

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 2nd December, 2025

MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Cobain (Chairperson); and Councillors Abernethy, Black, Bower, Brooks, Bradley, Bunting, Canavan, Collins, M. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, Flynn, Garrett, Magee, Maghie, Murray, McKeown and Verner.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services; Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services; Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services; Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet, Open Spaces and Streetscene; Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services; and Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 4th and 18th November were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st December.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Black, Bradley, Canavan, Doran and Verner declared interests in item 4d, 'Community Support Plan – Large Grant Funding Programme', in that they worked for organisations which were in receipt of funding under the Community Support Plan.

Councillors Canavan and Doran declared interests in item 5e, 'Winter Festival 2025', in that they worked for organisations which had applied for funding under the terms of the fund.

Councillor Bradley declared an interest also in item 4c, 'DfC Welfare Reform Mitigations Advice Funding 2026/27', in that she worked for an organisation in receipt of advice funding under the scheme.

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in item 5d. 'All-Party Reference Group on Older People – Update', in that his employer had been referenced within the report.

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With the exception of item 4d, none of the items mentioned became the subject of discussion nor debate and the Members were not required to leave the meeting whilst those matters were under consideration.

Donegall Pass Residents' Association

Further to its decision of 4th November, the Committee welcomed Mr. E. Purvis and Mr. P. McDonald, representing the Donegall Pass Residents' Association, who were in attendance to outline concerns in relation to antisocial behaviour in the vicinity of the Reverend Robert Bradford Memorial Park. Mr. Purvis stated that there had been recent reports of individuals loitering at the playpark and that there was evidence of drug use at the site. As a result, parents of local children had been reluctant to permit them to use the facility and the community was seeking the Council's support to address the issue. He suggested that the Council might consider the use of CCTV as a method to deter antisocial activity, as well as further measures to reassure local users of the playpark

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting that would examine the feasibility of installing CCTV across all parks and playgrounds. That report would consider also the projected costs, a comparison of antisocial behaviour statistics across Belfast, data protection considerations and the ability of the PSNI to monitor CCTV, should cameras be installed.

Queen's University – Community Archaeology Project at Woodvale Park

Subsequent to its decision of 18th November, the Committee welcomed Dr. H. Montgomery, Project Manager with the Community Archaeology Programme Northern Ireland (CAPNI), who was in attendance to provide an overview of the recent project which had been undertaken at Woodvale Park.

Dr. Montgomery explained that the project had been delivered in conjunction with The Queen's University of Belfast and had involved pupils from seven local primary schools as well as community volunteers. She reported that pupils had uncovered the remains of Woodvale House, which had been the home of the Reverend Octavius Glover, who sold the land to the then Belfast Corporation in 1888. The excavation had provided pupils with an opportunity to study history in depth and to take part in workshops at the Spectrum Centre. She added that the project had given the community a sense of ownership of their shared heritage, whilst giving young people an insight into local history.

The Committee noted the contents of the presentation.

Notice of Motion - Sustainable Burial Options

The Committee was advised that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 20th November, had referred the following notice of motion, which had been moved by Councillor Abernethy and seconded by Councillor T. Brooks, to the Committee for its consideration:

“That this Council recognises the significant environmental impact of traditional burial and cremation practices, including high carbon emissions,

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chemical pollution, and long-term land use challenges, as highlighted in the All-Party Group on Climate Action's briefing paper 'Beyond Burial and Cremation'.

This Council further acknowledges the growing public interest in more sustainable, dignified, and low-carbon alternatives to conventional practices – such as natural (green) burials, tree pod interment, and other emerging end-of-life methods.

Natural burial, which involves the use of biodegradable materials, avoids embalming, and often takes place in woodland or meadow settings with minimal ongoing maintenance, has already been successfully implemented elsewhere as a simple and ecologically restorative option.

Accordingly, the Council agrees to:

1. Explore the feasibility of providing sustainable burial options within existing or new cemeteries, including the designation of natural burial grounds or woodland burial areas within our district; and
2. Provide an update report on any identified legislative, planning, infrastructural, or regulatory barriers that may impact the delivery of these sustainable end-of-life options locally. "

Accordingly, it was

Moved by Councillor Abernethy,
Seconded by Councillor Maghie and

Resolved - that the Committee agrees to adopt the motion and agrees further that a report in this regard be submitted initially for consideration by the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Development Working Group.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the report associated with the following item 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 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 Committee was advised that content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

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Financial Reporting - Quarter 2

The Committee noted the contents of a report in relation to the above-mentioned matter, together with the details contained within the associated financial pack.

City of Sport 2026 - Belfast Candidature Bid Update

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 5th November, 2024, it had agreed that Belfast would apply to ACES, a Belgian-based non-profit association, for designation as a European City of Sport in 2026 and had approved a budget of £30,000 for that purpose, 50 percent of which would be met by the Council's leisure provider, Greenwich Leisure Limited.

The Committee was informed that, after a thorough and in-depth assessment process, Belfast had been awarded European City of Sport status for 2026, which was in recognition of the City's commitment to sport, physical activity and community wellbeing. The judges, it was reported, had been most impressed by Belfast's longer-term investment strategy to transform health and wellbeing and how the City had reflected the core values of the organising body.

The Committee congratulated officers on the work which had been undertaken in achieving the award and approved the attendance of the Deputy Lord Mayor and Council officials at the ACES Awards Gala event in the European Parliament in Brussels on 11th December. It was noted that the costs associated with travel, accommodation and subsistence for attendance at the ceremony had been included within the original budget allocated for the bid.

