

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 15th April, 2026

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor; and
Councillors Black, Bunting, de Faoite,
S. Douglas, Duffy, Groogan, Hanvey,
Lyons, McAteer, McCabe, McCallin,
McCormick, 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;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager, Economy;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. C. Persic, Development Manager;
Ms. P. Conway, Development Manager;
Mr. J. Uprichard, Business Research And Development
Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 11th and 25th March, 2026, 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 April, 2026, subject to an amendment to the minutes of the meeting of 25th March, under the heading 'Cultural Multi-Annual Grants', to provide that delegated authority be granted to the Director of Economic Development to proceed with the allocation of a discretionary transition fund to support those organisations which had incurred a net reduction in funding under the terms of the Cultural Multi-Annual Grants 2026-28.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Duffy declared an interest in relation to the item 'Employability and Skills Update' in that his employer was successful in a tender to coordinate the Employability and Skills Provider Network and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in relation to the items 'Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update' and '2 Royal Avenue Update' in that her employer was in receipt of

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a grant through the Vacant to Vibrant scheme and she had recently engaged with organisations which had expressed an interest in respect of the long-term use of 2 Royal Avenue's ground floor. She was not required to leave the meeting for either item. Councillor Groogan also declared an interest in relation to the item 'Belfast Harbour Commissioners Draft Masterplan 2025-50 Consultation - Draft Council Response' in that she was a Member of the Planning Committee and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Councillor R. McLaughlin also declared an interest in relation to the item 'Belfast Harbour Commissioners Draft Masterplan 2025-50 Consultation - Draft Council Response' in that he was on the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following seven items 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.

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.

Vacant to Vibrant Programme Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the Vacant to Vibrant Programme and sought approval for citywide grant awards as recommended by the Vacant to Vibrant assessment panel following the receipt and assessment of recent applications.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update in relation to the Vacant to Vibrant Programme which would be supporting up to 79 businesses/organisations to locate or expand into long-term vacant units; and
- ii. agreed the recommended citywide grant awards as outlined within Section 3.6 of the report.

2 Royal Avenue Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update in respect of the future long-term use of the ground floor of 2 Royal Avenue.

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The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting in November, 2025, it had agreed that a new two-stage Expression of Interest process be undertaken for the future long-term use of 2 Royal Avenue's ground floor. The Director advised that, as part of Stage One of the process, the Council had received a number of expressions of interest for the long-term occupation of the ground floor, and she provided the Committee with further detail in respect of the submissions. In addition to the expressions of interest, the Director informed the Committee that the Council had also received enquiries from organisations and individuals that wished to be considered as part of the future of 2 Royal Avenue in relation to smaller spaces and hosting events.

The Director set out the proposed next steps and the indicative timeline for Stage Two of the process, which would include respondents submitting detailed proposals and business plans. She also set out the proposed scoring assessment and criteria.

The Committee was provided with an update in relation to capital works and a condition survey of the building, the current meanwhile use of the ground floor, a petition by 'Reclaim The Agenda' hosted on Act Now in relation to the use of 2 Royal Avenue, and the engagement scheduled with Members and relevant partners on the future use of 2 Royal Avenue, as agreed by the Committee at its meeting in October, 2025.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons, and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the proposed next steps for Stage Two of the Expression of Interest process until its next meeting to enable further engagement to be undertaken, and that Stage One of the process be closed following the meeting of the Council in May and the associated call-in period.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the update on Stage One of the Expression of Interest process for the use of 2 Royal Avenue's ground floor, which included the Expressions of Interest received; the approach to the parties which had expressed an interest in a smaller space or hosting events; the condition survey which would help inform any future works that the Council might be required to undertake; the meanwhile use of the ground floor in line with the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann 2026; the petition on Act Now created by 'Reclaim The Agenda' in relation to 2 Royal Avenue; and the engagement as previously agreed;
- ii. agreed to defer consideration of the proposed next steps for Stage Two of the process until its next meeting to enable further engagement to be undertaken; and
- iii. agreed that Stage One of the process be closed following the meeting of the Council in May and the associated call-in period.

