.**
- **Leisure Transformation Phase 4 – note that an update on this will be part of the Party Group briefings being scheduled to inform work on future capital priorities.**
- **Capital Letters of Offer – to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer.**
- **Contracts awarded in Q2 2023/24 – to note the update in relation to contracts awarded.**

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Capital Programme - Proposed Movement

3.1 Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. Members are advised that the Property and Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.

3.2 Members have agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of

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approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme:

Project	Overview	Stage movement
Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter	The erection of dual language street signs en bloc within the Gaeltacht Quarter.	Move to Stage 3 – Committed

3.3 Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter

In March, SP&R Committee agreed to move the Gaeltacht Quarter Dual Language Street signs project to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted*. As per the three stage approvals process, an Outline Business Case has been completed and the team can now progress to delivery stage.

Members are asked to agree that this project is moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* with a budget of up to £170,000. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

3.4 Leisure Transformation – Phase 4

Members will recall that last month it was agreed to hold a series of party briefings to inform the future proposed workshop with Members on capital priorities. As Members are aware Space and Place Architects have been engaged by the Council to carry a review of current leisure provision across the city including a review of metrics such as facilities mix, usage, catchment, condition, revenue costs and current subvention levels of the leisure facilities which have not been taken forward as part of the leisure programme to date and also those independently managed community centres which have a focus on leisure. The review has also considered the impact of the LTP to date. Leisure has already been identified by Members as a key priority for the next few years and it is therefore proposed that an update on leisure and the S&P report will be part of the party group briefings to be held prior to the future capital workshop.

3.5 Capital Letters of Offer

Members are asked to note the update in relation to capital letters of offer from December 2023 to March 2024 at Appendix 1.

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3.6 Contracts Awarded

Members are asked to note the award of tenders for capital works including services related to works in Q2 2023/24 at Appendix 2.

3.7 Financial & Resource Implications

Financial – Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter – Maximum budget of £170,000.

Resources – Officer time to deliver as required

**3.8 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.

Assets Report

The Committee:

i) Station Street car park – Licence Renewal

approved the renewal of a Licence agreement from the Department for Communities to the Council in relation to the Council operated off-street car park at Station Street.

ii) Cherryvale Park – Licence for the siting of a container

approved the grant of a licence to Bredagh Gaelic Athletic Club for the siting of a container at Cherryvale Park.

iii) Conacre / Grazing Agreements

approved conacre licences for a 1-year term for grazing and grass cutting of agricultural Council lands at Glencairn, Lagan Meadows, Ballygomartin Road North, Clement Wilson Park, and Roselawn.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Contracts Report

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Table 1 below: and

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- approved the award of Single Tender Actions in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Table 2 below:

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Microsoft Enterprise Subscription Agreement (ESA)	Up to 3 years	£2,200,000	P Gribben	To support current technology and hardware used throughout the Council.
Provision of Fuels from CCS RM6177 – National Fuels 2 Framework Agreement for Gas Oil, Diesel, Kerosene, Gas Oil class D	Up to 2 years	£3,000,000	D Sales	The fuels are used throughout the Council sites to ensure the operation of vehicles and the heating of buildings
Roller shutter repairs/maintenance	Up to 4 years	£130,000	S Grimes	To support maintenance teams in maintaining roller shutter doors throughout Council estate.
Glazing repairs/maintenance	Up to 4 years	£60,000	S Grimes	To support maintenance teams in repairing windows throughout Council estate.
Occupational health services	2 + 1 year extension	£380,000	C Sheridan	Provision of occupational health services for staff
Building maintenance	Up to 4 years	£800,000	S Grimes	To support maintenance teams in maintaining wide range of buildings and assets throughout Council estate.
High level lighting repairs/maintenance	4 years	£600,000	S Grimes	To support maintenance teams in maintaining high level lighting at buildings, car parks,

