

# **East Belfast Area Working Group**

Thursday, 5th June, 2025

## **MEETING OF THE EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP**

**HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND  
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Members present: Alderman Lawlor (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Copeland and Rodgers;  
The High Sheriff, Councillor McAteer;  
Councillors Bower, R. Brooks, de Faoite,  
P. Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn, Hanvey,  
Long, Maghie and McCormick.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;  
Ms. M. McKay, Enterprise and Business Growth Manager  
Ms. A. Diver, Climate Programme Manager;  
Mr. A. O'Neill, Assistant Estates Surveyor;  
Mr. S. McBride, City Protection Manager; and  
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

### **Election of Chairperson**

The Area Working Group noted that it was required to elect a Chairperson for the coming year.

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,  
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson and

Resolved – that Alderman Lawlor be elected to serve as Chairperson of the East Belfast Area Working Group until the date of the Annual Meeting of the Council in 2026.

### **Apologies**

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Councillors Abernethy, S. Douglas and Smyth.

### **Minutes**

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 6th March were an accurate record of proceedings.

### **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

**Presentation**

**EastSide Early Learning Community**

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. M. Vielman, Save the Children and Ms. G. Hamilton, EastSide Learning to the meeting.

Ms. Vielman and Ms. Hamilton presented the Working Group with an overview of the work and activity of the EastSide Early Learning Community (ELC) including:

- **EastSide ELC** – a collaboration of partners working in a systems change approach to improve early learning outcomes for children in East Belfast;
- **Partners** – Government departments, schools and nurseries, statutory services, community organisations, and children and families;
- **ELC toolkit** - created by the Dartington Service Design Lab and associates, Save the Children and its partners to enable ELC partnerships to improve early learning outcomes for children growing up in poverty across their area, and to support partnerships to develop and implement a strategy. The toolkit is underpinned by evidence and provides guidance and resources to inform an effective approach to improving children's early learning outcomes;
- **EastSide ELC Framework** – two high-level outcomes identified by partners based on the evidence, improved speech language and communication and improved social and emotional development; and
- **ELC Project Planning Group** – focused on local partners working directly with children and their families in East Belfast, promoting opportunities for relationship building and collaboration, test-and-learn initiatives and sharing with wider system, development of tools to support cohesive approach, securing funding to develop work, evaluation and strengthening the maturity of Early Years system in East Belfast.

The representatives concluded the presentation by providing the Working Group with an overview of the EastSide ELC's activities over recent years and its alignment with the Belfast Agenda.

During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to referral pathways for children experiencing poverty, engagement with educational bodies, funding, summer activities and support for parents.

The Chairperson thanked the representatives for their presentation, and they retired from the meeting.

**East Belfast Area Working Group  
Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

After discussion, the Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

**Physical Programme Update**

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

**“1. Introduction**

**The Council’s Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.**

**2. Recommendations**

**Members are asked to:**

- **Note the physical programme update for East Belfast including recently completed project at Appendix 1 - Sporting Pitches Investment 24/25- Henry Jones Playing Fields GAA Pitch and Playground Improvement Programme 24/25 - Grampian Avenue playground and Hosford Community Homes Inclusion Hub (UV);**
- **Consider request for site visit on the Strand Arts Centre project and to agree to invite the DfC Minister to visit; and**
- **Note the updated list of external capital funding opportunities attached at Appendix 2.**

**3. Local Investment Fund**

**LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG areas; and LIF 2 (2015 -2019) - £4m allocation with the East being allocated £1.127m under LIF1 and £1.2m under LIF2.**

**Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding spend to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 22 projects received In Principle support under LIF1 and LIF2, of which 19 have been completed and 1**

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

**project is at delivery stage and 1 project is at due diligence stage.**

LIF breakdown – East	LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	8 (80%)	£931,902	12 (100%)	£1,161,589
Number of Projects in Delivery	1(10%)	£30,000		
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects at Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	1 (10%)	£70,000		
<b>Total Number of Approved Projects</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>£1,031,902</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>£1,161,589</b>