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Sandy Row/Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Fund Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the Department for Communities funded Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Schemes. In relation to the Sandy Row Revitalisation Grant Scheme, the report sought approval to allocate underspend, and any further underspend realised, to the delivery of activities as outlined within the report.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the Department for Communities funded Sandy Row and Grosvenor Road Revitalisation Schemes; and
- ii. agreed to reallocate the underspend within the Sandy Row Revitalisation Scheme as outlined within section 3.4 of the report.

Housing-Led Regeneration Private Sector Partner Update

(Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided the Committee with an update on the Private Sector Partner (PSP) strand of the housing-led regeneration programme of work, which included:

- the Initial Site-Specific Business Plan (ISSBP) for Corporation Street/Exchange Street;
- the potential for a multi-site approach that would see co-ordinated delivery of housing-led regeneration across both Corporation Street/Exchange Street and Gloucester Street (initially identified Seed Sites), along with Additional Opportunity Sites, identified through the Strategic Site Assessment Phase 2, at Seymour House, Sally Gardens and Ashdale car park;
- the future Detailed Site-Specific Business Plans (DSSBP) for various sites which would include greater detail on the proposed scheme deliverables, tenure mix, funding and delivery models, and that this would be brought back to the Committee;
- Site development and the Revised Development Programme; and
- Viability and the range of funding options which included the use of Financial Transactions Capital (FTC) financing.

The Director advised that a further report would be submitted to the Committee at a future meeting on the revision of sequencing for site development and the Development Programme.

During discussion, the Director of City Regeneration and Development answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the multi-site approach, social and affordable housing, funding options and Council subvention.

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In response to Members' questions, the Director of Finance provided the Committee with further detail in respect of the potential use of the £1 million which was secured through the 2026/27 rate setting process to support housing-led regeneration. He advised that this could be used to leverage additional capital and would be a recurring amount.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. noted the update provided in respect of the Private Sector Partner and the progress made in relation to the Initial Site-Specific Business Plan for Corporation Street/Exchange Street;
- ii. agreed a multi-site approach which would include Gloucester Street, Seymour House, Sally Gardens and Ashdale car park, along with Corporation Street/Exchange Street;
- iii. noted that this would allow the proposals to move to the next stages of the Detailed Site-Specific Business Plans which would include detail on the proposed scheme deliverables, tenure mix, funding and delivery models, and that this would all be subject to the approval of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee prior to any Development Agreements with the Private Sector Partner being entered into;
- iv. noted the impact on the Seed Site Development Programme which had been previously agreed by the Committee;
- v. agreed that a further report would be brought back which would seek agreement on the revision of sequencing for site development and the Development Programme;
- vi. noted the various funding options which were currently under review and that the Private Sector Partner was cognisant of addressing the challenges facing the delivery of a viable housing led-regeneration scheme; and
- vii. noted that a further report would be brought back to the appropriate Committee on how the funding secured through the rates setting process for housing-led regeneration could be optimally deployed in developing financing options for the delivery of housing led-regeneration.

Housing-Led Regeneration Programme Update

(Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report in respect of a number of strands of the housing-led regeneration programme of work, which included an update on:

- the eleven Strategic Site Assessment (SSA) Phase 2 sites;

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- the development of a Disposal Framework and decision flowchart for the SSA sites;
- delivery via the Private Sector Partner;
- the Cregagh Green and Marlborough Street car park site, and lands at Whiterock and Northumberland Street;
- Housing Association delivery route for the sites as identified;
- the Inner North-West Development Brief; and
- the Housing Association Grant (HAG).

The Director advised that a further detailed report, which would incorporate the findings of the University Ulster Economic Policy Centre (UUEPC) analysis, feedback from delivery partners, and the emerging position from the Subsidy Review, would be brought back to the Committee for consideration.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the eleven Strategic Site Assessment Phase 2 sites;
- ii. agreed the application of the Disposal Framework to enable the identification of the optimal delivery route for the identified sites;
- iii. agreed that Seymour House, Sally Gardens and Ashdale car park be included as part of the Private Sector Partner multi-site approach, as set out within the previous report;
- iv. noted that a separate report would be brought back in relation to the Cregagh Green site in the context of a wider placemaking approach which would comprise of adjoining Housing Executive lands;
- v. noted that the Marlborough Street car park site would not progressed at this juncture but would be kept under review for future consideration;
- vi. agreed that consideration would be given to widening the scope and redline boundary of the respective lands at both Whiterock and the Northumberland Street car park to enable consideration of the potential for a mixed-use regeneration scheme that could accommodate both leisure and housing in a wider placemaking perspective and in the context of both the Housing-Led Regeneration Programme and the Leisure Transformation Programme;

