

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 19th June, 2026

HYBRID MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Carson (Deputy Chairperson);
Councillors Beattie, Black, Brennan, Bunting, Cobain,
Doran, de Faoite, Garrett, Long, Lyons, Maghie,
R. McLaughlin Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Ó Néill,
Smyth and Verner.
- Also attended: Councillor R. Brooks.
- In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr. E. McConville, Director of Communications, Marketing
and External Affairs;
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet, Transport and
Open Spaces and Street Scene;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Murtagh, Divisional Solicitor;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of the Chairperson, Councillor I. McLaughlin.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd May, 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 June, subject to the following amendments:

- **Requests for Funding** - The Council agreed that the decision under the above heading be amended to provide that the Committee agrees to fund the 47 discretionary funding support requests as outlined in the report and agreed that the funding, totalling £339,242, be allocated from the non-recurrent community capacity building monies included in the

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Growth Fund for 26/27, with a report to come back to the committee on up to £100,000 being allocated for dual language signage in the extended Gaeltacht area as identified in the Irish Language Policy;

- **Minutes of the Language Strategy Working Group** - The Council agreed that the Irish Language Commissioner, Pól Deeds, be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group;
- **Outcome of the Judicial Review in relation to Animal Welfare Services and new Animal Welfare Legislation** - The Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that the Committee's letter to the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee included that the Council had concerns that introducing additional animal welfare enforcement responsibilities, without providing adequate resources, risks undermining both existing enforcement activity and the successful implementation of new legislation and, moreover, could not be improved through legislation alone. It required properly resourced enforcement services capable of investigating complaints, tackling illegal breeding and protecting vulnerable animals;
- **Belfast Stories - Community Grants** - The Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 22nd May, 2026, under the above heading, be rejected and that accordingly the Council agrees to the recommendations as outlined in the report, namely, to:
 - Award the recommended 5 creative project grants (up to £30,000) following completion of the assessment and moderation process;
 - Note the 12 small grants up to £10,000 approved under delegated authority; and
 - In light of the significant demand and high quality of submissions received, as outlined at 3.15, agrees to increase the fund for small grants utilising an additional allocation of £41,560 from the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) reserve to fund 4 additional projects; and
 -
- **Drumglass Park – SuDs Project** - The Council agreed that the decision be amended to require that NI Water would detail options for physical and programmatic elements, as discussed at the South Area Working Group, that they were prepared to include for the benefit of the community as part of the project, ahead of public consultation, and to engage with Council officers and organisations in the area, given that the project appeared to be advancing at pace.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 2.b) Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, Councillor Murray declared an interest, in that he was employed by S.O.S NI who were a delivery partner of the Fleadh, as the related interests did not become the subject of debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

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Regarding item 2.c) PEACEPLUS Distillery Street Regeneration Project, Councillor Long declared an interest, in that his wife was the Justice Minister and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

During discussion of item 3.a) Notice of Motion - Pilot Drug and Pill testing at events – Update, as the Public Prosecution Service was raised, Councillor Long also declared an interest, in that his wife was the Justice Minister and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following eight 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 eight 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 Members were advised that content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which takes place 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.

2025-26 Quarter 4 Finance Report

The Director of Finance presented the Quarter 4 financial position for 2025/26, together with the Treasury Management report for consideration.

The Committee:

- Noted the report and agreed the year end position (Appendix 1);
- agreed to the recommended realignment of £2m from the VR reserve to the APP Losses reserve;
- Agreed to the recommended realignment of year end balances;
- Noted the Quarter 4 Treasury Management report (Appendix 3); and
- Noted that future Finance year-end reports submitted to the Committee would outline regular overspends and comparisons to initial budget allocations.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

(Ms. L-A O’Donnell, Senior Manager - Culture and Tourism
attended in connection with this item.)

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy and the Senior Manager, Culture and Tourism provided an update on the planning to support the hosting of Fleadh Cheoil na

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hÉireann in Belfast in August 2026 and highlighted that a Briefing Pack would be available for Members soon.

During discussion, Members raised a number of queries in relation to public transport, website information, events list for Members, the availability of private car parks, interim use of vacant market space, safety messaging, park and ride wayfinding, the potential to expand the shuttle bus for the Fall's Park area, and a post Fleadh volunteer event.

In response to a Member's question on the impact pedestrianisation of the City Centre would have on air quality, the Director advised that he would discuss the potential of monitoring air quality with the Environmental Health Unit.

During further discussion, the City Solicitor outlined the legal advice in relation to the Major Events Order application.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor R. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Brennan and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that up to £250,000 be allocated for dressing locations along arterial routes for the Fleadh from specified reserves, and a report be submitted to the Committee on the detail of what was deliverable

Accordingly, the Committee:

1. Noted the contents of the report;
2. Agreed to seek Council agreement to delegate authority to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for urgent decisions in relation to the delivery of Fleadh which were not delegated to officers;
3. Approved expenditure for the provision of a temporary campsite at Falls Park, as outlined under 3.3 of the report;
4. Approved the extension and associated expenditure to Visit Belfast services or via direct contracting, as outlined under 3.5 and 3.10 of the report;
5. Noted the updates on:
 - Residents' parking and mitigating displacement
 - Park and Ride provision
 - Business engagement and toolkit
 - Major Events Order application
 - Event Management Plan
 - Opening ceremony arrangements
 - City dressing proposals;

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6. Encourage Member attendance at the opening ceremony and associated civic events;
7. Agreed that up to £250,000 be allocated for dressing locations along arterial routes for the Fleadh from specified reserves, and a report be prepared on the detail of what was deliverable; and
8. Noted that further updates would be provided on the issues which had been raised.

PEACEPLUS Distillery Street Regeneration Project

The Committee considered a report which outlined the proposed approach to SEUPB to submit a minor modification to the existing Distillery Street project.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Black,
Seconded by Councillor O'Neill and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that the Project progressed, subject to further consultation with residents on the proposed minor modification to the existing Distillery Street project and agreed to write to the Department of Justice in the interim period to recommend further engagement with residents, once the project works commence.

Accordingly the Committee:

- Noted the update and agreed that the Project progressed, subject to further consultation with residents on the proposed minor modification to the existing Distillery Street project.
- Agreed to write to the Department of Justice in the interim period to recommend further engagement with residents, once the project works had commenced.

**Social Value Levy Fund Update - Stakeholder
Engagement and Emerging Projects and
Priorities**

The Director of Resources, Fleet and OSS provided an update on the Social Value Levy Fund collected from large-scale commercial events held within Council parks and open spaces and to outline the outcome of member and stakeholder engagement undertaken regarding the future use of the fund.

He summarised the engagement undertaken to date and highlighted the emerging themes, priorities and potential projects identified by stakeholders across the three event locations: Ormeau Park, Botanic Gardens and Boucher Road Playing Fields.

During discussion Members outlined the following additional projects for consideration: St. Brigids Walking Trail, crowd and audio barriers at Stockman's Lane,

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landscaping at Balmoral crossroads, together with potential alternative options for use of the Fund.

After discussion, the Committee:

- a) Noted the contents of the report and the extensive engagement undertaken with elected Members, local residents, community organisations, businesses and stakeholder groups;
- b) Noted the emerging priorities identified through the engagement process;
- c) Noted that officers would continue to develop and cost potential projects in consultation with stakeholders;
- d) Agreed that the fund was used to install Accessible Picnic areas in Musgrave Park and replace the existing planters in the Musgrave Park community garden with Eco planters (Total cost £18k);
- e) In terms of the other options identified through stakeholder engagement, noted that, once fully costed, officers would bring a further report back for members to consider and approve; and
- f) Agreed that an update report be submitted to the Committee in quarter three to include costings and details on the potential projects which had been identified by the Committee: St. Brigids Walking Trail, crowd and audio barriers at Stockman's Lane, landscaping at Balmoral crossroads, together with potential alternative options for use of the Fund.