**The table below provides an overview of progress and actions around the remaining live projects.**

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action / Recommendation
ELIF31	<b>Bloomfield FC, Clonduff FC, East Belfast FC and Dundela FC, Tullycarnet, Cregagh Wanderers, Nettlefield Multi-Sports and Bredagh GAC – storage facilities</b>	£65,000 (£30k plus £35k reallocation)	On Ground <i>Phase 1- complete</i> <i>Phase 2- ongoing</i>	<b>Phase 1</b> – Complete - Bloomfield FC, East Belfast FC, Tullycarnet FC and Cregagh Wanderers projects completed. <b>Phase 2</b> - Bredagh GAC - completed. Clonduff FC – awaiting to sign the funding agreement to enable delivery of the container. Nettlefield Multi-Sports – awaiting information, to be discuss/ sign-off at DD on 26 June. Dundela FC –funding agreement to be finalised. Club preferred that container will be delivered after the NRF pitch work is complete.	Continue engagement with the groups.
ELIF29	<b>Cycling Ireland</b>	£70,000	Due Diligence	Due Diligence stage ongoing. Proposed licence arrangements have been discussed (subject to group confirming proposed usage requirements). Group is currently reviewing the suitability of the site and Council awaits an update from the group on this matter.	Continue engagement with the group and key stakeholders.

#### **4. Belfast Investment Fund**

**Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250,000 investment from Council. In East Belfast, 9 projects have**

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

received an In-Principle funding commitment under BIF. There are 5 projects on the longer BIF list. Each of the In-Principle projects are taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. The table below provides a summary of BIF allocated projects i.e. project stage; project title; and the funding allocated.

***Summary of BIF allocated projects:***

<b>East</b>	Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£655k Stage 2—Lagan Village Youth & Community—no commitment Stage 1—East Belfast Mission; Belmont Bowling Club; Bloomfield Presbyterian Church; St. John's Orangefield, Church of Ireland, Tullycarnet Community Support Services—no commitment / on long list
<b>Outer East</b>	Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh Presbyterian Church—£382k

**The table below provides an overview of the remaining projects. Members are asked to note the actions and recommendations.**

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
<b>BIF12</b>	<b>Strand Arts Centre</b>	£6,782,069  LUF- £4,094,000 BIF- £1,550,000 HF- £255,000 (Development Grant), £768,069 (Delivery Grant) Several Trusts- £115,000	On Ground	<b>On Ground.</b> Works began on site in early January 2025 and are progressing well, with completion due 2nd quarter 2026. Discussion ongoing with DfC regarding potential additional funding.  Group requested/ offered on possible site visit to the Strand Arts Centre.	Continue engagement with the group and funders.  <b>AWG is asked to consider request for site visit on the project and to agree to invite the DfC Minister to the project.</b>
<b>BIF13</b>	<b>Bloomfield Community Association</b>	£715,009  BIF - £655,000 LIF - £60,009	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	The group is continuing to explore additional funding opportunities to meet the shortfall. An updated application to DfC has been prepared on the basis of updated costs. DfC Minister has visited the site on 15 May 2025. DfC funding commitment announced on 2 June 2025.	Continue engagement with the group.

**Outer East BIF Projects**

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/Recommendation
BIF38	Castlereagh Presbyterian Church	£382,000	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	<b>On Ground.</b> Works on site and progressing well, with completion due end July 2025.	Continued engagement with the group.

**5. Social Outcomes Fund**

**SOF is £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. There is one project under SOF for East Belfast - Eastside Visitor Centre – with an In-Principle funding commitment. Similar to BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award.**

Project	SOF Award	Status	Action/Recommendation
<b>EastSide Hotel &amp; Visitor Centre</b> <i>(links to NRF project)</i>	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising:</i> SOF- £700,000 NRF- £950,000 Group- £400k	An agreed combined project for the construction of a new hotel and extension of the current Eastside Visitors Centre. Design Team appointed and pre start meeting held on 15th May. Progressing with detailed design.	Continued engagement with the group.

**6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund**

**The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital fund with a current overall budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The overall NRF allocation for East was £2,351,551 and 4 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each NRF project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. Projects remaining at Stage 2 continue to have the support of a Client Manager for their proposals.**

***East Belfast – NRF overview***

<b>East</b>	Stage 3 - Eastside Container Hotel, Portview Exchange, Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park, Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road Stage 2 - Impact Belfast, Nevin Spence Centre Visitor Experience
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***East Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery***

Project name	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/Recommendation
<b>EastSide Hotel &amp; Visitor Centre</b>	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising:</i> SOF- £700k	Stage 3- Committed	An agreed combined project for the construction of a new hotel and extension of the current	Continued engagement with the group.