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- vii. noted the Council's two-staged approach to determine appropriate Housing Associations for the remaining sites, as outlined within the report, in line with Housing Executive's nomination principles;
- viii. agreed that officers engage with respective identified Housing Associations to determine interest and develop a strategy for potential disposal, and that reports would be brought back to City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as appropriate;
- ix. noted the update provided in relation to the Inner North-West Development Brief and the continued progression of workstreams alongside the Department for Communities, as joint landowner, and the appointed Housing Association in advancing this scheme; and
- x. noted the update on the progress following a Member's request for an assessment of the Department for Communities' changes to the Total Cost Indicator and the Housing Association Grant rates.

A Bolder Vision Strategy Update

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which set out the finalised 'A Bolder Vision (ABV) for Belfast' strategy. The report outlined that the ABV strategy had been updated based on the revised interventions which had been agreed by the Committee at its meeting in February, 2026, and reinforced the role of ABV in informing future capital infrastructure schemes and framing the Council's response to the forthcoming Eastern Transport Plan (ETP) and future consultation plans in relation to public realm, mobility, net zero and city connectivity.

The Development Manager presented to the Committee an overview of ABV's development, the key moves contained within the strategy, the supporting interventions and the next steps.

During discussion, the Development Manager answered a range of questions from the Members in relation to the ambition of ABV and the engagement with key stakeholders and communities.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons, and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to ask:

- what further measures could be put in place to ensure that the pedestrianisation of Union Street is maintained and protected; and
- to request that consideration be given to the pedestrianisation of spaces within the York Street area.

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Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. approved the updated 'A Bolder Vision' (ABV) final strategy;
- ii. noted that the ABV strategy would inform the Council's position on policy and strategy consultations related to infrastructure, public realm, placemaking, net zero and sustainable travel including the forthcoming Eastern Transport Plan and the design and delivery of aligned projects; and that future draft consultation responses would be brought back to Committee for approval prior to submission;
- iii. agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to ask what further measures could be put in place to ensure that the pedestrianisation of Union Street is maintained and protected; and
- iv. agreed to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to request that consideration be given to the pedestrianisation of spaces within the York Street area.

Draft Belfast Economic Proposition

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy provided the Committee with an update on the development of a new economic proposition to assist with the promotion of the city for investment and international trade opportunities to support long-term sustainable and inclusive growth.

The Committee noted the progress to date on the development of an Economic Proposition for Belfast to support sustainable and inclusive growth.

Requests to Present

Destination CQ Business Improvement District (BID)

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the pending ballot for the third term of the Destination CQ BID and requested that, in advance of the ballot, the BID be invited to present at the next Committee meeting to enable officers to submit the Council's votes in the ballot which would open in July, 2026.

The Committee:

- i. noted the update on the pending ballot for the third term of the Destination CQ Business Improvement District; and
- ii. agreed to receive a presentation from Destination CQ BID at its next meeting to enable officers to submit the Council's votes in the ballot which would open in July and close on 1st September, 2026.

Queen's University Belfast

The Committee acceded to a request for Queen's University Belfast to attend a future meeting to present on its contribution to the city and its future plans and challenges.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

**Department for Infrastructure Consultation on the
Dublin Road and Botanic Avenue Pedestrian and
Cycling Improvements - Draft Council Response**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which set out a draft Council response to the Department for Infrastructure's preliminary engagement on the proposed pedestrian and cycling improvements along the Dublin Road, Shaftesbury Square and Botanic Avenue.

The report advised that the draft response, set out within Appendix A of the report, had been prepared in the context of the Council's adopted and emerging strategic frameworks, which included A Bolder Vision for Belfast, the Belfast Agenda, the Local Development Plan (LDP), the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) Stocktake, the Net Zero Carbon Roadmap, the Resilience Strategy, and the emerging Eastern Transport Plan (ETP).