Belfast Stories Update

(Ms. W. Langham, Programme Director, Belfast Stories
attended in connection with this item.)

The Programme Director, Belfast Stories, provided an update on: the addendum to the Outline Business Case (OBC) to develop a larger event space in Belfast Stories; the key findings following the Market Engagement Exercise (MEE) on the larger event space; and the Belfast Stories Programme.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth,

That the Committee agrees to defer consideration of the report to allow further work to be undertaken in relation to the operator model and demand for the enhanced studio events space.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin,

That the Committee agrees not to proceed with the proposed user of the larger space in the Belfast Stories Scheme.

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On a vote, eleven Members voted for the amendment and eight against and it was declared carried. The amendment was put to the Committee as the substantive motion and agreed.

The Committee:

- Noted the contents of the report; and
- Agreed not to proceed with the proposed user of the larger space in the Belfast Stories Scheme.

**Minutes of the Installations - City Hall/City Hall
Grounds Working Group of 13th May, 2026**

The Committee reviewed the Minutes of the Installations City Hall/City Hall Grounds Group, together with the illustration of the final design of the Health and Social Care stained glass window.

After discussion, the Committee:

- approved and adopted the minutes of the Installations City Hall/City Hall Grounds Group of 13th May, 2026;
- agreed to the final design of the Health and Social Care stained glass window, as outlined in the appendix; and
- noted that an update on the Fire Service stained glass window would be provided in due course.

Round the World Clipper Race

The Strategic Director of Place and Economy advised that a request had been received from Clipper Around the World Yacht Race regarding a proposal for Belfast to host a stopover in a future edition of the Clipper Round the World Yacht Race and outlined officer considerations regarding the request for Council financial support.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Long,

That the Committee agrees not to proceed with the potential involvement as host partner for the Race or the allocation of up to £100k.

On a vote, four Members voted for the amendment and thirteen against and it was declared lost.

The recommendations as outlined in the report were put to the Committee and agreed.

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Accordingly, the Committee:

- agreed to the potential involvement as host partner for the Race and the allocation of up to £100k, subject to independent assessment of the business case and commitment of funding from the relevant government department agency and Belfast Harbour at the required levels;
- noted that the approach to the festival programming and wrap around support would also be subject to further consideration following such confirmations and assessment of the business case; and
- noted that a week-long event was estimated to cost in the region of £600K.

An Droichead - Appraisal of Financial Recovery Plan and Consideration of Any Stabilisation Support Request

The Director of Finance provided an update on the request which had previously been received from An Droichead for a stabilisation grant to support essential childcare, community, cultural and Irish language services while it implemented a financial recovery and restructuring programme.

The Committee:

1. noted the findings of the review of An Droichead's 2024/25 audited accounts, together with the April 2026 and May 2026 management accounts and May 2026 recovery plan;
2. noted that the contents of the report in relation to the recovery plan;
3. agreed to provide one-off financial assistance of £100,000 from specified reserves on a restricted, time-limited and conditional basis, with phased drawdown and enhanced monitoring arrangements; and
4. agreed that officers should complete further due diligence, convene a meeting with other funders, and report back on any detailed funding proposal, including proposed terms, conditions, milestones and monitoring requirements, prior to any payment being released.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Notice of Motion - Pilot Drug and Pill testing at events – Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 **The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the work so far relating to the Notice of Motion relating to Pilot Drug and Pill Testing Facilities at Major Events and Festivals.**

The motion was proposed by Councillor Murray and seconded by Councillor Smyth at the Standards and Business Committee meeting held on the 24th March 2026 and subsequently referred to the People and Communities Committee for consideration. The motion was presented to the People and Communities Committee on 14 April 2026 and requested an internal report on the role of Belfast City Council in supporting and facilitating harm reduction services, including legal and regulatory considerations.

1.2 Since consideration of the motion, officers have engaged with the relevant statutory partners including representatives from the Department of Health (DoH), the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and event stakeholders involved in planning for the 2026 festival and events season.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. Note the contents of this report and the feedback received from statutory partners regarding the legal, regulatory and operational considerations associated with drug and pill testing facilities at events and festivals;
- ii. Note the ongoing work being undertaken by the Department of Health, Public Health Agency and PSNI in relation to harm reduction, public health messaging and event planning; and
- iii. Agree that officers continue to engage with relevant statutory agencies and monitor developments elsewhere within the UK and Ireland. Should there be any future policy developments, pilot programmes or legislative changes which may impact on Belfast City Council's role in this area a report will be brought back into committee.

3.0 Main Report

Background

3.0 Members will recall that the Notice of Motion requested Council support for the introduction of pilot drug and pill testing facilities at major events and festivals and sought consideration of the role Belfast City Council could play in supporting such harm reduction initiatives. Officers have subsequently sought advice from relevant statutory partners to better understand the legal framework, operational

requirements and policy considerations associated with such testing services.

Legal and Regulatory Considerations

- 3.2 The Department of Health has advised that drug and pill testing services involve significant legal and regulatory considerations under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. Any organisation undertaking testing of controlled substances would require the appropriate licences and approvals to possess, transport, analyse and dispose of controlled drugs.
- 3.3 In Great Britain, such licences are issued by the Home Office. In Northern Ireland, responsibility would fall to the Department of Health's Medicines Regulatory Group.
- 3.4 The Department has advised that no formal application for such a licence has been received to date in Northern Ireland. Should a provider seek to establish an on-site testing facility, a range of issues would require consideration, including:
- Site security arrangements;
 - Testing methodologies and governance arrangements;
 - Safety and welfare considerations for staff and service users;
 - Storage, handling and transportation of substances;
 - Disposal and destruction procedures;
 - Compliance with licensing requirements and controlled drug legislation.
- 3.5 The Department has advised that any proposal would represent a novel application and would require detailed assessment and engagement before any licensing arrangements could be considered.

Policy and Funding Considerations

- 3.6 The Department of Health has advised that there is currently no central government funding programme available to support drug testing facilities at festivals and events.
- 3.7 Whilst examples of on-site testing facilities exist elsewhere in the United Kingdom, these are generally associated with large-scale or multi-day festivals and operate within differing legal and policy frameworks. The Department has further advised that the current Northern Ireland Substance Use Strategy, Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery, does not contain actions relating to the introduction of festival-based drug testing services. Any future policy proposal to introduce such services would presumably require consideration at Executive level.

Existing and Enhanced Harm Reduction and Public Health Measures

- 3.9 The Committee should note that the Council, Department of Health, Public Health Agency and PSNI are already working collaboratively in preparation for the forthcoming festival season. A significant change will be to include specific drug and alcohol mitigation clauses in the site license between Council and the event promoters. Such clauses will give Council and its supporting partners an opportunity to have early sight of mitigation and medical plans. The PSNI and the PHA have already agreed to appraise such plans in partnership with Council when they are received and provide recommendations as required. Other measures include:
- Increased visibility of drug amnesty bins throughout concert venues;
 - Increased public health messaging and awareness campaigns;
 - Information sharing between relevant agencies;
 - Cross-border engagement with counterparts in Ireland to support aligned messaging and harm reduction approaches;
 - Ongoing monitoring of emerging substances and trends.
- 3.10 The Department of Health has also advised that where concerns arise regarding specific substances, testing can currently be undertaken through existing arrangements involving the PSNI and Forensic Services Northern Ireland, with indicative turnaround times of approximately 48 hours. Increased visibility of the drug amnesty bins will provide better opportunity to support this.