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

(links to SOF project)	NRF- £950k Group- £400k		Eastside Visitors Centre. Design Team appointed and pre start meeting held on 15th May. Progressing with detailed design.	
<b>Portview Exchange</b>	£600,000	Stage 3- Committed	Link to UV project. Awaiting decision on the business case from The Executive Office.	Continue engagement with the group.
<b>Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park</b>	£500,000	Stage 3- Committed	New planning application in process. The group submitted a funding application in March to secure the remaining budget required. Awaiting response until mid-summer.	Continue engagement with the group and integrated design team.
<b>Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road</b>	£300,000	Stage 3- Committed	Design team procurement planned for September 2025.	Continue engagement with the group.

**7. Capital Programme**

**The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building / buying new assets. Members are reminded of the 3-stage approval process in place for every project on council's Capital Programme, as agreed by SP&R Committee. The table below provides an update on current live projects in East Belfast. Members are asked to note the status and update.**

***East Belfast – Capital programme overview***

<b>Project</b>	<b>Status and update</b>
<b>New Crematorium</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Technical Design is complete. Procurement exercise for the main contractor has been completed. A review of the business case is being undertaken. A paper will be brought SP&R Committee outlining the current status and with key issues for Members consideration.
<b>Sporting Pitches Investment 24/25</b>	<i>Stage 3 Committed. Project completed.</i> Agreed at P&C Committee in June 2024. Works at various sites across the city including Henry Jones Playing Fields GAA Pitch.
<b>Playground Improvement Programme 2024/25</b>	<i>Stage 3 - Committed. Project completed.</i> The Programme for 2024/25 included improvement works at Grampian Avenue playground. The refurbished playground was opened on 3rd April 2025.
<b>Alleygating Phase 5 – City wide</b>	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Works progressing. Progress made with the commencement of the installation for Phase 5a. Members agreed in February to proceed with the gating order for Phase 5b, with an estimated completion timeline following the enactment of four to six months.
<b>Cremated Remains Burial Plots</b>	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Feasibility study has been completed. An Outline Business Case is being prepared.

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

<b>Sydenham Greenway</b>	<i>Stage 2- Uncommitted.</i> Business case to be worked up with DfI who are at design development stage for the greenway. Ongoing discussion with DfI regarding a partnership approach. DfI plan to deliver Phase 1A (Victoria Park to Inverary Community Centre) in current financial year. DfI are developing design options for the entrance to Victoria Park and asking to present these options to the next AWG. Suggestion for Council to deliver the 'feeder path' through Tommy Patton Millenium Park with DfI funding.
<b>Electric Vehicle Charging Network</b>	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Land Asset Assessment underway to identify a long list of sites suitable in principle. Progressing. Presentation at AWG.
<b>Historic Cemeteries</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries including Knock Cemetery, Clifton Street, Friar's Bush, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. Scoping work underway. Strategic case prepared and request at May SPR to move to Stage 2.
<b>Historic Tiled Street Signs</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Capital restoration programme for the historic Belfast tiled street signs across the city. Scoping of signs is continuing along with opportunities for external funding. Strategic case prepared and request at May SPR to move to Stage 2.
<b>Mobile Changing Places modular facility</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> This facility will be for use across the city. Specification developed and project now moving to procurement.
<b>Communications Boards</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Initial capital funding secured via UKSPF recouped monies for first phase of installation at 29 playground sites. Strategic case prepared for overall rollout and request at May SPR to move to Stage 2.
<b>Victoria Park – Basketball court upgrade</b>	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Upgrade to existing court. Meetings held with stakeholders and Elected Representatives to feed into design. Design work ongoing.
<b>Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East</b>	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan. Education Authority (EA) is continuing to develop a business case for capital funding for youth provision at the council owned Ballymacarrett site. Officers are continuing to liaise with EA on the way forward.
<b>Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan</b>	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to the Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East project.
<b>Belfast Bikes Expansion</b>	A new provider/ operator has been appointed. Currently in transition phase. The new scheme will be launched in Autumn.
<b>Parklands, Knocknagoney Dale - Knocknagoney Park Improvements</b>	This work is under S76 Developer Contributions for Open Space. Tree planting and installation of additional park seating is programmed for summer 2025.
<b>Lands at Castlehill Manor - Belmont Park Improvements</b>	This work is under S76 Developer Contributions for Open Space. Additional sensory play equipment to be installed at Belmont Park playground in Autumn 2025.