The Committee:

- i. approved the draft consultation response, as set out within Appendix A of the report, for submission to the Department for Infrastructure;
- ii. agreed that the response would emphasise the need for the scheme to be designed in accordance with:
 - Department for Transport's LTN 1/20 Cycle Infrastructure Design;
 - Wheels for Wellbeing – A Guide to Inclusive Cycling (4th Edition, 2020);
 - IMTAC's "A New Approach to Travel, Our Streets and Our Places" (2022);
- iii. noted that the scheme represented a significant early delivery opportunity for A Bolder Vision and the Eastern Transport Plan, and that the Council would continue to engage with the Department for Infrastructure to ensure alignment with wider city centre regeneration priorities; and
- iv. noted that the consultation had closed on 10th April, 2026, and that the draft response, as set out within Appendix A, had been submitted to the Department for Infrastructure subject to the Committee's approval and Council ratification in May.

**Belfast Harbour Commissioners
Draft Masterplan 2025-2050 Consultation -
Draft Council Response**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which set out a draft Council response to the Belfast

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Harbour Commissioners Draft Masterplan 2025-2050 consultation. The draft response, set out within Appendix A, was summarised in the report as follows:

That the Council recognised:

- the strategic importance of the Harbour to the city's economic growth and regeneration and welcomed the long-term approach to building the Port capacity, the transition to cleaner energy solutions and the progression for regeneration of the Inner Harbour area in line with the Local Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- the important role of the wider Harbour Estate in growing the city's key growth sectors in film, innovation and tourism, as well as the Harbours role in delivering regeneration and sustainable connectivity connections;
- and supported the reclassification of trust ports to provide the Harbour with the ability to increase spending in a prudent way, as agreed by the City Growth and Regeneration Committee in March, 2025; and
- the importance of proper community engagement and encourage the Harbour to continue to ensure that the delivery of the Masterplan is carried out in partnership with city stakeholders and communities.

The Committee agreed the Council's response to the Belfast Harbour Commissioners consultation on its draft Masterplan for 2025-2050.

Growing Business and the Economy

Employability and Skills Update

(Mr. K. Donaghy, Labour Market Partnership Co-Ordinator, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Economic Development submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise members of a range of activity undertaken in 2025/26 to support skills development, economic engagement and job outcomes for key target groups and to set out the proposed workplans for the 2026/27 financial year. The work programme supports the inclusive growth ambitions of the Council by targeting interventions on key cohorts, including:**

- Residents out of work and experiencing barriers to employment/self-employment, including those who are long-term unemployed and economically inactive
- Residents with low skills levels such as a baseline Level 2 equivalent qualification.
- In work, low earning residents.
- Those living in areas of highest multiple deprivation.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the work undertaken and outputs delivered in the financial year to date
- Note and endorse the priority interventions and approach for the 2026/27 financial year.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 2025/26 Update

Members will be aware that the Labour Market Partnership (LMP) is an intervention supported by DfC within all eleven council areas within the region. The LMP provides a platform for engagement with government departments, community partners and business organisations as a means of refocusing regional programmes more effectively within the Belfast area. In addition to LMP resources, the Council also commits resources in each year to support employability and skills interventions focused on those furthest from the labour market.

3.2 Employment & Upskilling Academies

Members will be aware that Employment Academies are one of the key instruments that the Council's Employability and Skills team utilises to support residents to secure a job or a better job. Employment Academies vary depending on employer need but they generally have a number of consistent components, namely:

- Pre-academy matching and selection to ensure all individuals who participate have a meaningful chance of securing employment after successful completion
- Employer-driven content in relation to vocations and employability skills, qualifications, licences etc. related to the specific job role

- In-situ work sampling
- Provision of additional supports, from equipment and clothing through to childcare, travel and subsistence
- Employability support particularly focused on the final employment interview.