Belfast City Council Role

- 3.11 While Belfast City Council has a role in facilitating events and working with partners to promote public safety and wellbeing, responsibility for drug testing services, controlled drug licensing, public health policy and substance misuse strategy rests primarily with central government departments and statutory agencies.
- 3.12 At present, there is no legislative framework, funding mechanism or operational model in place that would enable Belfast City Council to establish or directly deliver drug and pill testing facilities at events.
- 3.13 Officers will continue to engage with relevant partners and monitor developments in legislation, policy and best practice.

3.14 Members should note that responsibility for drug testing services, licensing and substance misuse policy rests primarily with the Department of Health and other statutory agencies.

4.0 Key Issues

Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from this report at this stage.

Any future proposal involving pilot testing facilities would require detailed consideration of resource requirements, governance arrangements, licensing obligations and funding sources.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

4.2 There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report at this stage.”

Durind discussion, a range of suggestions were put forward regarding the legal, regulatory and operational considerations associated with drug and pill testing facilities at events and festivals.

The Committee agreed:

- To request a formal paper from the Department of Health on what would be required to issue a licence in Northern Ireland;
- To request that the Stormont Executive include drug testing in the next update of: Preventing Harm, Empowering Recovery;
- That the Council convene a roundtable with relevant stakeholders such as the Department of Health, Public Health Agencies, PSNI, Universities, Promoters and an experienced provider and potential delivery partner, such as the Loop, to which a nominee from each party would be invited to attend;
- That the Council identifies a pilot event for 2027 and designs an operational model based on best practice and research and works in partnership with others immediately, so that Belfast is prepared for the moment that licensing was enabled; and
- To write to the Prosecution Service and the Attorney General to request that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is reviewed in relation to a public interest test on the transportation of material for rapid drug testing from sites to a licensee holder to allow the rapid testing to take place.

**Notice of Motion - Strengthening Disability
Inclusion and Accessibility across the Council**

The Committee was advised that, at the meeting of the Standards and Business Committee held on 26th May 2026, the following motion, which was proposed by Councillor Ruth Brooks and seconded by Councillor Nicola Verner, was referred to the Committee for consideration:

Strengthening Disability Inclusion and Accessibility across Council

“This Council agrees that:

- 1. Disability inclusion and accessibility should move towards a dedicated, streamlined corporate function, led by a senior officer and team with clear responsibility for coordinating and delivering this work across the organisation. A report will be brought forward setting out the structure, staffing, resources and reporting lines, and a timescale required, to establish that dedicated function and how it will streamline delivery across the organisation.***
- 2. The Disability Strategy will be brought to committee within three months, with a revised Action Plan to follow, with clear and ambitious actions, responsible officers, cross-departmental responsibilities, timescales and how progress will be monitored and reported.***
- 3. The Accessibility Roadmap 2035 is brought forward as soon as possible, setting out the lead officer or officers for delivery, required resources, key milestones, engagement with relevant Executive departments and how people with disabilities and relevant organisations will be involved from the beginning.***
- 4. More focused reports are brought to each relevant committee, allowing members to be given timely information on progress to improve accessibility and inclusion across the city, and the delivery against the Action Plan and Accessibility Roadmap 2035.”***

The Committee noted that, in accordance with Standing Orders, Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure or fall within the remit of a particular Committee must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.

The Committee noted that the notice of motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report would be brought back to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the motion and the potential cost implications.

Notice of Motions - Quarterly Update

The Committee considered an update on the progress of all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which it was responsible for.

The Committee:

- Noted the updates to all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that the Committee was responsible for;
- Agreed to the closure of Notices of Motion 50, 176, 337, 393, 402, 420, 446;
- Agreed that Motion 501 - Procedures of the Irish Street Sign Consultation, would remain open; and
- Noted that there would be a review of the Notice of Motion process as part of phase one of the governance review and a report would be submitted for consideration in August.

Correspondence Received – Ulster University Job Cuts Responses

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 5th May 2026, Belfast City Council passed the following motion which had been proposed by Councillor Michael Collins and seconded by Councillor Anthony Flynn:

“This Council:

- ***expresses deep concern at the announcement of up to 450 redundancies at the University of Ulster (UU);***
- ***stands in solidarity with workers at UU in campuses in Belfast and across the north against these job losses;***
- ***calls on and will write to senior University of Ulster management urging them to rescind these proposals to protect jobs and educational provision;***
- ***will also write to the Economy Minister requesting an urgent intervention by the Stormont Executive to protect jobs and educational provision in UU; and***
- ***supports the UCU, UNITE and other trade unions representing workers at UU and supports action to resist the loss of 450 jobs and the resultant impact on educational provision.”***

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It was reported that, subsequently, Democratic Services wrote to the Department from the Economy and the Ulster University on the issues which had been raised, and responses had been received at [Appendix 1](#) and [Appendix 2](#) of the report.

The Committee considered the responses, together with the request from the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Bartholomew, to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss how the University and Members could work together to safeguard the provision at all the Ulster University campuses, as outlined in Appendix 2.

The Committee:

- noted the correspondence as set out in the report: and
- agreed that representatives of Ulster University be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss how the University and Members could work together on the issue.

**Correspondence Received - Department for
Infrastructure Belfast Region City Deal
Response**

The Committee noted the [response](#) which had been received from the Minister for Infrastructure in relation to the concerns which had been raised regarding the Infrastructure Pillar update of the Belfast Region City Deal.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Corporate Delivery Plan 2026/27

The Committee agreed the draft contents of the [Corporate Delivery Plan](#) as the work planning and prioritisation document for the Council in the financial year 2026/ 27.

City Innovation Update

(Ms. B. Murphy, Innovation Broker, attended in connection with this item.)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To update Members on a number of City Innovation programme initiatives including Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors’ Challenge Belfast Alleyways Transformation programme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- 1. Approve Belfast City Council to commence work, on behalf of Belfast Region City Deal partners, on the**

design and delivery of the Belfast ACTs programme and its associated grants competition. This will include commissioning expert support.

2. To approve the submission of an application to the European Capital of Innovation Award 2027 promoting the Belfast innovation ecosystem and its commitment to inclusive growth.
3. Note the work packages and planned phases of the Alleyways transformation programme.

3.0 Main report

Belfast Region ACTs programme

- 3.1 Belfast City Council, on behalf of Belfast Region City Deal partners, has submitted a business case proposal to the Department for the Economy to deliver the £9 million Belfast Region Advanced Wireless Connectivity Technologies (ACTs) programme.
- 3.2 This work builds on the success of the recent Belfast 5G Innovation Regions programme which, with £5.1 million of funding for the UK Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, supported five major 'anchor' projects including an energy and building management project within the Cecil Ward Building to support long term efficiencies. It also provided grant funding for 15 smaller projects with local companies that allowed them to utilise 5G connectivity to create efficiencies and transformation within their business.
- 3.3 Belfast Region ACTs proposes to maintain this momentum to run three waves of competitions that will provide grants of between £500,000 and £1.5 million to projects that have significant business, industrial or public service needs that could be solved through the innovative adoption of advanced wireless technologies. At the same time, the programme also seeks to stimulate significant investment by the UK's Mobile Network Operators in business-ready public 5G networks across the Belfast region – which would generate opportunities for the region's businesses in general. Feedback from the wireless industry and local industry has been extremely encouraging.
- 3.4 Subject to DfE business case approval and legal advice, both of which are expected imminently, Members are asked approve Belfast City Council commence work, on behalf of Belfast Region City Deal partners, on the design and delivery of the Belfast ACTs programme and its associated grants competition. This will include commissioning expert support to design and manage what is a complex technical programme, details of which are included in this month's contract report.

