



Subject:	Physical Programme Update including Capital Programme 2026/27
Date:	20 March 2026
Reporting Officer:	Sinead Grimes, Director of Property & Projects Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance
Contact Officer:	David Logan, Senior Programme Delivery Manager Shauna Murtagh, Portfolio Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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 <input type="checkbox"/>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. 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 matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. 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	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

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 an update on the 2026/27 Capital Programme and associated capital financing, as well as requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is requested to –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Programme Movements - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme – Agree that the Programme for improvements to Parks and Open Spaces for 2025/2026 and 2026/2027 is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> with a maximum allocation of up to £1.5million (£750k – Year 1 and £750k- Year 2) and note that a rolling allocation of £750k has been agreed going forwards. • Bridges Improvement Programme - Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> with a maximum allocation of up to £240,000 for Year 1 and agree the annual rolling programme of bridge improvements of £240,000 per year thereafter. • IT Programme — Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology - Note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £225,000 be allocated. • City Hall – Security Improvements - Agree that the project is moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i> to allow options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course. • Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites - Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i> to allow a business case to be developed. • Procurement process for Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme, Bridges Programme, Pitches Programme and Leisure Programme - agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated for these Programmes as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver. • Belfast Zoo/Old Zoo – agree that Member site visits are undertaken to a range of other Zoo locations to inform the ongoing work in respect of the Zoo

Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2026/27

- note the update on Capital Financing as outlined in 3.10 below and the update on the Capital Programme for 2026/27 at 3.11 below and in Appendix 1.
- agree to hold Party Group Briefings to update Members on the status of projects along with the emerging implications for future capital investment decisions and in particular the potential impact on the future district rate in line with the development of the Medium-Term Financial Plan and linked to the ongoing Transformation and Efficiency agenda.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Capital Programme

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. The Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.

3.2 Capital Programme Movements

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

Project	Overview	Stage movement
Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme 2025/2026 and 2026/2027	Programme of improvement works to Parks and Open Spaces across the Council estate	<i>Move to Stage 3- Committed</i>
Bridges Improvement Programme	Programme of remedial works on bridges across the Council estate.	<i>Move to Stage 3 – Committed</i>
City Hall Security Improvements	Capital works put forward to make City Hall a safer place for visitors, employees and elected Members.	<i>Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>
Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites	Creation of lit spine and associated path/ access improvements to facilitate extended opening hours.	<i>Add as Stage 1 – Emerging</i>

3.3 Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme

In December 2025, SP&R Committee agreed that a rolling allocation of £750k be ring-fenced for improvements to parks and open spaces across the city. The proposed programme of works for the

2025/2026 and 2026/2027 Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme is outlined below utilising the ring-fenced allocations for each year delivering a £1.5m programme of improvements. The programme proposes a range of improvements across the city and a range of site-specific improvements.

LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
CITY WIDE	
Dog Run Areas	3 new dog run areas in West, East and Shankill (1 recently delivered in South and 1 in North at Grove)
Seating	Roll out of benches across parks citywide
Water Refill Points	Roll out of pilot to parks across the city. Proposed sites - Waterworks, Ballysillan, Falls, Pairc Nia Chollan, Paisley, Drumglass, Shaws Bridge, Cherryvale. Victoria, Orangefield/or Tullycarnet
NORTH	
Grove Park	New Pedestrian access / resurfacing to Dog Run area
Ligoniel Park	Pedestrian Entrance Improvements + gym equipment resurfacing
Marrowbone Park	New fencing at Jamaica Road
Cavehill Adventurous Playground	Removal of climbing ramp feature & construction of timber sleeper retaining edge
WEST	
Half Moon Lake	Range of environmental improvements
Springhill Park	Range of environmental improvements
Highfield CC Open Space	Range of environmental improvements
Woodvale Park	New toilet facilities including Changing Places provision
SOUTH	
Strangford Avenue Playing Fields	New path to connect to trim trail
Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Japanese Garden	Landscape Improvements and water aeration system
Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Rose Garden	Canopy frame structure replacement
Napier Park	Entrance gate improvements
Botanic Gardens	Herbaceous border- new trellis structures
Ormeau Park	New access gates
EAST	
Cherryvale Playing Fields	New pedestrian entrance at main gates
Tullycarnet Park	Entrance Safety Improvements for pedestrians
Wandsworth Road	New fencing
CS Lewis Square	New handrails and granite steps
Ballyhackamore Parklet	Environmental Improvements

Members are asked to agree that ‘Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme 2025/2026 and 2026/2027’ is moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum allocation of up to £1.5m a maximum allocation (£750k – 2025/2026 and £750k- 2026/2027) and note that a rolling allocation of £750k has been agreed going forwards for subsequent years and to agree the projects as outlined.

