

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 3rd December, 2025

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

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

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy; Mrs. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and Development; Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development; Mr. C. Campbell, Divisional Solicitor; Ms. C. Cassin, Markets Development Manager; Mr. F. Grant, Operations Development Manager; Ms. C. Keenan, Programme Lead, Enterprise Support Service; and Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 5th and 26th November, 2025 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st December, 2025, subject to the minute of 5th November, under the heading “Housing Association Grant (HAG) Update”, being amended to provide that a report be brought back to the Committee at its meeting in January to outline the potential impact of the reduction to the HAG rate on the delivery of social housing.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Black declared an interest in relation to item 2(b) “Sandy Row/Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Fund Update” in that she was the Manager of the Grosvenor Community Centre and left the meeting whilst this item was under discussion.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

Assembly Rooms Cluster Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee’s consideration a report which provided an update on various matters associated with the Assembly Rooms Cluster which included the Assembly Rooms, part of Donegall Street carpark site, 5-9 North Street and Braddell’s Building.

The Director highlighted that the Assembly Rooms had been selected for inclusion in the World Monument Fund’s (WMF) ‘2025 World Monuments Watch’ programme. It was reported that the WMF’s biennial programme selected twenty-five treasured heritage sites of significance across the world which faced urgent challenges with the aim to raise awareness, mobilise resources, and implement conservation initiatives. She informed the Committee that, following discussions between the Council and the WMF, the WMF had offered to work in partnership with the Council to procure and fund a Conservation Management Plan (CMP) to guide the repair and conservation of the Assembly Rooms as a keystone for heritage-led regeneration in the area and ensure the preservation and adaptation for public benefit. The Committee was advised that the Council and the WMF had proposed to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding which would formally agree the intention to work together towards a common goal.

The Director also provided an update on the Visioning and Future Use Strategy for the Assembly Rooms and adjacent sites. She reminded the Committee that, following agreement by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at its meeting in October, 2025, a workshop would be held in January, 2026, for Members to commence the process for the consideration of the future uses of the Assembly Rooms Cluster.

In respect of planning for the wider site, the Committee was also reminded that the draft Supplementary Planning Guidance for Development Opportunity Area Cathedral and North-East Quarter had been approved by the Council on 1st October, 2025, and had opened for consultation in November, 2025, for a twelve-week period.

During discussion, the Director of City Regeneration and Development answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the condition of the Assembly Rooms Cluster and future redevelopment.

In response to a Member’s question on the prioritisation of proposals, the Director advised that, as previously agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, the

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Regeneration Framework would be used as a tool to support and assist in the prioritisation of catalytic regeneration projects, subject to final approval by Members.

In relation to the potential partnership between the Council and the WMF, a Member requested that Party Group Leaders be provided with a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the update on the completion of the acquisition of the Assembly Rooms and adjacent properties (Assembly Rooms Cluster) in the context of the regeneration and development of the city;
- ii. noted the ongoing liaison with the WMF; the pending offer of funding for certain essential works and a Conservation Management Plan; the intention to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to underpin the intentions of working together for a common goal;
- iii. agreed that Party Group Leaders be provided with a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding;
- iv. noted the update on the Visioning and Future Use Strategy and the pending workshop for Members in January 2026 to commence the process for the consideration of the future uses of the Assembly Rooms; and
- v. noted the update on planning in respect of the wider site and the live consultation on the draft Supplementary Planning Guidance for the Development Opportunity Area for North-East and Cathedral Quarter.

Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Scheme Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update in relation to the Department for Communities funded revitalisation schemes for Sandy Row and the Grosvenor Road.

She reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 10th September, 2025, the Committee had agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to request support for independent businesses located on Great Victoria Street. She drew the Members' attention to a response received from the Minister which recognised the challenges faced by local businesses during the major infrastructure works associated with the Belfast Grand Central Station, however, outlined that, as public realm works on Great Victoria Street had not yet been scheduled, there was currently no strong rationale for a revitalisation scheme to be brought forward for the area.

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Proposal

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Groogan,

Resolved - that the Committee agrees to invite the Northern Ireland Food To Go Association to present at a future meeting on their work and in relation to the businesses which they represent within the Great Victoria Street area.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the update on the Department for Communities funded Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Schemes;
- ii. noted a response from the Minister for Communities regarding support for independent businesses on Great Victoria Street; and
- iii. agreed to invite the Northern Ireland Food To Go Association to present at a future meeting.

Local Growth Fund Update

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update in relation to the current position of the Local Growth Fund and the potential implications for the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed).

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in November, 2025, it had received a performance update on Go Succeed, which was a support service led by Belfast City Council on behalf of the eleven Councils across Northern Ireland to support potential entrepreneurs and businesses. It was reported that the service had received £17million of funding from the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) for 2023-2025, which had been extended for a further year with an additional £9.2million awarded for 2025/26.