3.5 European Capital of Innovation Award 2027 application

Supported by the European Innovation Council under Horizon Europe, the European Capital of Innovation Awards (also known as iCapital) honours city regions with strong collaborative innovation ecosystems. The competition is open to cities in EU Member States and countries associated to Horizon Europe. The iCapital city for 2026 is Grenoble, France. This year's competition opened on 5 May with submissions due (from city governments only) by 4 August 2026.

3.6 Winners are selected following evaluations by panels of experts in early autumn. The winning city receives €1 million and two runners-up receive \$100,000 each. The process also allows participating cities to 'benchmark' themselves against their peers and shared criteria, while at the same time offering opportunities to promote themselves internationally as places to invest in innovation and to foster collaborations.

3.7 Belfast City Council is currently engaging with partners on the Belfast submission. This will be framed around the strengths and uniqueness of the city's innovation ecosystem and its capacity to generate inclusive economic and social impact.

3.8 Our 'ecosystem' constitutes the city's private, public and academic institutions, our residents and communities, our digital and data infrastructure, the supportive policy environment, programmes and initiatives that allow these elements to work together to maximise the opportunities. The core argument in the submission will be that Belfast is deliberately shaping this ecosystem towards inclusive growth. And that the city is doing so by building on the unique capacity and scale of our community and voluntary sector infrastructure. This approach builds on the recent *Belfast: Inclusive Futures* series.

3.9 Given the submission deadline of 4 August, Members are asked to approve the submission of an application to the competition which will be framed in this context. This will also require a letter of support from the Lord Mayor.

3.10 Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge update

Work is underway to design, in collaboration with Bloomberg Philanthropies, a two-year programme that will put in place a new long-term, financially sustainable, Belfast City Council 'Alleyway Service' that's responsive and supportive of the needs and ambitions of neighbourhoods across the city. The programme is expected to deliver the following key outputs by March 2028:

3.11

1. A detailed sustainability plan that identifies a costed model for how Belfast City Council will deliver a citywide alleyways programme over subsequent years once the Bloomberg funding ends. This will address such things as support for residents, council service re-design, the role of partners, financing, administration, future funding models, etc.
2. A Belfast City Council business case for onward delivery of the programme that may include costed proposals for the transformation of services, 'invest to save' propositions, models for new ways of working, etc.
3. 25 miles of transformed alleyways. The programme is not only about designing long-term solutions, it is also about learning how this can work in the real-world conditions by delivering 800 resident-led alley projects with residents.

3.12 To deliver these outputs the programme will have a number of inter-connected work packages.

1. Programme management

To put in place and manage all aspects of programme governance, delivery and co-ordination of work packages, including over-seeing risk, assurance, budget and reporting to Belfast City Council and Bloomberg Philanthropies as the main funder, to recruit and manage staff, commission technical and other support.

2. Data and Insights

Gathering the data and insights required to plan and evaluate the programme including the success of pilots, approaches, engagement with residents, service costs, impact, etc. This will generate evidence for the sustainability plan and any future 'invest to save' business case.

3. Resident mobilisation

A critical success factor for the programme is the mobilisation and continued involvement of residents over the long term. In the past, similar resident-led projects have managed to sustain resident motivation while other projects have failed. This work package will determine the best mix of support, incentives and approaches needed to inspire and maintain engagement and motivation over time.

4. Stakeholders & Partner engagement

While the Council will lead on the programme, long term success depends on multi-agency cooperation with organisations such as NIHE, the Department for Communities, the Department for Infrastructure, potential third-party funders and, most importantly, the local community and voluntary sector.

5. Alleyway Transformation Resources

There are a range of resources the programme will develop to support residents in their ambition. This may include resource hubs, materials, toolkits and guides, hands-on training, and micro-grants. These will be identified, developed and tested with residents over the life of the programme.

6. Mobilisation and Delivery

This is the 'on-the-ground' work of council officers, residents and partners in the delivery of the programme and its pilots. The Bloomberg funding will provide support for a temporary three-person programme team who will work with existing staff from City and Neighbourhoods.

7. 'Future State' Delivery Model

This is mapping the various existing council and partners services related to alleyways and developing a low cost, integrated approach that can support the alleyway programme.

8. Learning & Evaluation

An obligation to our funders is to ensure that the programme is measured and evaluated at each phase, with a emphasise on determining impact through, for example, a social return on investment model.

3.13 The programme has a number of discreet phases specified by Bloomberg's innovation process. Over the next six months the focus will be on the following:

- Establishing the programme governance
- Recruitment of the three-person team
- Ramp up stakeholders and community engagement and awareness
- Development of element of the alleyways support package for communities
- Delivery of a small number of interventions to inspire and mobilise neighbourhoods

- **Design of a scalable approach ahead of the introduction of a citywide approach.**

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.14 Bloomberg Philanthropies will provide funding of approx. £900,000 for a two-year programme which includes funding for a Programme Manager and two staff.**

Other expenditure has been identified within existing departmental budgets.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.15 Equality and Rural screenings will be completed as part of the Bloomberg programme design process.”**

During discussion, the Director of Resources, Fleet, Transport and Open Spaces and Street Scene answered a range of questions in relation to the sustainability of the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors’ Challenge Belfast Alleyways Transformation programme, community engagement, the pilot model, fly-tipping and vandalism, how the Council’s existing Alleyway Scheme could complement the Bloomberg scheme, and the issues with unadopted alleyways.

Several Members suggested the need for the identification of problematic entries and the required interventions, further information on the pilot initiatives, the plans for maintenance and long term sustainability; and potential recurrent funding.

After discussion, the Committee:

1. Approved Belfast City Council to commence work, on behalf of Belfast Region City Deal partners, on the design and delivery of the Belfast ACTs programme and its associated grants competition. This would include commissioning expert support.
2. Approved the submission of an application to the European Capital of Innovation Award 2027 promoting the Belfast innovation ecosystem and its commitment to inclusive growth;
3. Noted the work packages and planned phases of the Alleyways transformation programme and agreed that officers would proceed with the pilot phase; and
4. Agreed that a further report be submitted on both the Bloomberg Belfast Alleyway Transformation Scheme and the Council’s existing Alleyways Programme to include: the identification of problematic entries and the required interventions; the pilot initiatives; maintenance and long term sustainability; and recurrent funding.

Accessibility and Inclusion Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To provide SP&R with an update on the legislative framework around disability and our strategic approach to accessibility. The eventual aim of the development of a strategic approach is to make the city more accessible to all D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse people and to everyone who lives, works or visits Belfast, irrespective of their service access requirements. This will be a long-term strategy to place accessibility at the heart of how we design and deliver all our services.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the update in this report; and
- Note that an updated version of the Disability Action Plan will be presented to SP&R Committee in August 2026 for the purposes of public consultation.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Over one in four people in Belfast live with a disability. Disability impacts not only the individual but also members of their families, sometimes in a caring role. Now is the right time to develop a more strategic approach to accessibility. The impact of disability is different if you are young or old, having caring responsibilities or don't speak English as your first language. The need for a focus on accessibility isn't new, in the last decade it has come in from the margins as inequalities are better understood, with disabled people often highlighting the unequal opportunities that are afforded to them. Data provided from official sources such as the 2021 Census, with standardised definitions of disability as 'health impairment' are now set alongside social media, where global influencers, promote their disability as part of their identity, bringing voices to the label. Types of disability are often categorised into physical, sensory, hidden and intellectual, with legal definitions focusing on the impact.