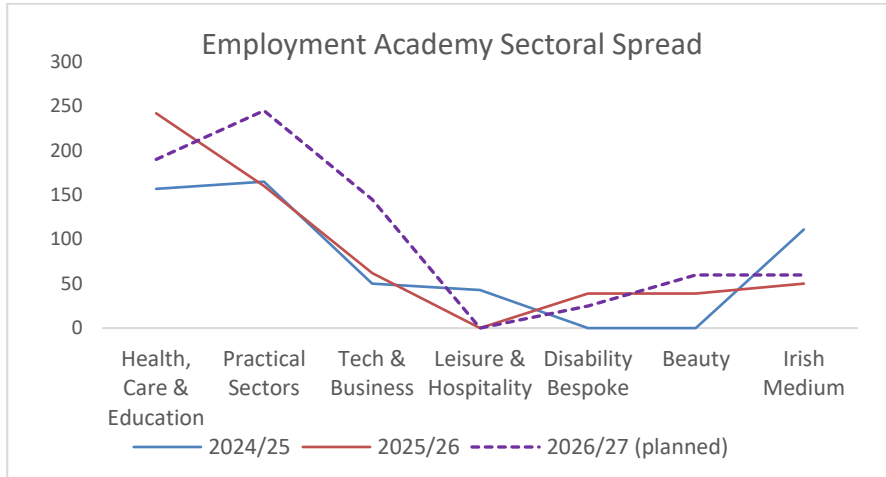
3.3 Given the volatility in the labour market – and the limited financial resources available to undertake the work – delivery has been driven by a number of factors including:

- The opportunity presented by a number of growth sectors (such as tech, green economy and business services) to support participants into roles with higher earning potential. In recognition of the additional skills support work required, these interventions tend to have a higher per capita cost for participants but offer a positive return on investment in terms of salary levels for those successful in finding work following programme completion
- Ongoing need to work with employers to convince them of the value of alternative approaches to finding talent other than pre-existing qualifications and/or experience. This is particularly the case for our work in higher paid sectors – where employers have tended to recruit using an unnecessary ‘degree first’ approach without considering alternative routes to recruiting the skills they need
- Opportunities to support existing employees who are in low-paid work and/or underemployed by means of upskilling interventions – supporting individuals to improve salary levels by progressing to a better job and thereby embedding a skills-escalator by creating additional entry-level roles. These Upskilling Academies are limited to low paid sectors such as working with children and other caring professions and only triggered when existing mainstream provision is not suitable or accessible.

3.4 Across 2025/26 we have made investments in over 850 places for Employment and Upskilling Academies, utilising both council and LMP resources. The availability of these resources as well as having an agile, responsive commissioning model, means that we have been able to respond to opportunities, meeting employer demand and bringing forward solutions that benefit local businesses and residents. The pattern of participation by sector is outlined

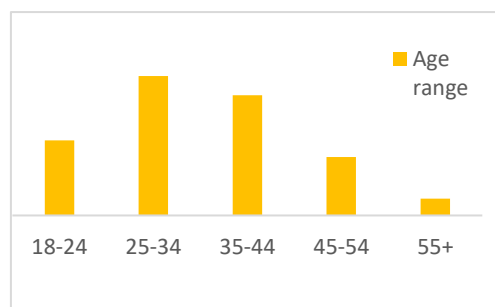
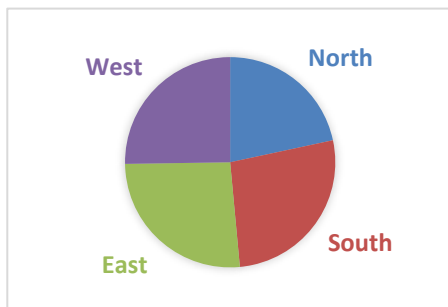
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below over the last number of years as well as projected 2026/27 activity.



3.5 It is important to note that differences in volume across sectors above is not an indicator of investment levels. Academies targeting higher paid roles are significantly more expensive to deliver due to the skills levels required for the role. For example, a Tech Employment Academy can cost over £4,000 per person, while a Health & Social Care Employment Academy costs under £1,000 per person. Additionally, employment outcomes are continuously monitored and investments subject to review to ensure residents receive the best service possible. All work is underpinned by the implementation of a Quality Assurance Framework.

3.6 While it is too early to report on outcomes due to the fact that academies are still being delivered, of those who completed participant surveys in 2025/26 so far, 22% of participants reported having a disability while 30% were from an ethnic minority. Details of both the age and geographical spread are below.