3.4 **Bridges Improvement Programme**

	<p>In May 2025, SP&R Committee agreed that this project be moved to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>. The project aims to develop a multiyear approach to bridge improvements for 50+ bridges across the Council estate, following on from the initial surveys that have already been carried out. A programme of remedial work is now being finalised for the first phase which requires £240,000 for Year 1 and a rolling annual funding of up to a maximum of £240,000 per year to be reviewed thereafter. As per the three-stage approval process, the outline business case has been completed and the project can now progress to delivery stage. Members are asked to agree that ‘Bridges Improvement Programme’ is moved to Stage 3 – Committed with a maximum allocation of up to £240,000 for Year 1 and agree on the annual rolling programme of bridge improvements of £240,000 per year thereafter.</p>
3.5	<p>IT Programme— Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology in the Council Chamber</p> <p>This project is part of the overall IT Programme/ Digital Strategy and will replace the current analogue AV rack-mounted controller hardware used in the Council chamber into digital AV solution. In January 2026, this project was moved to <i>Stage 3 – Committed</i> and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development of the project and a satisfactory tender return. An update was to be brought back to Committee along with the final budget allocation and confirmation that this is within the affordability limits of the Council. Members are asked to note that a satisfactory tender return has been received and that the Director of Finance has confirmed that this project is within the affordability limits of the Council and agree that a maximum of up to £225,000 be allocated.</p>
3.6	<p>City Hall Security Improvements</p> <p>In October 2025, Members agreed that ‘City Hall Security Improvements’ project was added to the Capital Programme at <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i>. The project aims to deliver the enhancements to City Hall that were in the recommendations review and security audit report produced by the TRIO Solutions Group. The report noted several vulnerabilities primarily relating to hostile vehicle mitigation (HVM), perimeter security, access control, surveillance coverage, staff training, emergency preparedness, and operational policies. A number of the areas identified in the report are operational, but the majority are physical/ systems based requirements or improvements. In addition, the project is also in line with the Martyn’s Law legislation which requires venues and public locations to implement security measures to protect against terrorism. Members are asked to agree that the project is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.</p>
3.7	<p>Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites</p> <p>In September 2025, P&C Committee agreed to the parks and open spaces’ pilot opening hours scheme. The proposed project will look at the creation of lit spine and associated path/ access improvements to facilitate extended opening hours. The pilot sites initially agreed are</p>

	<p>Ormeau Park, Botanic Gardens, Belmont Park and Falls Park. The project will ensure park safety through artificial lighting and improvements to security, connections and accessibility.</p> <p>Members are asked to agree that the project is added to Stage 1 – Emerging to allow the business case to be developed.</p>
3.8	<p>Approval to Procure – Parks and Open Space, Bridges, Pitches and Leisure Programmes</p> <p>In February 2026, Members agreed the next phase of Leisure Programme and the Pitches Programme and are being asked to approve the Parks and Open Space Programme and the Bridges Programme at today’s Committee. In order to progress these programmes now Members are further asked to agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated for these Programmes and any projects arising from them as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.</p>
	<p>Belfast Zoo – Site Visits</p>
3.9	<p>Members will be aware that Belfast Zoo/Old Zoo has been identified as a key strategic priority for Members and that a Members Working Group has recently been established to focus on this. At the recent workshop the need to look at other Zoos was discussed to inform future development based on best practice elsewhere and to explore other attractions, particularly those where an animal element is much more widely integrated with other offerings allowing the opportunity to understand their journey, visitor experience and business/operating models. To inform this it is proposed that a two-day site visit is undertaken in the Spring to a range of other venues. Details of the final itinerary are currently being finalised. It is proposed that this will be for Party Group Leaders or their nominees. Members are asked to agree that best practice site visits are undertaken in Spring to other Zoo locations.</p>
	<p><u>Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2026/27</u></p>
3.10	<p>The Council incurs both capital expenditure and capital financing costs in the delivery of its Capital Programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Expenditure is the expenditure incurred in the actual delivery of contracts e.g. the actual payments to the contractor for a construction contract (see Appendix 1) • Capital Financing is the method the council uses to fund the capital expenditure. The capital financing costs include loan repayments (principal and interest); revenue contributions (cash payments to repay or avoid taking out loans); capital receipts and external funding. <p>Members need to be aware that each decision they take in relation to progressing a capital project or agreeing additional money towards any one project has a consequential impact on</p>

the level of financing that is available for other capital projects and each individual decision therefore subsequently limits the capacity of the Council to progress other capital projects thereby potentially necessitating some difficult decisions for Members in terms of prioritisation.

