



Subject:	Requests for annual funding 26/27
Date:	13 th January 2026
Reporting Officer:	Stephen Leonard - Director of Open Spaces, Resources, Fleet and Transport. Jim Girvan - Director of Neighbourhood Services
Contact Officer:	Stephen Leonard - Director of Open Spaces, Resources, Fleet and Transport. Jim Girvan - Director of Neighbourhood Services

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation, or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.0	<p>The purpose of the report is to advise committee of requests for annual funding support in 26/27 that have been received by City and Neighbourhood Services. These requests relate to the following organisations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Hills Partnership • Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful • Belfast Healthy Cities <p>The report also contains information on a request from Belfast Healthy Cities for council to issue a Letter of Endorsement for their application to Phase VIII of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network to allow them to submit an expression of interest to participate in the next phase of the Network in January 2026.</p>
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>Members are asked to consider the requests for funding from the three organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast Hills Partnership • Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful • Belfast Healthy Cities <p>Members are also asked to consider the request from Belfast Healthy Cities for council to issue a Letter of Endorsement for their application to Phase VIII of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network to allow them to submit an expression of interest to participate in the next phase of the Network in January 2026.</p>
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>Members are aware that City & Neighbourhood Services work in partnership with a number of organisations that share common strategic objectives and that some of this work is supported through annual funding agreements to deliver against agreed outcomes.</p> <p>In 2021/22, each of the agreements that are considered in this report was subject to independent reviews which concluded that they provided strategic alignment, added value to the Council/City and were value for money. In line with these findings, council has agreed on an annual basis to continue funding to deliver services since that time.</p> <p>Further detail on the activity funded and issues to consider in relation to each agreement are listed below.</p>
3.2	<p><u>Belfast Hills Partnership</u></p> <p>Since it's inception in 2005, Belfast City Council has been a key partner within Belfast Hills Partnership (BHP) with BCC Councillors and staff sitting on the Board of Directors. This funding has enabled the organisation to grow and develop from a small of three individuals to a team that now consists of 8 full time members of staff and 7 part time staff. This growth allows the partnership to deliver a wide range of programmes within the Belfast City Council</p>

	<p>area. These activities help deliver BCC strategies and plans such as the “The Belfast Agenda” our people & communities, our planet, our economy and compassionate city; BCC’s Corporate Plan 2025 – 28; One Million Trees (and associated climate resilience plans. BHP also support of the biodiversity officers and Parks Outreach Managers.</p>
3.3	<p>Key Programmes undertaken by BHP include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat & species surveys & improvements – surveys include pine martins, swifts, skylarks, meadow pipits, bats, badgers etc, which then feed into site improvement works. Significant amount of invasive species removal, including laurel on Cave Hill. Path maintenance and litter lifts & river cleans were also carried out on BCC owned sites such as Carrs Glen, Glencairn, Forth River, Hazelwood and Cave Hill in 24/25 • Environment education for young people – involving 943 young people on a regular basis in 24/25, with topics including 5 steps to wellbeing and looking after our planet. 83% of participants were from deprived areas • Trainee Rangers – 14 young people took part in a 15 week training programme to introduce them to careers in the Environmental Sector and provide employability skills • Volunteering opportunities – Volunteering activities run 3 days a week with a value of £64,100 in 24/25 • Addressing anti-social behaviour including fly tipping, littering, wildfires and scramblers – through a variety of campaigns/info provision, signage, CCTV, mapping, working with statutory bodies etc. • Tree propagation & planting – propagation of almost 2000 trees in their own tree nursery and 44,500 trees planted across 40 sites in 24/25, supporting the work of one Million Trees • Community support & engagement – through public events, input into local committees/Boards, training opportunities etc • Information provision – approx. 15,000 followers across our Social media platforms as well as various other newspaper, TV and radio outlets • Health walks – including 670 adults with learning difficulties, green prescription series for local people with health issues, and other one-off events for groups • Strategic input – consulting on Local Development Plans, Planning proposals, Government Strategies, supporting BCC officers with funding bids etc • New landscape level projects – firstly promoting 30x30 across private and community sites within the Belfast Hills; secondly a river quality project from its source on Divis Mountain to Lough Neagh
3.4	<p>BCC has funded BHP since 2005. The current level of funding £36,900 has not increased since 2011.</p>
3.5	<p>BHP have highlighted consistent rising costs, which they have tried to absorb internally by seeking to cut costs where possible and securing additional funding elsewhere.</p>
3.6	<p>Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council and Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council have already agreed an increase of 30% on current funding. It should be noted that each Council provides funding in proportion to land ownership within the Belfast Hills area.</p>
3.7	<p>DAERA has agreed to double its funding; however to enable funding from DAERA to be drawn down match funding is required making this request to Council even more critical for BHP.</p>
3.8	<p><u>Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful</u></p> <p>Keep NI Beautiful has received an annual award of £55,000 since 2014. This has consisted of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £41,000 contribution to the Live Here Love Here (LHLH) campaign • £14,000 for support of the Eco School programme.