Over the past decade there has been a shift in understanding from the medical model of disability to the social model, which in turn has increased public awareness of the barriers faced by D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse people in participating in everyday life. There is a clear need for an ambitious strategy which will shift the emphasis from the medical model, where

disability is viewed as a problem stemming from the individual, in sharp contrast the social model highlights the environmental barriers which exclude and discriminate. Any shift in public attitudes is challenging, and the strategic approach will need to be delivered over an adequate timeframe.

3.2 Why do we need an accessibility strategy when we have a Disability Action Plan?

Our Disability Action Plan, which is a legal requirement with an internal focus, and is overseen by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

Around 2018 Belfast City Council had addressed the limitations placed upon disability by the legal boundaries of the Disability Action Plan and shared our ambitions to develop a more strategic, external approach.

ECNI explained that due to legislation the Disability Action Plan and any strategy should be separated. Frustrations with the complexity of the legal framework contributed, in part, with the prominence of diversity initiatives focused on specific groups of people. A strategic approach to accessibility will also allow us to display civic leadership on the promotion of all of Belfast's citizens, working through an evidence-based approach.

Developing a strategic approach to what is currently called the 'Roadmap to an Accessible City', will build on existing council work and contributions to accessibility within the city, we will also review our current approaches and start new work where it is needed. The strategy will bring added value to initiatives being delivered throughout Departments and aim to harmonise approaches through the city, aiming to bring together best practice and working in partnership to identify where work still needs to be done. We will listen, learn and lead bringing human stories to the statistics.

3.3 How does Belfast City Council currently promote accessibility?

Disability inequalities and accessibility measures are mainstreamed, led by each Director within their own Departments. Outlined below are a range of actions delivered across Council, although it should be noted this is not an extensive list.

1. Promoting accessibility through funding

- Targeted grant initiatives, including 'The Sounds Atypical Music Grant Scheme', funded by Council and delivered by University of Atypical for Arts and

Disability. Schemes such as this are central to the UNESCO City of Music status, we are proud to offer some fantastic music-led grant schemes within the city.

- Funding initiatives like ‘Suitcases and Skies’ performed by adults with learning disabilities, coming together from groups across north, south, east and west Belfast. This was part of the Belfast Local Community Action Plan supported by Peaceplus, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body

2. Promoting accessibility through services

- In April 2024 council commissioned an external consultant to carry out an audit of play value and accessibility at all council-maintained playgrounds. The scores allocated for each playground relate to existing features, types of play opportunities available and their accessibility for a range of age groups and abilities.
- The Play Value & Accessibility Audit (2024) now informs sites selection under PIP and is used as a design guide to help deliver more accessible playgrounds going forward.
- Council’s Play Equipment Supply Contract (2021-2026) allows us to procure equipment for use in playground improvement works. The supply contract will be retendered in the coming months and will include an additional five items of accessible equipment e.g. wheelchair accessible, swing, see-saw and trampolines, providing a wider palette of equipment to improve accessibility in playgrounds.
- Communication Boards, displaying symbols to help children with limited language skills express themselves, are currently being installed in all council-maintained playgrounds, work is expected to be complete by the November 2026.
- In 2020 council installed special needs swing-seats in all playgrounds with suitable swing frames. There are now support swing-seats in more than 50 council-maintained playgrounds across the city. Installation of support swing-seats will continue to be delivered under PIP.
- An Accessible Signage Working Group, comprised of council officers, consultants and representatives from Council’s Disability Advisory Panel was set up in January 2026 to design a fully accessible entrance sign for use in the Reconnected Belfast project (Waterworks and Alexandra Park). It is hoped this sign could be used as a template in other parks and open spaces.
- Capital funding has been secured to develop a new accessible, sensory play facility at Woodvale Park on

the site of the disused bowling green. It is envisaged that this project can be used as a pilot for other projects moving forward.

- Changing Places facilities have been agreed for Waterworks and Alexandra Park as part of the Reconnected Belfast project; a feasibility study is currently underway for another Changing Places facility in proximity to the Woodvale Park Sensory Garden site.
- Capital funding has been secured to improve accessibility at Musgrave Park Therapy Garden. Improvements include installation of wheelchair accessible equipment and a sensory trail; completion is due in June 2026.
- Accessible bin lifts and braille on bins
- RADAR keys
- Zoomobile, which is an accessible buggy that can carry one wheelchair user and four non-wheelchair users, or four non-wheelchair users.
- Designing routes in our parks for wheelchair accessibility
- ICC Belfast, Waterfront Hall and Ulster Hall were one of the first venues in Belfast and Northern Ireland to receive the Autism NI Impact Award.
- The venues also hold the Bronze Diversity Mark accreditation and are on track to achieving silver accreditation.
- City Hall, Belfast Castle, Belfast Zoo and Malone House are Autism Impact Award Champions and accredited as autism-accessible, welcoming environments.

3. Promoting accessibility through Council led city-wide initiatives

- The Belfast Promise includes commitments to make your business more inclusive for disabled people, noting ‘it is not only the right thing to do. It makes good business sense’.
- Our Inclusive Tourism initiative roles out in 2025 provides support for tourism businesses to help them become more inclusive. This was the first support of its kind in Northern Ireland. The funding, awarded as a voucher, could be used to improve the visitor experience in small, but practical, ways, through staff training and awareness raising, support with navigating websites or booking tickets, or to upgrade signage or marketing materials.

4. Promoting accessibility through communications

- Video relay services
- Continuing to improve the accessibility of the Council's website
- The role out of Makaton boards in play parks set out above
- Sign posting to other accessible service providers

5. Promoting accessibility through strategic partnerships

All our strategies have accessibility to promote inclusion embedded in them

- The Belfast Agenda
- Corporate Plan 2025-2028
- Local Development Plan
- Inclusive Growth Strategy
- Social Value Procurement Policy
- Resilience Strategy
- Belfast Region City Deal
- A Bolder Vision for Belfast
- Belfast Economic Strategy 2022-2030

6. Promoting accessibility as an employer

- Council holds the Silver Diversity Mark in recognition of our commitment to promoting equality and diversity within our workforce.
- Council provides reasonable adjustments through its recruitment and selection process and operate a Guaranteed Interview Scheme.
- Council holds the AAA* Disability Positive accreditation from Employers for Disability NI in recognition of our employment-related disability good practice. Members of our Employee Resourcing team are accredited as 'Disability Positive'.
- Our ABLE staff network meets quarterly and is open to all council staff who consider themselves to have a disability; as well as carers, allies or supporters of people with disabilities.

3.4 What is an 'Accessible City'?

With such emphasis on accessibility being 'for everyone; the first steps in developing a strategic approach includes defining the problem you want to solve. We have explored the need for specific focus throughout opportunities including the Disability Advisory Group and International Day for Persons with Disabilities events. From the December 2025 event the evaluation showed:

- The diversity of disability with over twenty different types listed from attendees
- 63% of attendees had experienced a barrier which excluded them, a friend, or family member from accessing work or social life in Belfast.
- An average of 85% of attendees rated the event as found the event content, usefulness, rated the event highly or excellent.
- Twenty-four different reasons were listed displaying pride at Belfast's efforts for disability inclusion and accessibility. These included going beyond legislation and hearing lived experiences.
- There are knowledge gaps on disability inclusion and accessibility, including engaging with people with lived experience of disability, economic benefits of inclusion and ableism.
- Barriers being addressed through our departments include:
 - Communication
 - Attitudinal
 - Physical/Architectural
 - Technology
 - Systemic/Policy

Defining what we mean by Belfast as an accessible city will be key to the success of the strategy through clear communication as well as establishing data baselines. If not defined 'accessibility' becomes a new buzzword for good customer service. Emphasising the impact of the process, the Centre for Ageing notes:

Accessibility can mean a variety of different things, from wheelchair access to comprehensive information. For the historic city of Chester, becoming an accessible city has been a careful, long-term process - with real rewards.