**8. Externally Funded Programmes**

**The Council is the delivery partner for a number of government departments on significant capital investment**



**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

programmes, namely the Urban Villages Initiative (UV) funded by the Executive Office, and number of schemes with DfC. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to East Belfast.

**Urban Villages Initiative**

Project	Status and update
Hosford Community Homes Inclusion Hub	Project completed. Official launch completed 14 May 2025.
Titanic People Exhibition	<i>Project underway.</i> The project is expected to complete in late Summer 2025 (September), launch expected in Autumn 2025.
Portview Exchange <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i>	<i>Business case stage.</i> Awaiting decision on the business case from The Executive Office.

**PEACEPLUS – Capital Project**

Members are asked to note updates on the capital project under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

***East Belfast – PEACEPLUS LAP Capital Project overview***

Project	Status and update
Sanctuary Theatre	Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Refurbishment of the Sanctuary Theatre at Castlereagh Street. The procurement for the design team is underway and anticipate that a design team will be appointed by early Summer 2025.

**9. Capital Funding Opportunities**

Members are asked to note the updated version of the list of external capital funding opportunities attached at Appendix 2 which may be of assistance to groups and clubs.”

The Director of Property and Projects highlighted the following recently completed projects:

- Henry Jones Playing Fields GAA Pitch (Sporting Pitches Investment 2024/25);
- Grampian Avenue Playground (Playground Improvement Programme 2024/25); and
- Hosford Community Homes and Inclusion Hub.

She provided the Working Group with further detail in relation to the remaining live projects under the Local Investment Fund and the Belfast Investment Fund and highlighted a recent announcement by the Minister for Communities that the Department

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

for Communities had committed to provide funding in relation to the Bloomfield Community Association redevelopment project.

In relation to the Strand Arts Centre, the Director advised that officers continue to engage with the Department for Communities in respect of potential funding towards the project and suggested that the Working Group undertake a site visit to the Strand Arts Centre, and to extend an invitation to the Minister for Communities.

The Director of Property and Projects further suggested that it would be beneficial to Members for the Working Group to undertake site visits to some of the other completed and ongoing projects and to consider the potential to hold a future meeting at an appropriate site within East Belfast.

She drew Members attention to the External Funding and Social Investment Opportunities for Capital Projects as outlined in Appendix 2 of the report and encouraged Members to share the information provided with relevant groups.

In response to a Member's question on the Bloomfield Community Association project, the Director advised that the funding recently announced by the Department for Communities would be additional funding.

The Working Group:

- i. noted the Physical Programme update for East Belfast;
- ii. noted the updated list of external capital funding opportunities, as outlined in Appendix 2 of the report;
- iii. agreed to undertake a site visit to the Strand Arts Centre and to extend an invitation to the Minister for Communities; and
- iv. agreed that officers would explore the potential to hold a future meeting of the Working Group at an appropriate site within East Belfast.

**Enterprise and Business Growth Support Update**

The Working Group considered the undernoted report:

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

**The purpose of this report is to update members on the business support available to constituents and businesses in their areas including Go Succeed – the regional initiative to support business start-up and growth that is being led by Belfast City Council on behalf of the 11 councils.**

**2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 Members are asked to:**

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

- Note and endorse the progress to date on the delivery of the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed) in East Belfast and beyond, with the objective of driving more and better businesses
- Promote opportunities for business support to constituents where relevant and appropriate
- Provide recommendations to Enterprise and Business Growth team on community and stakeholder engagement in the East Belfast area

**3.0     Main Report**

**3.1     Go Succeed (Enterprise Support Service)**

The Go Succeed service has now been operational for around eighteen months and has reached thousands of potential entrepreneurs and businesses across Eastern Ireland.

By way of background, Belfast City Council led on a successful funding application to UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). This provided £17 million of support for the period November 2023 to March 2025; £12 million programme delivery and £5 million for small grants. Following receipt of the funding agreement in September 2023, the service became operational in November 2023.

Belfast City Council, as lead for the service, has now secured additional funding via an application to UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) of £9.2 million for the 2025/2026 financial year, ensuring continuity of the service. The focus over the next year, alongside delivery of the service, will be working to secure a more permanent funding source.

The service aims to be the go-to source for expert business advice across the region. It represents the councils' collective response to our statutory responsibility and offers a set of connected enterprise support services where individuals, entrepreneurs or businesses can access a continuum of support to meet their needs, depending on their stage of development.