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				pitches and other assets throughout Council estate.
Air conditioning systems repairs/maintenance	4 years	£400,000	S Grimes	To support maintenance teams in maintaining air conditioning systems at buildings throughout Council estate.
Provision of temporary agency workers (for specialist roles)	2 years	£2,000,000	John Tully	<p>Framework to support the current contract with Matrix SCM for circumstances where Matrix SCM Ltd cannot provide a suitable candidate for a required role. This tends to be for specialist/niche roles.</p> <p>Call off contracts will be awarded via the Crown Commercial Services framework RM6277 using direct award to local suppliers who have availability at the time.</p> <p>This will ensure this spend is regularised using a compliant procurement route with this spend historically been awarded under STAs.</p>

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Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason Code
Premier account and application support for Microsoft products	Up to 3 years	£210,000	S McNicholl	Microsoft support for all of the Council Microsoft products. Microsoft are the only supplier to offer the level of support the Council requires.	Microsoft	3

STA/ Direct Award Reasons

Reason Code	Reasons in line with Public Contract Regulations
1	No response following advertised procurement exercise
2	Creation or acquisition of a unique work of art or artistic performance
3	Competition is absent for technical reasons (no reasonable substitute exists)
4	The protection of exclusive rights, including intellectual property rights
5	Extreme urgency brought about by events unforeseeable by BCC, the time limits for a procurement cannot be complied with.
6	Products manufactured purely for the purpose of research, experimentation, study or development
7	Additional deliveries which are intended either as a partial or extended replacement of supplies or installations where a change of supplier would result in supplies of different technical characteristics causing incompatibility or disproportionate technical difficulties in operation and maintenance
8	Supplies quoted and purchased on a commodity market
9	Supplies or services on particularly time-limited advantageous terms e.g. supplier winding up its business activities
10	New works and services consisting of the repetition of similar works or services, provided that the possibility of a direct award is disclosed during the original tender process
11	Other – Reason not in line with Public Contract Regulations (PCR 2015)

West Belfast Well Being Hub

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 advise members the Notice of Motion referred back to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (SP&R) from March’s Council.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **note the report and agree on whether the request should be dealt with via the discretionary payments process or via the end of year finance report.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 A Notice of Motion was brought to the Standards and Business Committee on 29th August 2023 to explore all options to fund the West Well Being Suicide Prevention Centre, including using reserve funds, if necessary, to source up to £50,000 so the organisation can continue to deliver its full range of services for the remainder of 2023. It was proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor McCusker. The Standards and Business Committee agreed that, in the first instance, the motion be referred to SP&R.

3.2 At the SP&R committee meeting of 22nd September 2023, the Committee considered the motion and agreed that the request be considered as part of the Quarter 2 Financial Report.

3.3 The Quarter 2 Financial Report as presented to members at SP&R on 24th November 2023 highlighted the Q2 financial position and the forecast position of the council. Members agreed that reallocation of forecast underspends be considered as part of the year-end finance report.

3.4 The Committee’s attention was drawn to the motion calling for emergency funding of £50K to be allocated to West Wellbeing Suicide Prevention Centre which the Committee, at its meeting on 22nd September 2023, had agreed to consider as part of the Quarter 2 Financial Report. It was noted that requests of this nature were dependent upon funding being available for reallocation and the Director of Finance pointed out that the Quarter 2 finance report, which had been considered earlier in the meeting, had indicated that none was available. The

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request would, therefore, be dealt with as part of the year-end financial report.

- 3.5 Subsequently information was provided to the Chair of West Well Being advising of the Discretionary Payments Fund that was being reviewed, and in January 2024 the application pack was sent directly to the Chair. No application, or further correspondence, was received.
- 3.6 On this basis it was then recommend that the Notice of Motion was closed. Subsequently, at the Council meeting of 4th March 2024, it was agreed that the Motion would not be closed and referred to SP&R committee for further discussion.
- 3.7 Members are therefore asked on how they wish this motion to proceed, either:
1. Via the year-end reallocation process, which would be dependent on monies being available; or
 2. Via the Discretionary Payment Process which will open in June but will again be capped at £20k.

