

East Belfast Area Working Group

Thursday, 3rd September, 2026

MEETING OF THE EAST BELFAST AREA WORKING GROUP

**HELD IN THE CONOR ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS**

Members present: Councillor Long (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Abernethy;
Aldermen Lawlor and Rodgers; and
Councillors R. Brooks, Bower, de Faoite,
D. Douglas, S. Douglas, P. Donnelly, Ferguson,
Flynn, Maghie, McAteer, McCormick and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. R. Haire, Sports Development Officer,
Mr. K. Donaghy, Labour Market Partnership Coordinator;
Ms. E. Gowdy, Lead Officer, Operational Services Section;
Ms. K. Watters, Neighbourhood Integration Manager; and
Mr. C. Mealey, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The Working Group agreed that the minutes of the meeting of 4th June, 2026, were an accurate record of proceedings.

Declarations of Interest

The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Abernethy) declared an interest in relation to the item 'Physical Programmes Update' in that he was associated with East Belfast Mission and Belmont Bowling Club which were referenced within the report but as neither became the subject of debate or discussion, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Presentation

The Larder

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. L. Ferguson, the Larder.

Ms. Ferguson provided the Working Group with an overview of the Larder, which was a community initiative to support local people by providing affordable, healthy and high-quality produce. She informed the Working Group that through its model, the Larder provided affordable fresh food whilst supporting local producers.

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She stated that the Larder had created a space for the community to come together with equal access and dignity and that, in addition to providing fresh, affordable food, the Larder offered a wide range of services, including the hosting of shared community meals, organising growing sessions with local gardeners and offering a herb clinic with qualified herbalists.

Ms. Ferguson outlined the Larder's plans to move to new premises within East Belfast. She highlighted that the transition to a more permanent high street fixture was essential to ensure the sustainability of the model and help build long-term community infrastructure to support health and wellbeing.

During discussion, a number of Members expressed their support for the Larder and thanked Ms. Ferguson for its ongoing work and the significant contribution to the local community. She answered a range of Members' questions in relation to the pressures on food systems, tackling food insecurity, improving food resilience, social prescribing, the impact of food poverty and the Larder's plans for moving to new premises.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Ferguson for her presentation and the information provided and she left the meeting.

Physical Programmes Update

The Working Group considered the following report:

“1. Introduction

The Council's Physical Programme covers projects under a range of funding streams including the Capital Programme, the Leisure Transformation Programme, the Local Investment Fund (LIF), the Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF); in addition, the programme covers projects that the Council is delivering on behalf of other agencies. This report outlines the status of projects under the Physical Programme.

2. Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the Physical Programme update for East Belfast including the recently completed projects – Capital Programme Depot Charging Scheme; Urban Villages Titanic People Exhibition; and**
- Note the update on the Local Community Ownership Fund (LCOF).**

3. Local Investment Fund

LIF is a £9m fixed programme of capital investment in non-council neighbourhood assets, over two tranches: LIF 1 (2012-2015) - £5m total funding pot, allocated across each AWG area; and LIF 2 (2015

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-2019) - £4m allocation with the East being allocated £1.127m under LIF1 and £1.2m under LIF2.

Each LIF project proposal is taken through a Due Diligence process prior to any funding award. The table below outlines funding spend to date for each tranche, at key stages of the delivery process: 24 projects received In Principle support under LIF1 and LIF2, 20 have been completed, 1 project is at delivery stage and 3 project is at due diligence stage.

LIF breakdown – East	LIF 1		LIF 2	
Stage/ Description	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)	Projects	Amount/ Value (£)
Number of Projects Completed	8 (67%)	£1,027,500	12 (100%)	£1,161,589
Number of Projects in Delivery	1(8%)	£30,000		
Number of Projects in Pre-construction				
Number of Projects at Initial Stage (Due Diligence)	3 (25%)	£100,000		
Total Number of Approved Projects	12	£1,157,500	12	£1,161,589

The table below provides an overview of progress and actions around the remaining live projects

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action / Recommendation
ELIF31	Storage facilities	£65,000 (£30k plus £35k reallocation)	On Ground	Complete except for Dundela FC – container to be delivered after pitch is complete.	Continue engagement with the groups.
ELIF29	Cycling Ireland	£30,000	Due Diligence	Agreed at EAWG/ SP&R Committee in June 2026. Cycling Ireland to explore alternative sites for a cycling project in East Belfast. A meeting has been held in August, outworkings are ongoing and a report will be brought back in the future AWG meeting.	Continue engagement with the group.