3.11 The **SP&R Committee has approved a capital financing budget of £25,774,022 for 2026/27**. Members will be aware however that the Council has already committed financing to a range of physical projects under the Capital Programme as outlined in Appendix 1.

Table 1- Existing Capital Financing Budget 2026/27

Existing Capital Financing Budget		£25,774,022
<u>Less:</u> Physical Programme Commitments (capital programme and non-recurrent projects)	£23,487,611	
Existing BCC Loans	£1,407,552	
Lisburn/ Castlereagh Transferred Loans	£598,675	
Balance Remaining		£280,184

3.12 **The current Capital Programme**

Capital three-stage approval process

The Council has agreed a three-stage approval process which all Council Capital Programme and larger projects funded externally must go through. Each stage movement is subject to Council ratification before the project formally progresses to the next stage. Projects move through *Stage 1 – Emerging* where they are required to complete a Strategic Outline Case and then progress to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted*. Following production of an Outline Business Case, a project can move to *Stage 3 – Committed*. Following a procurement exercise, projects must then demonstrate that the project is within the affordability limits of the Council before proceeding. At each of these stages, the project is reviewed internally before coming to SP&R Committee for a decision and a committed budget. Associated revenue costs are considered at each stage. A number of years ago, it was further agreed that a final investment decision and final budget would only be allocated to a project once the tender process is concluded and it was confirmed to be within the affordability limits of the Council. This process has proved to be extremely robust and central to ensuring that projects are delivered within the agreed budget envelope.

Schemes at Stage 3 – Committed

The Capital Programme already comprises 40+ projects at Stage 3 – Committed, where procurement is underway or projects are already in contract, see Appendix 1. Stage 3 projects also include capital projects on Council assets which are fully funded by external bodies. Members are updated on these schemes via regular reports to Area Working Groups and

SP&R Committee. Most of these schemes have confirmed budgets and associated financing, and a number are coming to a close over the next financial year.

Schemes at Stage 2 – Uncommitted or Stage 1 – Emerging

Members are asked to note that there are a range of physical projects which the Council must undertake from a health and safety, legislative and/or operational perspective in order to ensure the Council fulfils its statutory duties and continues to run ‘fit for purpose’ services. These will all require capital financing. A number of these are already on the Capital Programme and include: Waste Plan, New Cemetery provision, Fleet Programme and IT programme. Projects at these early stages do not have final budgets agreed however estimates have been used in order to calculate the impact of these on the capital financing budget and the availability of capital financing in the future. In addition, there are several other major enhancement projects on the Capital Programme (Stage 1 or Stage 2) with developmental work underway including greenway schemes, heritage assets, and others, see Appendix 1. Many of these schemes will be attractive to external funders and schemes are developed with this in mind.

3.13	<p>Next steps</p> <p>Members will appreciate that the Council’s capital and wider physical programme is one of the most important programmes delivered by the Council and due to the nature of capital projects it is also one of the most visible and easily recognisable signs of the Council’s civic leadership role in the city. Moving forward the Council will face a number of key challenges in respect of the capital programme. These are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The available capital financing budget will come under significant pressure if all current and emerging proposed projects are to be delivered. • The need to ensure that Investment decisions are taken within the context of strategic alignment with the Belfast Agenda, Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and in full consideration of what assets already exist in an area and how these are being used.
3.14	<p>Typically, the Capital Programme has an expenditure horizon of around three years. CIPFA capital planning guidance recommends that local authorities take a longer-term view (8-10 years). This is intrinsically linked to the development of the Council’s Medium Term Financial Plan and to the ongoing work being taken forward under the Transformation and Efficiency agenda.</p>
3.15	<p>To inform this it is recommended that a series of Party Group Briefings are held in the first instance to update Members on the existing Capital Programme, ascertain future priorities to determine the level of financing required, as well as exploring the implications of any future investment decisions and the potential impact on the district rate.</p>
3.16	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p>

	<p><i>Financial Implications –</i></p> <p>Parks and Open Space Improvement Programme - capital allocation of up to £750,000 already approved by Council. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p>Bridges Improvement Programme – capital allocation of up to £240,000 for Year 1 and additional £240,000 per year for the rolling programme thereafter. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p>IT Programme— Digitising Audio-Visual (AV) Technology in the Council Chamber– a maximum of £225,000 is now allocated to this project. The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.</p> <p><i>Resource Implications –</i> Officer time to deliver.</p>
3.17	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>The legislation requirements have been met including screening.</p> <p>All physical projects are designed for people and are inherently inclusive and accessible.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – Capital Programme & Capital Financing 2026/27</p>