Department for Communities (DfC) Welfare Reform Mitigations Advice Funding 2026/27

The Committee considered a report relating to the current arrangements for the allocation of the Welfare Reform Mitigations Extension funding, which was delivered as part of the Advice Services element of the Community Support Plan Letter of Offer from DfC. The report contained a range of options for consideration to oversee the future allocation of the fund from April 2026, or until the funding stream had ended.

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report to enable officers to engage directly with DfC to ascertain if it could administer the fund directly to organisations; and establish how the DfC would manage the transitional process once the funding had expired in 2028. A further report would be submitted to Committee outlining the outcomes of the above-mentioned considerations.

Community Support Plan - Large Grant Funding Programme

(Councillors Black, Bradley, Canavan, Doran and Verner left the meeting whilst this matter was under consideration).

The Committee was reminded that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting on 25th June, had agreed, as part of the Community Support Plan, to establish a Large Grant Funding Programme for 2026/29, which would replace the former

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Capacity and Revenue Fund. Accordingly, the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services outlined the main aspects of a report which provided an overview of the number of applications which had been received for support under the new funding programme. It was noted that the number of applications, together with the level of funding requested, had exceeded significantly the original amount allocated within the budget for the programme.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed that it be referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for its consideration at its meeting on 19th December.

(Councillors Black, Bradley, Canavan, Doran and Verner returned to the meeting at this point).

Lagan Valley Regional Park – Funding Update

The Committee considered a report regarding the above-mentioned matter and was reminded that, at its meeting on 7th October, it had received a presentation from representatives of the Lagan Valley Regional Park (LVRP) at which a number of future funding models had been outlined.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed to recommend that a sum of £88,000 be allocated within the Council's estimates of expenditure for 2026/27 for LVRP. It was noted that the 2026/27 contribution would be at the same level as allocated in 2025/26, and that further discussions would be undertaken with Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council regarding any revised funding model.

Operational Issues

Alley Gate Replacement Keys – Update

At its meeting on 7th October, the Committee had noted the contents of a report which had outlined the costs incurred in providing replacement alley gate keys to local residents. Arising from discussion, the Committee had agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting that would outline the number of replacement keys which had been issued, together with income received by the Council in charging residents for keys over the past 24 months.

The Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reported that, from September 2023 to September 2025, 166 replacement keys had been provided, in respect of which a charge of £25 per key had been levied on individuals. Over that period, the Council had generated an income of £4,150, whilst the actual cost incurred at source in purchasing the keys had been £2,490. The remaining amount of £1,660 had been added for administrative purposes.

A Member suggested that the charge made for replacement keys was somewhat onerous and that the Council should consider introducing, on a trial basis, a scheme whereby no charges be made for replacement keys. It was added that such a scheme might run throughout 2026 and that, at its conclusion, a further report be submitted to enable the Committee to consider the costs incurred and examine the matter further.

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Moved by Councillor Canavan,
Seconded by Councillor R-M Donnelly and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees that no charges be made for the cost of replacement keys for a period of one-year (commencing January 2026) and that a further report in this regard be considered at the Committee's meeting in December 2026.

**Belfast City Airport –
Rook Management at Victoria Park**

The Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that, over the past number of years, it had agreed that the Council would enter into legal agreements with the George Best Belfast City Airport to permit access to Victoria Park to facilitate the management of rook nests. The management of the nests was one of the airports obligations under its Wildlife Hazard Assessment and Civil Aviation Authority Licence, which required the airport to identify and manage risks to aircrafts.

The Committee was advised that a further request had been submitted by the airport seeking to extend the arrangements in order to disperse, reduce and discourage rooks from settling in areas which had been used in previous years.

The Committee acceded to the request and granted the airport access to Victoria Park (under licence) to facilitate rook management and, for that purpose, that the Council would enter into a three-year legal agreement, subject to the drawing-up of appropriate terms and conditions.

**Lenadoon and Suffolk Playing Fields –
Developer Contributions**

The Committee noted the contents of a report which outlined the work which had been completed at the Lenadoon and Suffolk Playing Fields by way of a developer contribution.

All-Party Reference Group on Older People

The Committee noted the contents of the report in respect of the above-mentioned matter and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Reference Group of 16th September.

Winter Festival 2025

The Committee was reminded that the Council, at its meeting on 3rd November, had amended the minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 24th October, under the heading 'Requests for Funding', to reflect that a one-week expression of interest exercise be undertaken to provide funding in the sum of £17,000 to one organisation within the north, south, east and west of the City for the purposes of delivering a Winter Festival during December 2025. In addition, the Committee had agreed to delegate authority to the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services to award funding to the successful organisations, subject to assessment and due diligence.

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The Committee noted the contents of a report which gave an overview of the outcome of the expression of interest exercise.

Requests for the Use of Parks

The Committee granted approval for the hosting of a series of Christmas events at Páirc Nua Chollan, subject to the organisers meeting with – and adhering to – all of the stipulations and requirements set out within the associated report.

Dual Language Street Signs

The Committee agreed to the erection of second street nameplates, in Irish, at Old Colin, Whitewell Road, Upper Dunmurry Lane, Rileys Place and Keegan Street.

Proposals for the Naming of New Streets

The Committee agreed to the naming of Eastland Street and Eastland Place.

Issue Raised in Advance

**Botanic Gardens
200th Anniversary in 2028**

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor Groogan addressed the Committee and pointed out that the bicentenary of the opening of Botanic Gardens would occur in 2028. She referred to the rich history of the gardens and how significant the bicentenary would be to the City of Belfast. She enquired if plans were being formulated to mark the anniversary.

After discussion, it was

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Murray and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees that a report be submitted for consideration that would outline the plans to mark the bicentenary of Botanic Gardens, together with details regarding a projected budget, and that consideration be given also to establishing a working group for that purpose.

Chairperson