A common framework for definition is provided by the European Commission, who organizes the Access City Award, to reward EU cities that are prioritizing accessibility for persons with disabilities. Although Belfast was a past recipient of an award for the sensory garden at Musgrave Park, we are no longer eligible to enter. Nonetheless, the Access City Award provides a vision:

Accessibility is a master-key that opens the door to the city's services, buildings and spaces, so persons with disabilities can take the lead of their lives, live independently and fully participate in the community.

Cities are key actors to ensure accessibility, as they have a direct impact on our everyday life and needs as citizens. A city is accessible when persons with disabilities can, for instance:

- go around the streets and enjoy public areas, such as parks and playgrounds.
- get in public buildings like hospitals, town halls, libraries, and sports halls.
- get the bus, tram and metro to go to work or meet friends.
- communicate with the local administration in person, by phone or online.
- get information in ways that they can read and understand.

The Royal Town Planning Institute recognises the increasing lack of accessibility in sustainable design, with climate change becoming prevalent vulnerable people are being left behind. Transport is again listed as a key concern highlighting the role of barriers in excluding disabled people.

3.5 Next steps - how is the strategy being developed?

Legal and Civic Services will lead the overall development, delivery and monitoring of the accessibility strategy. This cannot be achieved without the co-operation from all departments. Collaboration between departments was key to the success of the International Day for Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) in 2025. A meeting of Directors nominees for the IDPD 2026 Planning Group will be held in the coming weeks.

Commitments towards accessibility are actively being delivered and the development of a strategy for changes in education, culture and service delivery must be done in tandem with business as usual.

As a response to the IPDD 2025, training with an Accessibility Consultant was organised and delivered to P&P and CNS. An output of this training has been the inclusion of new Accessibility requirements within the appointment of all integrated design teams on behalf of the council.

The new requirements will see the appointment of an Accessibility Consultant with a view to promoting inclusive design and access for disabled people and incorporate their recommendations. The Accessibility Consultant will be registered with the National Register of Access Consultants (NRAC) and should will undertake a review of the designs at each applicable design stage.

The aim is to ensure that capital projects delivered by the Council are providing inclusive design and access that exceeds the regulatory requirements and minimum standards. Council departments are working together to truly strive toward making Belfast a more inclusive and accessible city for all.

Key 2026 milestones:

- Autumn - Public consultation for the Disability Action Plan including external engagement on a strategic approach to accessibility with key stakeholders
- November: launch of Disability History Month on the theme 'Disability, Politics and Democracy
- December: International Day for Persons with Disabilities event

These milestones align with the 2027-28 programme of actions reported to the Disability Working Group and further updates will be brought back to SP&R in due course.

Members are asked to note the contents of this report and that an updated Disability Action Plan to reflect the Council's strategic ambitions will be presented to Committee at its meeting in August.

3.6 Financial and Resource Implications

Disability and accessibility, like all equality and good relations matters are mainstreamed throughout Council, meaning that the Director of each Departments is responsible for development actions within their remit. As the SRO for disability, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services has oversight of the legislative framework for disability and accessibility as well as strategic direction.

Members will be aware that there is an ongoing service review in the Council's Equality & Diversity Unit. This review has been focussed on ensuring there are sufficient resources to drive the Council's ambitions in relation to accessibility and to better co-ordinate the work that is being undertaken across the Council.

The outcome of this review will be presented to Committee in the coming months.

3.7 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

As an employer, a civic leader and provider of goods, facilities and services Belfast City Council is bound by a legal framework around anti-discrimination and the promotion of equality and good relations. Our current approach satisfies the legal requirements, and the development of an accessibility strategy will display commitment as a civic leader representative of all our citizens.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations as outlined in the report.

Good Jobs Charter Initial Consultation - Draft Response

The Committee was reminded that the Department for Economy was consulting on the nature of the Good Employment and the factors that were considered to form a good job, based on the [Carnegie Job Quality Measures](#), in order to help increase the number of good jobs in the economy.

It was reported that the [consultation survey](#) had a closing date of 31st July 2026.

The Committee:

- Noted the initial consultation on the characteristics and options for a Good Employment Charter and closing date of 31st July, 2026.
- Agreed the proposed [response](#) be submitted to the Department for Economy.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Committee:

Capital Programme Stage Movements –

- **Wilmont House H&S Works** - Noted that a satisfactory tender return had been received and that the Director of Finance had confirmed that the project was within the affordability limits of the Council and agreed that a maximum of up to £400,000 be allocated.
- **Fernhill House H&S Works** - Noted that a satisfactory tender return had been received and that the Director of Finance had confirmed that this project was within the affordability limits of the Council and agreed that a maximum of up to £350,000 be allocated.

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- **Open Spaces and Streetscene (OSS) Machinery Replacement Programme 2026/27** – Agreed that the project was moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* with a maximum allocation of up to £375,000.
- **IT Programme - Fleet Management System** - Agreed that the project be moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* as part of the overall IT Programme and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
- **IT Programme - Pitch Booking System** - Agreed that the project be moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* as part of the overall IT Programme and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
- **Staff Cycle Racks Installation** – Agreed that the project be moved to *Stage 3 – Committed* and held at Tier 0 – Scheme at Risk pending further development and a satisfactory tender return; and that necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated with a contract to be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.
- **Historic Cemeteries - Friar’s Bush** - Agreed that ‘Friar’s Bush Graveyard’ was extracted from the overall scheme and taken forward as a stand-alone project at *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* on the Capital Programme to allow the business case and application to NHLF to be developed.
- **Depot Charging Scheme 2026/27** - Agreed that the project be added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case and funding application to be developed.
- **Belfast Castle** - Agreed that the programme of works be added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed on a phased basis.

Project Update

- **Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann –Supporting infrastructure works** - Agreed that required works at sites in support of the delivery of the Fleadh are progressed with a maximum allocation of up to £400,000.

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- **Local Community Ownership Fund** – Noted the update on the Expression of Interest process and that an update would be provided in the Autumn.

Asset Management

The Committee:

- i. **Overflow Parking Area adjacent Cregagh Youth & Community Centre – New Licence** - approved a new licence to Irish Rugby Football Union (Ulster Branch) for their occasional use of the overflow parking area adjacent to Cregagh Youth & Community Centre;
- ii. **Duncrue Complex – Replacement Electricity Substation Lease** - approved a replacement electricity substation lease at Duncrue Complex; and
- iii. **Black Mountain Pathway, Ballygomartin Road – Proposed transfer of land from Woodland Trust** – approved, in principle, the proposed transfer of a small area of land from Woodland Trust to the Council.

Area Working Group Update

The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting of the: South Belfast Area Working Group of 18th May; the West Belfast Area Working Group of 28th May; the North Belfast Area Working Group of 3rd June and East Belfast Area Working Group of 4th June.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Audit and Risk Panel Annual Report to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee including Draft Annual Governance Statement

The Committee:

- Noted the summary of the work of the Panel during 2025/26 as set out at Section 3 of the report;
- Approved the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26 at [Appendix A](#), and particularly the disclosure of the significant governance issues contained in the statement; and
- Noted the minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel on 9th June 2026 at [Appendix B](#).

