



Subject:	Climate programme - external funding update
Date:	10 th September 2026
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of Organisational and City Strategy
Contact Officer:	Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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

Insert number

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

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To update Committee on the status on securing external funding for climate related projects.

2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note that: I. Current efforts to secure external funding for climate related projects focus on the following funding sources: Lottery Climate Action Fund, GB Energy Local Power Plan and the EU Horizon fund. II. The pipeline of projects includes: ▪ £168,820 secured from the EU Horizon programme for Pathways2Resilience (P2R), ▪ a QUB bid into National Institute for Health and care Research (NIHR) for a £2.5m Healthy Adaptation consortium project (over 4 years) with more than £1m going directly to Belfast including £41k to Council, ▪ two collaborative funding applications which are planned to support delivery of the Belfast Way (Belfast Food Strategy) and a public diner pilot in Belfast (£7m and £6m respectively), ▪ an EOI to GB Energy to help shape the development of its Local Power Plan which will provide £1bn to communities and local authorities, and ▪ an EOI with potential research projects which was submitted to QUB's Foresighters Doctoral Programme which aims to appoint 20 PHD students in the autumn.
3.0	Main report
	Background 3.1 Since 2021, a variety of external funding has been raised to support the planning and delivery of the Council's climate programme under the Our Planet Board and the Council's Corporate Plan. Funding sources have included: EU Horizon, the Emergency Tree Fund, Innovate UK and Sustainable Food Places. Funded projects include: UP2030 (£166,176), UPSURGE (€660,375), One Million Trees (£289,858), Sustainable Food Partnership (£10,000), Net Zero Belfast (£81,083), Belfast Net Zero Pathfinder (£149,964), Enhancing the viability of low carbon heat networks (£150,000). 3.2 This funding has provided a significant boost to the allocated annual programme budget of £172,000. As such, officers continue to explore external funding opportunities to enable the delivery of further projects that build resilience to climate shocks and stresses and enable a fair transition to a more secure and affordable energy system. These are described below. Pathways2Resilience (P2R) 3.3 Pathways2Resilience (P2R) is a £21million Horizon EU funded programme in its second phase across Europe, with Belfast selected as 1 of the 62 regions in cohort 2, with 100 regions in total supported within the 5-year programme. The P2R programme contributes to the objectives of the EU Missions Adaptation to Climate Change Strategy by helping regions to better understand their climate risks through the development of a Regional Analytical Profile and Baseline Assessment, with these initial outputs due for completion by November 2026. 3.4 Following the Baseline Assessment, programme participation and training aims to build capacity and develop pathways to be better prepared to cope with the changing climatic conditions, and to test and deploy innovative solutions needed to enable resilience, through the production of a Climate Resilience Strategy, Action Plan and Investment Plan by August 2027.

3.5	In Belfast, the project runs over an 18-month period ending in mid-2027 with £168,820 secured from the above EU programme. BCC are partnering with Northern Ireland Environment Link (Climate NI) to collaborate with key partners and wider stakeholders to build on the legacy of Belfast's previous resilience strategy and existing Climate Action Plan for the Belfast City region.
3.6	The funding has enabled the recruitment of two Resilience Officers to support delivery of the plans - one post has already been recruited to Climate NI and one is in the process of being recruited to the BCC Climate Team. P2R will focus on identifying opportunities for transformative, collective action to enable more complex, integrated and co-designed adaptation plans for the city, importantly, with a focus on how investment planning could support adaptation and build resilience to climate change and address resource related barriers that may impact plan delivery. The project, Pathways to a Resilient Belfast, will be supported cross-departmentally and externally through a Steering Group and Working Groups, with both due to commence meeting in September 2026. NIHR Healthy Adaptation consortium
3.7	The proposed National Institute for Health and care Research (NIHR) funded Healthy Adaptation UK Consortium is a collaborative initiative led by University of York and Queen's University Belfast. Its main goal is to develop and implement climate adaptation strategies that improve public health and reduce health inequalities across the UK. The project responds to the urgent need to address climate change, which is recognised as a major threat to population health, mental wellbeing, and health equity. The consortium aims to deliver meaningful health and societal benefits by ensuring that research outputs are relevant, actionable, and capable of informing effective climate adaptation policies and practices across the UK.
3.8	The key objectives are to: 1. generate robust evidence on climate adaptation interventions that deliver health benefits and reduce inequalities; 2. support cross-sector collaboration among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, communities, and other stakeholders; 3. inform policy development at local, regional, and national levels with actionable evidence; 4. build capacity for designing, implementing, and evaluating adaptation measures across multiple sectors; 5. facilitate knowledge exchange and shared learning throughout the UK.
3.9	The project emphasises an interdisciplinary, partnership-based, and co-production approach, ensuring that solutions are developed with input from policymakers, practitioners, and communities.
3.10	The bid is currently in its second stage and if successful the £2.5m project will run for 4 years with more than £1m going directly to Belfast including a £41k allocation to Council to cover officer time from the Climate team to participate in governance, provide strategic input, support stakeholder engagement, and facilitate connections with relevant networks.
3.11	The consortium will seek to understand how local climate adaptation policies and interventions (practical steps to prepare for the impacts of climate change) affect health and health inequalities.