The Director of Economic Development highlighted that, from March, 2026, the UK Government's SPF, the principal funder of the service, would be replaced by a Local Growth Fund (LGF) and that, given the success of Go Succeed, there was concern in relation to how the new LGF would operate and the potential impact on the service. He advised that officers would continue to engage with the UK Government, regional government officials and the Northern Ireland Executive in respect of funding. The Director also highlighted the ongoing work by officers to explore potential opportunities to secure support for the service beyond March, 2026, whilst recognising current budget pressures.

The Programme Lead, Enterprise Support Service, presented the Committee with an overview of the service which included its ambition, pillars, focus on inclusion, impact of the service in Belfast and the future funding position.

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During discussion, several Members highlighted the success of Go Succeed and expressed concern in relation to the LGF's potential capital and revenue split and the potential implications for the service going forward.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the update on the Local Growth Fund and the potential implications for the Enterprise Support Service (Go Succeed); and
- ii. agreed to support the ongoing work to explore opportunities to secure continued support for the Enterprise Support Service, which would take account of the changes in the external funding environment and the pressures on existing budgets.

St George's Market Quarterly Performance Update

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update in relation to the performance of St George's Market for Quarter 2 of 2025/26, the ongoing work regarding investment, development and marketing, market stall and venue hire fees, engagement with traders in relation to storage and operational matters, and the 2025 Christmas Twilight and Continental Markets.

In relation to market stalls and venue hire, the Director drew Members' attention to a revised fee structure, as set out within the report, which recommended an increase to stall and venue hire fees, effective from April, 2026.

The Committee also considered an application for an external market to be held as part of the Roots Market and Trade Fair at the ICC Belfast on 16th and 17th January, 2026.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development and the Markets Development Manager answered a number of questions from Members in relation to the engagement with traders.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the update against priority business plan activities and the financial performance of St George's Market for Quarter 2 of 2025/26;
- ii. noted the update on the engagement with traders on storage and other operational matters;
- iii. approved an increase to the stall and venue hire fees with effect from April, 2026, as outlined within the report; and

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- iv. approved a licence for an external market to be held as part of the Roots Market and Trade Fair at the ICC Belfast on 16th and 17th January, 2026.

Belfast Zoo Quarterly Performance Report

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update on the performance of Belfast Zoo for Quarter 2 of 2025/26 which included visitor and education services, animal collection, marketing and events, and financial performance.

The Committee noted the update on the performance of Belfast Zoo for Quarter 2 of 2025/26.

Belfast Bikes Quarterly Performance Report

The Director of Economic Development provided the Committee with an update on the performance of the Belfast Bikes Scheme for Quarter 2 of 2025/26 which included the operator contract, operational performance, marketing activity, expansion of the scheme and sponsorship.

During discussion, the Director answered a number of questions from Members in relation to the expansion of the scheme.

After discussion, the Committee noted the update provided in respect of the Belfast Bikes Scheme performance for Quarter 2 of 2025/26.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 2 2025/26

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided an update on the Committee's financial position for Quarter 2 of 2025/26.

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Notice of Motion - Priority for our Local Traders

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 20th November, 2025, the Standards and Business Committee had referred the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Doran and seconded by Alderman McCoubrey, to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee for its consideration:

"This Council notes the significant contribution that local independent traders, small businesses, and market stallholders make to Belfast's economy, tourism offering and community life.

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This Council further notes that major Council organised events such as the Belfast Maritime Festival, Christmas Market, and other seasonal events attract large crowds and generate substantial commercial opportunities.

Accordingly, this Council resolves that for all Belfast City Council organised or Council supported events involving trader or vendor pitches, priority shall be given to traders who are residents or ratepayers within the Belfast City Council area. Council officers should develop and publish a transparent process for allocating pitches which:

- gives first refusal to eligible local traders before any external operators are invited;
- ensures fair opportunity across different sectors and communities; and
- supports the Council's commitment to local economic growth and inclusive prosperity.”

During discussion, a Member welcomed the motion and highlighted the need to support the city's local independent traders and small businesses.

In response to a Member's query in respect of the legal implications of the motion, the Divisional Solicitor advised that he would consider the legal position and that further information would be brought back to the Committee.

After discussion, the Committee noted that the motion had been received and agreed that a report would be brought back which would outline a detailed consideration of the motion, including potential legal implications.

Strategic and Operational Issues

Notices of Motion Quarterly Update

The Committee considered a report which provided a quarterly update on the Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that it was responsible for, in line with the agreement of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that all Committees receive regular updates.

The report outlined that there was currently nine Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which the Committee was responsible for, and recommended the closure of the following motion:

- Translink - Night-time provision of services.

The report also provided an update on the eight motions which remained open.

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In response to an issue raised by a Member in respect of the update provided on the Tourism Street Signage (Enlightenment Period) motion, the Strategic Director of Place and Economy undertook to obtain further information regarding the progress of the work.

The Committee:

- i. noted the updates to all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that it was responsible for, as outlined in Appendix 1 of the report; and
- ii. agreed to the closure of the motion 'Translink - Night-time provision of services', as outlined in section 3.3 and Appendix 1 of the report.

Chairperson