3.7 While officers can update members on the outcomes of this investment in a future report, the pattern of outcomes tend to remain stable across the last number of years: attrition rates tend to be low with an average of over 90% successfully completing and with an average into-work rate of 75% for those who complete. The level of demand and supply – both from employers as well as those looking for a job or a better job – remains high, although is much more challenging in higher paid sectors such as Tech.

3.8 Provider Engagement

A vital element of our work is our engagement with groups and providers across the city. This underpins the ability of our interventions such as Employment Academies to successfully match people to the opportunities on offer. Officers have continued to expand the E&S Provider Network, with over 150 organisations and groups from across the city covering key target groups (disability, women, young people, justice leavers, care leavers etc.). Members will no doubt be aware of the likely changes to the community-based employability infrastructure due to the reduction in available funding from the Local Growth Fund. We will need to keep the network membership under review in light of the changes. However we consider that the need for that coordination and information sharing will be even greater in the context of reduced resources.

3.9 Digital Badging

Through RSA Cities of Learning, officers continue to expand micro-credentialing through Digital Badges. These badges help recognise the skills and competencies of those who are at risk of being left behind – a significant challenge in Belfast where there is a disproportionately high percentage of people with no or low skills. All Employment Academies are now digitally badged as an alternative validation of achievement. In addition to this, the Council has offered 60 organisations across the city access to Digital Badging for their own participants and/or employees across the lifetime of the project. In total, 484 credentials have been created through Digital Badging with 90% claim rates across managed programmes.

3.10 2026/27 Business Plan

Building on the work undertaken in 2025/26 as well as learning from previous engagement, the indicative plans for 2026/27 are set out below. Priority areas of work will include:

3.11 Labour Market Partnership

While it will take a number of months to fully know the extent and impact of the reduction of funding available through Local Growth Fund (LGF), one new development may mitigate such a steep reduction of support for those experiencing economic inactivity. A Commission for Work and Wellbeing is being established and is resourced through an NI Executive 'Transformation Bid' for those experiencing economic inactivity – using innovative approaches within the 'health and work' agenda as recommended by the Health & Work Steering Group convened by the Belfast LMP in 2025.

3.12 Belfast LMP's approach to 2026/27 includes a focus on the following:

- 1. System leadership: the Partnership has matured over time and has a strategic enabling role. This leadership input will be particularly important in the coming year, given the radical reduction in support services. The focus will need to be on integration rather than expansion, acting as the convenor of a Belfast-wide employability and economic inactivity ecosystem and influencing the LGF Investment Plan in line with the recommendations of the Health & Work Steering Group; principally that a health-first approach is critical to resolving long-standing barriers along the journey to employment experienced by those who are economically inactive**
- 2. Given the limited LMP resources, it is important to position direct delivery where we can best make the most impact, namely on demand-facing services. A key area of work in the coming year will be the development of an Employer Hub – creating a focal point for employer engagement and input. Our current thinking is that this work will be of immediate use for Local Growth Fund projects in particular – given the reductions in their resources. However it is our intention that this model will become a resource for all employer-facing engagement in order to create resource efficiencies and provide more effective service delivery to businesses**
- 3. While the more natural place for LMP to directly resource and deliver is in the 'demand facing' space, the significant reduction of engagement capacity within LGF leaves a gap in the number of people that can be supported. While LMP cannot provide a 'match' to LGF, there may be an ability to purchase additional 'places' for 2026/27 to be able to maintain some additional level of capacity. While this is a 'Plan B' and under consideration until more is known, it could only**

happen if it was predicated on an assurance that other funding/delivery streams come online in 2027 that mirror the capacity we seek to maintain. The Belfast LMP will keep a watching brief before considering this option, noting that underpinning any decision is the fact that LMP (and BCC) do not have the resources to sufficiently fill this gap beyond an 'emergency measure' in this financial year

4. Given that there is a high likelihood of a reduction in skills interventions delivered within LGF projects, LMP will act as a convenor to ensure engagement between LGF and alternative skills delivery which could potentially fill this gap to some extent such as Belfast Met, Invest NI, DfE and DfC.