Contracts Update

The Committee:

- Approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 1**);

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- Approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (**Table 2**); and
- Noted the update to the council's Procurement Policy to align to the requirements of the Procurement Act 2023.

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Provision of Data Cabling Services	Up to 3 years	£350,000	S McNicholl	To provide ongoing data cabling services to include ethernet / fibre / break fix /install and mounting of network & telephony equipment across multiple BCC sites.	N	N	N
Annual Kitchen Extract Canopy Assessment/ Cleaning and Minor Remedial Repairs	Up to 5 years	£250,000	S Grimes	Specialist service to ensure kitchens remain safe and compliant with statutory requirements.	N	N	N
Legionella Monitoring & Risk Management Programme	Up to 5 years	£400,000	S Grimes	Specialist service to legionella monitoring checks across BCC sites in line with statutory requirements.	N	N	N
Annual Lift Maintenance Services and Minor Remedial Repairs	Up to 5 years	£400,000	S Grimes	Specialist service to ensure lifts remain safe and compliant with statutory requirements.	N	N	N

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Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Building Energy Management Systems (BEMS) MTC - callouts, repairs and planned maintenance.	Up to 5 years	£600,000	S Grimes	Specialist service to ensure Council's BEMS is maintained and remains operational.	N	N	N
MTC CCTV and Door Access and PA - callouts, repairs and planned maintenance	Up to 4 years	£400,000	S Grimes	Specialist service to ensure Council's CCTV and door access systems are maintained and remain operational.	N	N	N
Subscription of Gartner Technical Professionals (GTP) for Digital Services	Up to 3 years	£150,000	S McNicholl	Digital Services requires this service to support the delivery of complex digital systems and strategic approaches. It provides independent technical guidance, reference architectures, and expert advice that helps teams reduce implementation risk, make informed design decisions, and avoid over reliance on suppliers, while building internal capability and supporting value for money outcomes.	N	N	N

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Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
Provision of Reservoir Safety Inspections and Reporting	Up to 3 years	£55,085	S Leonard	Council as asset owner has a responsibility to monitor the condition of reservoirs they own for the protection of the public and residents downstream of reservoir assets.	N	N	N
Framework for press and media photography services	Up to 4 years	£120,000	E McConville	Press photography services required to promote a wide range of council initiatives, services and decisions across each council term. These photos are required to be high quality for use by media outlets, with experience needed of working with VIPs in a political setting.	Y	N	N
Hardware support for Oracle Solaris servers (for NIHE hosting)	Up to 1 year	£33,077	P Gribben	Essential hardware required to support Solaris servers for NIHE hosting.	N	N	N
Catering services at Belfast Zoo	Up to 5 years	Income based contract	K Forster	Belfast City Council intends to provide a supplier to deliver seasonal catering services at Belfast Zoo, covering both summer and winter periods. The service will	Y	N	N

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Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services	On published pipeline (Y/N)	Prior Committee approval (Y/N) If Y name Committee & Date	External Funding (Y/N)
				provide high-quality food and beverage offerings to enhance the visitor experience.			
Provision of Technical Design Authority to deliver support for the Advanced Connectivity Technology Fund	Up to 36 months	£300,000	S McNicholl	To support the delivery of the £9m Advanced Connectivity Technology Fund on behalf of Belfast Region City Deal partners, Belfast City Council requires support in designing the scheme and providing technical advice. Funded through City Deal	N	N	Y

Table 2: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Approved Duration & Value	Modification	SRO	Description	Supplier
Provision of a facilities management service at the Mary Peters Track T1856	Up to 92 months & £1.1m	Additional 6 months and £80,000	D Sales	To allow sufficient time for further negotiations with ANI and come to an affordable outcome regarding the annual management fee. Contract expired May 2026. 1 month being requested retrospectively.	Athletics NI (ANI)
Provision of Travel Services T2004	Up to 5 years and 3 months & £475k	Additional 3 months	T Wallace	An increase in duration for 3 months to align award of replacement contract with new	Perk UK Ltd

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				call off framework. No impact to the original approved value as the contract is currently underspent.	
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Commercial and Procurement Services
Social Value Working Group Update

The Committee was provided with an update on the reports which had been presented to the Social Policy Working Group on 2nd June, which included:

1. Social Value Delivery Report which sets out the delivery of social value outcomes via BCC tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Council's Social Value Procurement Policy; and
2. Draft Sustainable Procurement Policy and Strategy Document for Members consideration before proceeding with a public consultation exercise.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and associated appendices.

Equality and Good Relations

Minutes of Shared City Partnership Meeting

The Committee approved the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 3rd and 12th June, including:

Presentations

- Presentations were received from Artseka Shared Roots Programme and NICVA's Community Empower Programme, both contracted through Belfast's PeacePlus Local Action Plan Programmes. The Shared City Partnership noted the presentations and recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources committee to note the presentations.

Members Updates

- Updates were received from the East Belfast Community and PSNI representatives and are noted in the minutes for members information.

Minority Ethnic Integration and Inclusion Programme

- The Shared City Partnership noted the report and agreed the approach outlined in the report and recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee also note the contents of the report and agree the proposed approach detailed in the Shared City Partnership Minutes.

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Good Relations and Fleadh Programme

- The Shared City Partnership noted the report and recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee notes the contents of the report and agrees the alignment of resources within the report.

Community Recovery Fund Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

PEACEPLUS – Local Community Action Plan Secretariat Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Peace Plus Thriving and Peaceful Communities Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Peace Plus Celebrating Culture and Diversity Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Community Regeneration & Transformation Thematic Update

- The Shared City Partnership recommends that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the contents of the report.

Any Other Business

- **Asylum Dispersal Open Call**
Shared City Partnership noted that up to 12 projects will be funded through the Open Call each between £10 and £20K under delegated authority, letters of offer are being drafted, a further update will be provided at the next meeting and recommend that Strategy Policy and Resources also note this.
- The Chair of Shared City Partnership thanked the Rev Graeme Kennedy for his time and commitment to Shared City Partnership.

Minutes of a Special Meeting of Shared City Partnership on 12th June 2026

- Shared City Partnership noted a number of actions following the recent disorder in Belfast City and recommend that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee note the minutes and the key actions.

Diversity Action Plans

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To agree the budget and appropriate resources for the implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) and LGBTQIA+ Action Plan year 3 activities.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to agree the proposed diversity action plans and associated year 3 costs.

3.0 Main report

Our Equality and Diversity Action Plan outlines how we will promote equality and diversity in our ambitions to create a city in which people love to live, learn, invest, work and visit. It also contributes to our compliance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Actions are categorised under the following corporate plan priorities:

- Growing an inclusive economy
- Living here
- Cross cutting
- Organisational priorities

3.2 As part of the Equality and Diversity Action Plan the Council has committed to developing and delivering a Gender Action Plan, LGBT+ Action Plan and a Race Equality Action Plan. The three year Gender Action Plan and LGBTQIA+ Action Plan were approved at SP&R Committee in October 2024. Actions for Year 3 (2025/26) for both plans have been costed and are being presented to Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval.

Gender Action Plan (GAP)

3.3 Gender inequalities are deeply embedded in our social, economic and cultural systems. There is overwhelming evidence that women disproportionately experience disadvantage and discrimination, a reflection of historical unaddressed inequality, but also that inequalities have been exacerbated by austerity, welfare reform and by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics affirm the persistence of gendered inequalities, which continue to inhibit women's life opportunities in Northern Ireland. Men will benefit from gender equality as they too face gender-specific issues such

as lower life expectancy, bad health, lower education levels and are impacted negatively by rigid gender norms.