The key objectives of the model are to:

- Nurture a strong entrepreneurial culture, recognising enterprise as a viable career option and/or a route out of economic inactivity
- Enable a vibrant and productive business base across Eastern Ireland

**East Belfast Area Working Group  
Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

- Increase the proportion of 'innovation-active' businesses in NI and embed this more firmly with enterprise/ start-up agenda
- Diversify the representation amongst those supported by the enterprise and innovation ecosystem
- Delivery a service designed with the user in mind
- Focus on adding value to existing support available in the ecosystem
- Providing regional coverage while ensuring that delivery reflects local differences/nuances.

Go Succeed provides a continuum of support from early-stage enterprise awareness through to starting, growing, and scaling a business. The concept was that the service would help people get the right support at the right time – and would also help maximise other available funding streams by helping businesses to navigate the complex support ecosystem.

The service has been established to deliver across three core areas – Start, Grow and Scale – with tailored support for clients aligned with their growth ambitions.

- **Start:** this element of the service aims to identify individuals with entrepreneurial intentions as well as reaching those individuals who do not have an intention to start a business but could be encouraged to do so. There is specific, targeted support for a range of underrepresented groups. The menu of support available includes masterclasses, peer support networks and 1-1 mentoring
- **Grow:** this element of the service provides support for existing businesses. 1-1 mentoring is allocated based on the business' potential to grow and innovate. Masterclass and peer support network activity are also provided to support existing businesses to make key decisions on issues such as entering new markets or accessing finance for growth
- **Scale:** this part of the service is geared to supporting start-ups that have the potential to go on and generate at least £1m in revenue after 3 years. Support is delivered through 1-1 mentoring which aims to enable access to finance or further support through Invest NI, Catalyst or others.

In addition to the tiered menu of support, small grants of up to £3,000 (up to 50% of capital costs) are available to entrepreneurs or businesses accessing support through the service who demonstrate growth potential.

**East Belfast Area Working Group  
Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

The delivery is underpinned by investments such as a wide-reaching marketing and communications campaign; a call handling service to deal with phone enquiries as well as an online portal to deal with online requests for support and a regional CRM system to enable tracking of client engagement across the service.

**Belfast Performance Update**

Since the service launched in November 2023, we have achieved the following by way of Belfast performance:

- **4,059 individuals 'reached' through a range of community outreach activities. This has included:**
  - **Sector specific events and self-employment academies for those in the hair and beauty industry including delivery of aspirational workshops and hands-on mentoring support for over 80 newly qualified individuals.**
  - **Delivery of a female-focused 'inspiring enterprise' event for a group of 100 female entrepreneurs providing practical support to starting or growing their enterprise.**
  - **Working with apprenticeship providers across Belfast to deliver aspirational workshops to 100s of 16–18-year-olds encouraging entrepreneurship as a very real and achievable pathway for consideration.**
  - **Facilitation of the '22 under 22' initiative, designed to unearth, recognise and fast track 22 exceptional potential entrepreneurs in the City.**
  - **Increasing awareness of enterprise among young people at the Young Enterprise Big Market event in St George's Market in December 2025.**
- **1528 Belfast entrepreneurs supported through start up activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks) with 419 (27%) of these entrepreneurs being from the East Belfast area**
- **888 Belfast businesses supported through growth activity (1-1 mentoring, masterclasses, peer support networks) with 306 (34%) of these businesses being based in the East Belfast area.**

**315 Belfast businesses have accessed Go Succeed Grants since the launch in February 2024, drawing down over £1 million. These grants have enabled businesses to purchase capital and/or revenue items which will support their future growth plans.**

The Enterprise and Business Growth team would welcome any guidance from working group members to increase engagement in the East Belfast area. Constituent referrals or enquiries can be sent to the Enterprise and Business Growth team via [gosucceed@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:gosucceed@belfastcity.gov.uk)

### **3.2 Go Social (Social Economy Support)**

Developing the social economy sector has been a priority of the NI Executive for some time and Belfast City Council is aware of the important and unique contribution which the sector can, and does, make to the local economy. In the 2024/25 year the demand for Belfast City Council's 'Go Social' programme, aimed at encouraging more start-ups within the local Social Economy, has increased with over 60 individuals starting their social enterprise/cooperative.