3.13 Members will be aware that the Labour Market Partnership has now evolved to incorporate the Local Economic Partnership (LEP). At the March 2026 meeting of this Committee, members agreed an outline workplan of priority projects to be supported using LEP resources. Aligning the LEP and the LMP provides an opportunity for a wider discussion around employability, skills, enterprise and economic growth. As the Partnership develops in the coming year, efforts will be made to ensure that resources are being maximised to support economic growth in the Belfast area – always with a focus on inclusive growth.

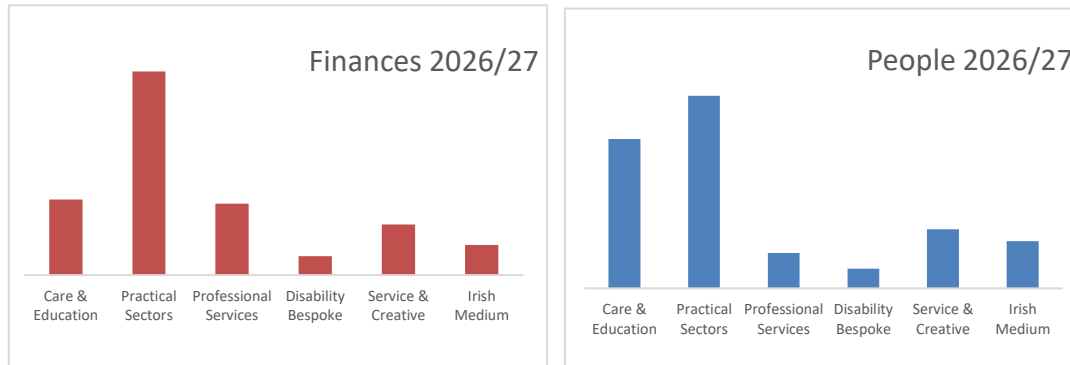
3.14 Employment & Upskilling Academies

Across 2026/27, we expect that the Employment Academies will engage with at least 675 participants with 75% expected to gain employment/self-employment in sectors outlined below.

- Practical sectors such as logistics and construction as well as scoping opportunities within manufacturing and the green economy (heating, electrical etc.).
- Professional services such as administration, business and digital technology
- Care and education sectors including classroom assistants, health and social care, childcare, childminding and playwork
- Creative industries and service sectors, scoping meaningful opportunities to access good jobs as well as self-employment.

3.15 A breakdown of the sectoral spread planned for 2026/27 is outlined below, both in terms of places allocated as well as the

financial investments. As previously noted, differences in volume across sectors above is not an indicator of investment levels and having these together shows this differential.



3.16 The delivery of Employment Academies is underpinned by:

- A focus on growth areas and good jobs – negotiating alternative routes with employers for residents who otherwise could not access due to experience/qualification levels – providing the assurance of aptitude and skills as an appropriate alternative.
- Strong relationships with employers and sectoral bodies who are at the centre of design, such as National House Building Council, CITB, NI Screen, Software Alliance, Logistics UK, NI Social Care Council etc.
- Providing additional support and highly bespoke academies for those with disabilities and migrants (where gaps exist)
- Designing academies such as childminding and beauty which specifically lead to self-employment opportunities with Go Succeed supports built in
- Providing in-programme supports as needed so that barriers to participating are removed – childcare, travel, interpreters etc. as well as in-built aftercare.

3.17 Officers will continue to drive excellence through the implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework that underpins delivery and will undertake an external evaluation of Employment Academies in 2025/26 to consolidate and recognise the Belfast Employment Academy model as an evidenced-based and intelligence-led intervention.

3.18 Digital Badging

In 2026/27 officers will continue to work to expand Digital Badging as a way to increase the currency of this inclusive recognition of skills and competence. This includes supporting DfC to roll out digital badging for all LMP delivery across the region. Alongside other RSA Cities of Learning, officers will also explore ways to increase the functionality of Digital Badging for such as the ability to generate CVs through badges, creating a 'marketplace' for recruitment and improving functionality by the development of an app-based solution.

3.19 Provider Engagement

In 2026/27 we will continue to consolidate this work, reaching into, for example, local Neighbourhood Renewal infrastructure across the city and working closely with other anti-poverty measures within the council such as social supermarkets and advice services. This is even more vital given the significant funding reduction with LGF, which will leave a significant gap in provision for those most economically vulnerable across Belfast.