3.4 The GAP 24-27 was agreed following consultation with Women's Steering Group and the Women's Network Group. Achievements in 2025/26 include:

- Delivery of the annual International Women's Day event for staff in the City Hall
- Delivery of Mock Committees for all relevant officers
- Onus Domestic Violence Charter (employer award) retained Platinum level
- Onus Safe City Accreditation – retained
- Retention of the NI Gender Diversity Chartermark – Silver level (work continues towards Gold level)
- Funded and developed a programme of events for Women's Network Group – Choosing Confidence Workshop
- Funding provided for external IWD event
- Targeting of Employment and Upskilling Academies to women in low paid (female dominate) sectors including the provision of childcare
- Building an entrepreneurial mindset workshop
- Masterclass in Leading Meetings
- Confidence Training workshop
- Belfast Stories consultation workshop
- Staff networks coffee morning
- Good Relations event
- Domestic Abuse Awareness joint event with Proud
- European Week for Waste
- Reduction creative workshop
- Women in Leadership bitesize events
- Allyship and Bystander Interventions workshop, specifically for male colleagues and elected members, running as part of the international 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign.
- In-person workshop on Sexual Harassment and Bystander in the Workplace

3.5 Year 3 actions are set out in Appendix One. In addition to the financial resources required, the plan also identifies the role that individual business units and departments have in delivery of the plan. Chief Officers are asked to allocate the necessary resources to ensure delivery of the actions or ensure where appropriate, that actions are incorporated into existing projects and work plans.

LGBTQIA+ Action Plan

3.6 The LGBTQIA+ Action Plan for 2024-27, was developed in collaboration with the staff network 'Proud' and this is also being presented, with costs for Year 3, for approval. Please see Appendix Two. The plan has been developed to ensure that our organisational culture and working environment allows staff to feel comfortable to be their whole selves at work and that policies and practices empower talent development at all levels and the removal of any form of discrimination. It also aims to increase the understanding of the wider workforce of issues facing the LGBTQIA+ communities.

3.7 Achievements in 2025/26 include:

- Fundraising bake sale
- Transgender Day of Remembrance
- Mental Health First Aid for Proud network members
- Network Planning Day
- Hosted the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance event in the City Hall.
- Continued promotion, visibility and growth of staff network
- Attended Stonewall's Networking Event
- Participation in Belfast Pride
- Network Planning Day
- The display of Rainbow and Trans flags and lighting up of City Hall.

Disability Action Plan

3.8 Members will be aware that the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 ('DDA') Section 49 requires the Council to have due regard to the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons, and to the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life. Our current Plan runs, approved by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and reported on annually, runs from 2022 until 2025.

3.9 There are many 'live' actions still being delivered which fall under the Disability Action Plan 2022-25. Engagement with key stakeholder groups on the new Disability Action Plan also commenced in 2025. Central to this engagement is understanding the needs of disabled people in Belfast. This information will be combined with statistical data to develop an increased understanding of the actions Council can take, both strategically and operationally. The improvements being made will inform closer alignment of the statutory duties with the corporate planning cycle through establishing more

defined outcomes for all nine equality groups including disability.

- 3.10 An internal 'International Day for People with Disabilities' event was held on 3rd December 2026 at the City Hall which showcased lived experiences from people with disabilities and the work the Council is currently doing to make our services and facilities more accessible and inclusive.
- 3.11 During the last quarter of 2025/26, a draft Disability Action Plan 2026-2029 was developed. A new action measure has been added to the draft Disability Action Plan, highlighting a strategic and leadership commitment for the Council to commit to the planning, the design process and the implementation for Belfast to become an accessible city for people with disabilities residing, working or visiting Belfast.
- 3.12 Detail on all of the actions delivered as part of the Disability Action Plan, the Gender Action Plan and the LGBTQIA+ Action Plan are included in the annual report to the Equality Commission due in August 2026.

Race Equality Action Plan

- 3.13 Year 1 of the Race Equality Action Plan (REAP) was incorporated into the Corporate Delivery Plan and focused on foundational actions, with further planning to be undertaken in mid-2026 to agree actions for Year 2 and beyond. The Operational Equality Diversity Network (EDN) will be utilised to link with Departments and support delivery of actions, which will be monitored via the Corporate Delivery Plan. The networks will ensure that future actions are informed by knowledge of ongoing work programmes, resource availability and capacity to deliver.
- 3.14 The next phase of the action plan will include the following themes:
- Improving data for policy development and service quality
 - Reflecting a diverse city
 - Serving a diverse city
 - Supporting a diverse and equal labour market in Belfast
 - Building a safer city
 - Supporting full civic participation
 - Visibility, inclusion and vibrancy for minority cultures in the city
- 3.15 This approach will inform and support a structured public engagement process with minority ethnic and migrant communities, civil society organisations and service

providers. The findings from these steps will be used to inform the subsequent phases of the Race Equality Action Plan.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.16 The cost of delivery of the proposed Gender Action Plan year 3 activities is estimated at £37,500. The cost of delivery of the LGBTQIA+ Action Plan year 3 is estimated at £9,600. Both plans will be met from the existing Organisational Development budget.

The plan also identifies the role that individual business units and departments have in delivery of the plan.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.17 The delivery of the Gender and the LGBT+ Action Plans will result in positive outcomes. The promotion of equality and diversity entails more than the elimination of discrimination, it requires proactive action. The actions contained within both plans will not only impact on internal operations but also have a positive impact externally on women and men and the LGBT+ community in our city.”

The Committee agreed the proposed diversity action plans and associated year 3 costs.

Operational Issues

Minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 11th June

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 11th June, 2026.

Requests for use of the City Hall and the provision of Hospitality

The Committee approved the recommendation as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGES
Voicing the Void	18 September 2026	Participating Celebration Event: This event celebrates the achievements of participants in a BCC Recovery Fund-supported project. Throughout the programme, participants	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">ROOM HIRE OF £450Any applicable additional charges

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGES
		<p>completed an OCN Level 1 qualification in Storytelling and developed their own unique stories, showcasing their creativity, skills, and personal experiences.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 60</p>		
Corrymeela Community	8 October 2026	<p>In The Midst of Trauma – A Collective Journey: Marking the end of a project exploring trauma, North and South of Ireland, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and The Ireland Funds. It will aim to celebrate key accomplishments and share key learnings and recommendations through the dissemination of a report.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 100</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ROOM HIRE OF £450 • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></p>
Cruse Bereavement Support	13 December 2026	<p>Light Up The Night – An Occasion to Remember: The event is designed to offer a space of comfort and reflection for all those who find Christmas a particularly difficult due to bereavement.</p> <p>Numbers attending - 400</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NO ROOM HIRE • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></p>
Young Enterprise	22 April 2027	<p>YEA27 – Young Enterprise NI Awards 2027: Annual awards ceremony and celebration of the success of young local entrepreneurs</p> <p>Numbers attending - 300</p>	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ROOM HIRE OF £1250 • Any applicable additional charges <p><i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i></p>

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Request for Use of City Hall Grounds - Culture Night

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from MayWe Events to deliver activity in the City Hall grounds as part of Culture Night 2026 on Friday, 18th September. It was reported that, due to the larger scale of activity involved it was deemed necessary to seek Committee approval for this event.

The Committee:

1. Authorised the use of City Hall grounds on 18th September, 2026;
and
2. Authorised the activity to take place on the basis of submission of an event management plan and risk assessment to ensure delivery of a safe public events.

**Minutes of the Social Policy
Working Group of 2nd June, 2026**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Social Policy Working Group of 2nd June, 2026.

**Minutes of the Language Working
Group of 8th June, 2026**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Language Working Group of 8th June, 2026.

Chairperson