Via our dedicated 'Go Social' service we offer enhanced support to those thinking of starting up a new business as a social enterprise or co-operative and we encourage existing SE businesses to join our social economy register to help us on our journey to grow the sector. Go Social support is open to individuals, groups and existing organisations seeking to set up, or transition to, a social enterprise or cooperative model.

We recognise setting up a social enterprise or cooperative can be difficult due to navigating complex legal structures and governance along with tackling a social cause or issue. Our Go Social support helps clients via specialist 1-1 mentoring support, access to networking opportunities and best practice visits as well as peer to peer support.

As part of our investment in the sector, Belfast City Council also deliver the Social Economy Incentive Fund which provides grants to new or developing social economy businesses in early growth stages. Each year we launch the fund in September with grants provided for up to £10,000, applications are assessed by a panel with shortlisted applicants invited to pitch. The fund is available to Belfast-based social enterprises and co-operatives, we would encourage anyone interested to sign up to our enterprise and business growth newsletter to be the first to hear about the fund launching again in September.

The Enterprise and Business Growth team would welcome any guidance from working group members to increase engagement in the East Belfast area. Constituent referrals or

enquiries can be sent to the Enterprise and Business Growth team via [gosucceed@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:gosucceed@belfastcity.gov.uk)

### **3.3 Test trading**

The Enterprise and Business growth team also offer fully funded opportunities for those receiving support through our services to test their products or services at St George's Market.

This opportunity gives businesses starting out, or those who have been in business for less than two years, the opportunity to test trade their products at our thriving, award winning St George's market.

Taking part is free of charge, and businesses have the opportunity to test trade up to six times – a fantastic opportunity to gain real customer feedback, insights from other traders and hone their sales pitch.

The Enterprise and Business Growth team would welcome any guidance from working group members to increase engagement in the East Belfast area. Constituent referrals or enquiries can be sent to the Enterprise and Business Growth team via [gosucceed@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:gosucceed@belfastcity.gov.uk)

### **4.0 Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no financial or resource implications for members to consider.

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

**Equality impact assessments for all of the above services have been completed."**

The Working Group:

- i. noted and endorsed the progress to date on the delivery of the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed) in East Belfast and beyond with the objective of driving more and better businesses;
- ii. agreed that Members would promote opportunities for business support to constituents where relevant and appropriate; and
- iii. agreed that Members would engage further with the Enterprise and Business Growth team in relation to increasing community and stakeholder engagement in East Belfast.

**East Belfast Area Working Group**  
**Thursday, 5th June, 2025**

**EV Charging Point Network Project Update**

The Climate Programme Manager, along with the Assistant Estates Surveyor, presented the Working Group with an overview of the work which had been undertaken to date in relation to potential sites within the Council's estate where Electric Vehicle (EV) charging stations could be installed.

The Climate Programme Manager reminded the Working Group that, at its meeting in August, 2024, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed that officers progress with phase 1 (Land Assets Assessment) and phase 2 (Commercial Agreements) of the draft Low Emission Vehicle (LEV) Strategy, with the aim of assisting the Council in procuring public charge points to enable residents, visitors, and businesses to transition to electric vehicles.

She provided the Working Group with an update in relation to existing EV charging points currently in operation on Council sites and the work that had been undertaken to assess Council sites in order identify suitable locations for further charging points. She reported that 44 sites had been identified overall in phase 1 as suitable in principle, however, those identified sites and the progress in respect of the EV network would be dependent on further engagement with stakeholders.

She outlined the next steps for the EV Charging Point Network Project which included exploring operating models, financial modelling, market testing for potential charge point operators, and equality and rural needs screening.

The Assistant Estates Surveyor concluded the presentation by outlining the 20 sites that had been identified as suitable in principle within East Belfast.

The Working Group thanked the officers for the presentation and noted the update which had been provided.

**Ballyhackamore Parklet Update**

The City Protection Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the work that had been undertaken to date in respect of the proposal by Councillor Flynn for the installation of a parklet on vacant Council land in the Ballyhackamore area.

He advised the Working Group that the project was currently at a concept stage and presented, for the Members information, two concept designs for a potential parklet.

It was reported that the proposal would be considered by officers at a Council Assets Board meeting in June, 2025 to identify potential costings and feasibility, and that any project relating to capital would be subject to the Council's capital processes including Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approval.

The Working Group welcomed the update which had been provided and agreed to endorse the proposal for a parklet in line with the draft layout 1 design.

Chairperson