As per any funding, either option would require due diligence to be carried out prior to funding being provided.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.8 None at this stage

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

- 3.9 None.”

The Committee agreed that the request be dealt with via the discretionary payments process.

Equality and Good Relations

Language Strategy Action Plan

The Committee agreed to defer the report to enable the Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services to ascertain the possible cost implications of those additional actions which were raised at the meeting by Members.

Irish Language Policy

The Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide an update on the progress on the development of a Draft Irish Language Policy.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that Members:

- 1. Note the progress on the development of a Draft Irish Language Policy;**
- 2. Provide approval for the Draft Irish Language Policy to go out to public consultation;**
- 3. Agree the recommended next steps as set out at paragraph 4.0 and in particular to the development of an implementation plan aligned to budgetary considerations.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Work initially started on a draft Irish Language Policy in 2022. However following initial consultation it was considered more appropriate to focus on the work which had already begun on the Language Strategy Action Plan.

The draft Policy was discussed at the Irish Language Stakeholders Forum on 1st February 2024. An updated version of the draft Policy was brought to the Language Strategy Working Group on 9th February 2024 and then Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on 23rd February 2024.

3.2 Following feedback from stakeholders and CMT, the draft Policy was presented to SP&R on 23rd February 2024. At that meeting a number of amendments were proposed to the Policy. In addition, parties requested briefings on the draft policy in advance of it being brought back to SP&R for approval in advance of a formal public consultation.

A copy of the minutes of that meeting are attached at Appendix One.

3.3 The following issues were raised at the Party briefings:

- Potential cost implications, particularly in relation to the proposed amendment to the Policy proposed at SP&R Committee (the adoption of a new bilingual logo);
- The impact of any bilingual rebrand on staff; and
- The impact on equality and good relations (including community relations).

3.4 The amendments proposed at the Committee's meeting on 23rd February 2024 and subsequently adopted at Council, are as follows:

'Belfast City Council will adopt a new bilingual (Irish/English) corporate identity and the bilingual logo will become the new, proactive, de-facto council logo to be used comprehensively across all corporate branding. The English-only version of the logo will be available upon request. The same typeface and font-size will be used for both languages and the Irish text will be as visible and legible as the English text.'

Appendix 1:

To be added into Category 1(a): City Centre Public Realm Signage (street signposts)

To be added into Category 1(b) and 2(b): Dumps, Recycling Centres / stations

To be added into Category 3 (as being upgraded): Bins

Point 14 (page 3):

The Council will develop a list of key strategic Council documents and publications to proactively be made available in Irish. The 10 most common front-facing forms (online and hard copy) will be identified and translated into Irish for immediate use. The Council commits to publishing information leaflets, marketing and promotional materials bilingually in printed form and online. In instances where consultations are being conducted and the subject matter has the potential to impact the use of the Irish language or the Irish language community themselves, consultation questionnaires, engagement sessions and associated documents will be conducted proactively through the medium of Irish/bilingually as part of the active offer.

Point 18 (page 4):

The Council commits to publishing regular and often bilingual English / Irish content across all social media platforms. Information posts, marketing initiatives, community / service announcements will take place in Irish and in English. The relevant officer(s) will work in conjunction with the marketing team to develop a comprehensive strategy on how best to promote the Irish language across the Council's platforms. The Strategy will set out clear annual goals, increasing annually, around the % of social media posts produced.

To be added under 'Communications':

The Council will develop and maintain a functioning bilingual (Irish/English) website. A choice of languages, English/Irish, will first appear on the Council home page and users will be asked which language they wish to view the site in. The Council website will also develop, host and regularly update a specific Irish language page, with information about the Irish language services available from Council, information on classes throughout the city and on Irish medium education.'

- 3.5** Members are reminded that there are already commitments to some of these actions in the draft Language Strategy Action Plan. Consultation arrangements are dealt with through the Council's Equality Scheme which commits the Council to removing barriers to consultation. Therefore there are existing obligations mirroring some aspects of the proposal.