3.9	Keep NI Beautiful receives funding for this work from 10 of the 11 councils. They have advised that their current financial model is no longer sustainable and that they have contacted each council area which provides funding to request an increase in the Council's annual contribution to the LHLH programme.
3.10	In the case of Belfast City Council this request is for an additional £10,250 for 26/27 which is an increase of 25% bringing the total request to £65,250. The rationale for this increase is to ensure sustainability of the project and to cover previously unfunded administration of the small grant assessment. In addition, they are requesting a cost-of-living increase in each year moving forward using the average Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflationary adjustment. The request for the support of the Eco School programme remains unchanged.
3.11	<u>Live Here Love Here Achievements</u> At least £20,500, (50%) of the Council's current contribution to LHLH is delivered back to community environmental projects in Belfast through the annual LHLH small grants scheme. In 2024/25 this was £40,283. Please see Appendix I for more detail.
3.12	In addition, the LHLH programme consists of a media campaign and a number of regional initiatives including, Adopt a Spot (133 in Belfast 2024/25), Big Spring Clean, Healthy Ocean Health Minds, Connecting Community Events and Community Awards.
3.13	<u>Eco School Achievements</u> 38% of Belfast Schools have achieved Green Flag Status and the Keep NI Beautiful field officers undertook 68 school support visits and events in 2024/25. 179 schools in the Belfast City Council area are registered with Ecoschools. Please see Appendix II for more detail.
3.14	Officers have been in contact with Corporate Communications and the Climate Team to explore whether they have any additional budgets available to support this work which also supports delivery of some of their outcomes. However, no confirmation is available at present.
3.15	<u>Belfast Healthy Cities</u> For more than 35 years, Belfast Healthy Cities has been the WHO designated lead organisation for the Healthy Cities movement in Belfast, connecting local evidence, policy and practice with global learning. As a non-profit, cross-sectoral partnership, BHC works to embed health equity in all policies – recognising that where people live, learn, work and play shapes their wellbeing.
3.16	Belfast Healthy Cities is governed by a Board of Directors, elected annually and representing the public, university, voluntary and community sectors. Council are one of four core funders to Belfast Healthy Cities, along with the Public Health Agency (PHA), Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSC) and Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Annual funding amounts to over 300k of which BCC contributes £81,294. The current funding arrangement began in June 2022 and finishes on 31 March 2026.
3.17	The 26/27 year will be a transition year as the current WHO Phase VII ends on 31 st March 2026 and the new Phase VIII begins on 1 st April 202 until 31 st March 2031. The WHO European Healthy Cities Network will open for expressions of interest to participate in the next phase of the Network in January 2026. Belfast Healthy Cities is keen to submit an

	expression of interest as soon as possible and has contacted council to ask that we issue a Letter of Endorsement for their application to Phase VIII.
3.18	The process for preparing and submitting bids is led by the Mayor of applicant cities and in the case of Belfast, the Lord Mayor will be asked to convene a workshop to bring strategic stakeholders together to identify the key priorities for the city which fall within the identified themes for Phase VIII, which adds Preparedness to the existing themes. There will further public and community engagement to develop the final bid for Belfast. Officers will liaise with the Lord Mayor's office and BHC to complete this process and will update members on progress in due course. Members are asked to consider and approve the request for a letter of endorsement, noting that this is required for BHC to register on the portal and access the required information to submit an EOI..
3.19	Members are asked to approve funding for BHC in 26/27 at the same level as 25/26. During this transition year Belfast Healthy Cities will sustain its agreed themes while focusing on preparing for WHO Phase VIII designation, aligning Belfast's next submission to the emerging 7 Ps framework, which adds Preparedness to the existing themes. A paper outlining the Phase VIII priorities and requested funding for the next Phase will be brought to committee for consideration when the bid has been completed at the end of 2026.
3.20	<p>Key successes in Phase VII are listed below and further details are available in Appendix 5;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-production of Greening the City & Green Health Maps with communities across the city • Development of Healthy Transport & Walking Bus Programme with dedicated teacher resource and toolkit • Development of Belfast City Health Profiles which have informed policy development on urban planning, active travel and wellbeing economies, influencing the work of the Department of Health, Belfast City Council and community partners. • Health Literacy & Education - over 100 schools have been trained in, and use BHC's Pharmacy Schools Programme, • Development and support for Community Prosperity & Care Zone (North Belfast) • Healthy Places, Healthy Children Teaching Resource to empower children to assess and redesign their local environments for health and has been delivered to hundreds of children across Belfast.
3.21	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>The existing contribution to each award has been included as part of the City and Neighbourhood Services departmental budget estimates for 26/27. These budgets need to be finally agreed as part of rate setting for 26/27. There is no additional budget to support any requested increases within the Unit budget.</p>
3.22	Members may wish to note that most funding agreements which are in place over a continued period of time will include some level of inflationary increase. This is either built into Belfast City Council budgets on an ongoing basis or is provided through increased funding allocations from contributing government departments. Grants which are paid for a time limited period are generally not subject to an increase unless there is a specific council decision to do this.
3.23	<p><u>Belfast Hills Partnership</u></p> <p>BHP currently receives £36,900 from BCC and have requested an increase of 30% (£11,070) to £47,970</p>

3.24	<p><u>Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful</u> KNIB currently receives £55,000 from BCC and have requested an increase of 19% (£10,250) to £65,250.</p>
3.25	<p><u>Belfast Healthy Cities</u> Belfast Healthy Cities currently receives £81,294 from BCC, they have requested the same level of funding for 26/27.</p>
3.26	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> There are no additional implications related to this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices - Documents Attached</p>
4.1	<p>N/A</p>