3.12	The goal is to ensure that climate adaptation in the UK protects health, reduces inequalities, and leaves no community behind. The project aims to: 1. To understand what local and regional adaptation actions exist across the UK and see how they may influence health, co-benefits and reduce inequalities; 2. Identify which people and places are most vulnerable to climate-related health risks, using data on heat, flooding, health, and deprivation; 3. Analyse data on health, environment and the places people live, to understand how adaptation policies influence health and inequality; 4. Understand the impacts of adaptation, whether interventions offer good value for money, who gains or loses from investments and which adaptation actions are most acceptable to communities; 5. Co-produce practical tools, guidance, and a Healthy Adaptation Toolkit to support equitable and effective local decision-making; 6. Support cross-sector collaboration between researchers, policymakers, practitioners, communities, and other stakeholders; 7. Inform local, regional, and national policy development through robust and actionable evidence; 8. Build capacity for the design, implementation, and evaluation of adaptation measures across multiple sectors; and 9. Facilitate knowledge exchange and shared learning across the UK. National Lottery Climate Action Fund: Food Systems 3.13 The National Lottery Climate Action Fund (CAF): Food Systems supports large-scale partnerships across the UK to create more sustainable, resilient and equitable food systems. The fund aims to tackle both food insecurity and climate change by supporting projects that use agroecological approaches (working with nature to produce food sustainably) and deliver systems change, meaning they address the root causes of problems rather than short-term symptoms. Funding is available for projects that improve how food is grown, distributed and accessed, particularly for people experiencing poverty, disadvantage or discrimination, while also delivering long-term benefits for communities, nature and the environment. Grants range from £2.5 million to £7 million, with most projects running for 5 to 7 years. 3.14 The Council's Food Systems Coordinator is engaging with partners to develop two Expressions of Interest under the above fund which may secure significant funding to support delivery of the Belfast Food Strategy – The Belfast Way. 1. <u>Delivery of the Action Plans of The Belfast Way - £7million (over 5-years).</u> The bid is currently being developed with Belfast Food Partnership a cross-sector partnership of over 23 organisations from business, community, government, and academia to address food system challenges collaboratively. 2. <u>Pilot of public diners in Belfast in line with the current pilots being carried out in Scotland - £6million (over 5-years).</u> This is a wider collaborative bid with partners and local authorities across England, Scotland and Wales. 3.15 These bids are currently in the Expression of Interest phase and will continue to be taken forward by the Food Systems Coordinator.
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	GB Energy Local Power Plan
3.16	In Feb 2026, GB Energy launched its Local Power Plan to invest up to £1bn in a combination of grants, loans, advice, expert help to accelerate the build out of clean power in communities in the UK. The vision is for every community in the UK to have the opportunity to own a local energy project by 2030. As part of the launch GBE invited Expression of Interests (EOIs) from communities and local government to share project ideas in order to understand their readiness and suitability for the Local Power Plan, and whether they might need future support or investment.
3.17	An EOI was subsequently submitted to GB Energy. The project idea is to help engage communities in delivering energy projects in a coordinated way to ensure that the benefits of clean energy reach the communities that need them most. Specifically, the EOI proposed: 1. Establishing a £4m Community Energy Fund 2. Deploying rooftop solar on community centres and Leisure Centres (£8m) 3. Developing a web-based solar information portal for the City (£150k) 4. Commercialising a portfolio the PPA business model (developed by ESC for BCC) to scale the uptake of renewables in Belfast (£150k)
3.18	The proposed project idea is intended to build on Belfast's strong community and voluntary sector with neighbourhood-based organisations playing a large role in everyday civic life and regeneration. Community groups in Belfast are well placed to develop energy co-operatives and shared benefit schemes and to link energy projects to wider social goals and community resilience. However, they often lack the resources and capacity to take these projects forward. The creation of a Community Energy Fund would put communities at the centre of Belfast's efforts to transition to a more resilient energy system. The fund would support projects that address fuel poverty, build local skills and develop community-led renewable energy projects including solar and BESS projects, retrofit and renewable-energy learning programmes for schools, etc.
3.19	The project would also support the delivery of the Belfast Local Area Energy Plan (2024) which used energy modelling and local insights to identify rooftop solar, district heating and the retrofit of the City's aging building stock as priority projects that are cost-effective way whilst also creating multiple benefits for local communities.
	Building a Belfast Resilience Intelligence Platform
3.20	BCC officers are collaborating with the AI department at Ulster University to build a consortium that is developing a project concept. The ambition is to establish Belfast as an international demonstrator for AI-enabled Resilience Intelligence—showing how a city can combine existing capabilities with targeted new evidence generation, multidisciplinary expertise and responsible AI to support whole-system resilience planning, investment, implementation and adaptive management. In addition to Ulster University and BCC, the consortium currently includes QUB, the UK Digital Twin Centre, DFI and Arup. This is at an early stage with a collaborative discussion paper under circulation to gather feedback, challenge and refine the emerging concept, identify opportunities and shape the next stage of programme development.

	Foresighters Doctoral Programme
3.21	Queen's University Belfast has recently launched its Foresighters Doctoral Programme supported by the EU's COFUND programme with 20 PhD students set to research under an overarching theme of 'Anticipatory Governance'. A key element of the programme is to provide students with secondments (between 2 weeks and 6 months), while providing an opportunity for external organisations to also co-design the student PhD projects.
3.22	During the proposal stage, the Climate team was approached by QUB to submit an EOI outlining potential research projects. An EOI was submitted with a range of project ideas under two of the programmes themes: Energy and Future Cities. There was a huge level of interest in the programme with 744 submitted applications for 20 Early Stage Researcher vacancies. QUB has selected the most promising candidates for interviews in early October. The project ideas included in the EOI will be made available to the candidates as part of their selection process.
3.23	An update on all of the above EOIs and applications will be brought back to Committee in due course outlining any specific considerations and/or decisions required from Council in going forward.
4.0	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u> None at present. <u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None
5.0	Appendices
	None