3.20 Guidance on employability issues

In addition to service delivery, the team will also continue to work with internal and external partners to maximise the benefits to be derived through other support mechanisms. This will include:

- **Developer Contributions:** supporting the Planning team with to ensure that relevant E&S considerations are factored into major developments
- **Social Value:** supporting Corporate Procurement Services with the implementation employability and skills measures.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 The activities outlined in this report will be resourced from the 2026/27 budget for the Employability & Skills section of the Place and Economy departmental budget that was approved as part of the 2026/27 estimates process as well as other sources such as DfC (through the LMP).

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

5.1 Each of the proposed projects referenced in this report is informed by statistical research, stakeholder engagement and complementary policies and strategies. Considerations given to equality and good relations impacts at the initial stages of

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project development and monitored throughout delivery. Officers will work closely with the Equality and Good Relations Team on this activity.”

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Ó Néill,
Seconded by Councillor McKay, and

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to:

- recommend that a Jobs and Skills Task and Finish Group be established with the Labour Market Partnership/Local Economic Partnership as the oversight group;
- that work be undertaken to formulate a Skills Strategy for Belfast;
- to support and promote the Department for the Economy’s forthcoming bill on ‘Good Jobs’ and Employment Rights; and
- that work be undertaken to create a pipeline of workers for Good Jobs.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the work which had been undertaken and the outputs delivered in the financial year to date;
- ii. endorsed the priority interventions and approach for the 2026/27 financial year;
- iii. agreed to recommend that a Jobs and Skills Task and Finish Group be established with the Labour Market Partnership/Local Economic Partnership as the oversight group;
- iv. agreed that work be undertaken to formulate a Skills Strategy for Belfast;
- v. agreed to support and promote the Department for the Economy’s forthcoming bill on ‘Good Jobs’ and Employment Rights; and
- vi. agreed that work be undertaken to create a pipeline of workers for Good Jobs.

Correspondence

**Minister for Infrastructure Response - Belfast
Cycle Network’s Ravenhill Road Scheme**

The Committee considered a response from the Minister for Infrastructure in relation to the Ravenhill Road/Ormeau Embankment Pedestrian and Cycle Improvements scheme.

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During discussion, a Member highlighted the Minister's response to the Committee's request for the Department for Infrastructure to engage with the Council in respect of support for the installation of lighting infrastructure within the Council's parks. In her response, the Minister advised that the Department "*may provide capital funding support towards the installation of appropriate lighting deemed to be beneficial to enhancing the Belfast Cycling Network, subject to approval of a suitable grant funding business case.*"

Proposal

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Lyons,

'That the Committee agrees that a grant funding business case be developed for the installation of appropriate lighting within Council parks.'

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Nelson,
Seconded by Councillor McAteer,

'That the Committee agrees to refer the Minister's response to the People and Communities Committee and highlight the update provided in respect of lighting within the Council's parks.'

On a vote, thirteen Members voted for the amendment and two against and the amendment was declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- i. noted the response from the Minister for Infrastructure on the Belfast Cycle Network's Ravenhill Road Scheme; and
- ii. agreed to refer the Minister's response to the People and Communities Committee to highlight the update provided in respect of lighting within the Council's parks.

**Department for Infrastructure Response - Issues
Raised at Special Meeting in November 2025**

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) in response to a range of issues raised by Members to the officials from DfI Roads at its special meeting in November, 2025.

Strategic and Operational Issues

City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan 2026/27

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy submitted for the Committee's consideration the draft City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan for 2026/27.

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The Committee also considered the Culture, Tourism and Events workplan for 2026/27, which included priority work areas and associated budget allocations.

The Committee:

- i. approved the draft City Growth and Regeneration Committee Plan for 2026/27, subject to additional performance information being brought back to its next meeting;
- ii. approved the priority work areas and budget allocations presented within the Culture, Tourism and Events Workplan for 2026/27, as set out in Appendix 2 of the report; and
- iii. approved the contribution to support the ongoing development of the Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor (work to be coordinated through Newry, Mourne and Down District Council) up to a maximum of £35,000.

**Minutes of the City Regeneration Members'
Working Group - 5th March 2026**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the City Regeneration Members' Working Group of 5th March, 2026.

Chairperson