4.0 **Next Steps**

If Members are content for the Draft Irish Language to issue for public consultation, then officers recommend that the following steps be undertaken as part of the overall policy development process:

- i.** Officers will prepare a draft consultation document and associated questionnaire to issue alongside a draft EQIA for formal public consultation;
- ii.** staff will be consulted through the Council's Industrial Relations Framework as part of the consultation process;
- iii.** officers will undertake to develop indicative costings of the proposals whilst the public consultation is ongoing;

- iv. any identified costings to be presented to Committee once the Policy has been subject to consultation and a final policy position proposed;
- v. that the policy will be subject to a detailed implementation plan which will outline delivery of specific actions arising out of the policy.

5.0 Financial & Resource Implications

The financial implications of the implementation of this policy will need to be considered once a final policy position is proposed.

6.0 Equality or Good Relations / Rural Needs Implications

The draft Irish Language Policy is currently being subject to a Section 75 Equality Screening and Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

It is anticipated that an EQIA will be required and consulted upon along with the draft Policy.”

Moved by Councillor Nic Bhranair,
Seconded by Councillor R M Donnelly,

That the Committee agrees to adopt the recommendations as set out in the report.

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

The Committee noted that the Policy would subject to a full Equality Impact Assessment and consultation with the Trade Unions on the draft Policy through the Council's Industrial Relations Framework.

80th Anniversary of D-Day Landings

The Committee:

- i. approved the proposed programme of events to be organised by the Council over the 80th Anniversary period, on Wednesday 5th and Thursday 6th June 2024; and
- ii. approved costs in the region of £10,000 to deliver this programme.

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Operational Issues

**Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum
11th April 2024**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 11th April.

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

The Committee:

- Approved the use of the Banqueting Hall by Lord Mayor on 31st May 2024; and
- Approved the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1 below.
- Approved an additional request in relation to an organ donation organisation.

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2024 EVENTS						
Institute of Public Health	26 September 2024	Alcohol Awareness engagement to improve the understanding of the health savings of minimum unit pricing of alcohol in Northern Ireland. Numbers attending – 160	D	Charge £115	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No Hospitality
Ulster Supported Employment and Learning	9 October 2024	Graduation Ceremony celebrating a milestone for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) who completed their journey through	C & D	No charge - Complimentary as Charity	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer</i>

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
		the Skills for Life and Work programme. Numbers attending – 160				
Glór na Móna	19 October 2024	20th Anniversary Celebration- Drinks Reception, Dinner, Speeches and entertainment. Numbers attending – 350	C & D	No charge as charity	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No Charge Wine Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
2025 EVENTS						
The Scout Association, Northern Ireland Scout Council	3 January 2025	Chief Scout's Award and Queen's Scout Award Presentation – 120 young people receiving awards and attending a reception. Numbers attending - 450	B & D	No charge - Complimentary as Charity	Yes tea and coffee reception as charity	Approve No Charge Yes Hospitality £500 given to their chosen caterer for reception
Holocaust Memorial Day Trust	23 January 2025	Northern Ireland regional ceremony to mark Holocaust Memorial Day 2025 - a time for all to remember the millions of people killed in the Holocaust and subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur. The event is the official Northern	C	No (charity)	No hospitality (<i>funding provided</i>)	Approve No Charge No hospitality

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
		Ireland commemoration of the Holocaust. Numbers attending – 350				

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Baby Loss Awareness - Councillor Beattie to raise

The Committee agreed to mark Baby Loss Awareness Week, with the Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal Services to submit a report on the arrangements for the event, to include display of clay tiles and the illumination of the City Hall, to a future meeting of the Committee.

Use of City Hall - Launch of Orangefest – Councillor Bunting to raise

The Committee acceded to a request from the Belfast County Grand Lodge for the use of the City Hall for the launch of Orangefest.

Chairperson