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ELIF32	Clarawood Tenants Hall	£50,000	Initial stage	Agreed at EAWG/ SP&R Committee in June 2026.	Continue engagement with the group.
ELIF33	Hosford Community Homes	£400,000 <i>Comprising: LIF- £20k NRF- £300k WF- £80k</i>	Due Diligence	Agreed at EAWG/ SP&R Committee in June 2026. In Planning. Design team procurement nearing completion.	Continue engagement with the group.

4. Belfast Investment Fund

Members are reminded BIF is a £28m investment fund for regeneration partnership projects, with a minimum £250,000 investment from Council. In East Belfast, 9 projects have received an In-Principle funding commitment under BIF. There are 5 projects on the longer BIF list. Each of the In-Principle projects are taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. The table below provides a summary of BIF allocated projects i.e. project stage; project title; and the funding allocated.

Summary of BIF allocated projects:

East	Stage 3—Willowfield—£560k; H&W Welders—£2.37m; Strand—£1.5m; Bloomfield—£655k Stage 2—Lagan Village Youth & Community—no commitment Stage 1—East Belfast Mission; Belmont Bowling Club; Bloomfield Presbyterian Church; St. John's Orangefield, Church of Ireland, Tullycarnet Community Support Services—no commitment / on long list
Outer East	Stage 3 —TAGIT- £434k; Hanwood—£396k; Lisnasharragh Community Schools—£398k; Braniel—£390k; Castlereagh Presbyterian Church—£382k

The table below provides an overview of the remaining projects. Members are asked to note the actions and recommendations.

Ref	Project	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
BIF12	Strand Arts Centre	£6,782,069 LUF- £4,094,000 BIF- £1,550,000 HF- £255,000 (Development Grant),	On Ground	On Ground. Works are progressing however due to the complexity of the works, completion will be delayed until Spring 2027. DfC letter response	Continue engagement with the group and funders.

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		<i>£768,069 (Delivery Grant) Several Trusts- £115,000</i>		dated 7 July received which says that the Department's position remains that it considers the project to be one that would merit support, subject to funding becoming available.	
BIF13	Bloomfield Community Association	£715,009 <i>BIF - £655,000 LIF - £60,009</i>	Stage 3 - Committed – In Principle	Business Case Addendum submitted to DfC. Planning application due to be submitted by end of August. Due Diligence ongoing. Current funding shortfall of £243k.	Continue engagement with the group and design team.

5. Social Outcomes Fund

SOF is £4m ringfenced capital investment programme with a focus on local community tourism projects. There is one project under SOF for East Belfast - Eastside Visitor Centre – with an In-Principle funding commitment. Similar to BIF, all projects are subject to Due Diligence process prior to any funding award.

Project	SOF Award	Status	Action/ Recommendation
EastSide Hotel & Visitor Centre (links to NRF project)	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising: SOF- £700,000 NRF- £950,000 Group- £400k</i>	Value engineering process is continuing. Group is actively seeking more funding opportunities so that sustainability enhancements can be introduced. Planning application to be submitted once additional funding is sourced.	Continued engagement with the group.

6. Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

The Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF) is a capital fund with a current overall budget of £10,280,000 to help groups deliver capital projects that will make a real, long-term difference in their communities. The overall NRF allocation for East was £2,351,551 and 4 projects received an In-Principle funding commitment. Each NRF project is taken through a 3-stage approval process, including a rigorous Due Diligence process before any Funding Agreement is approved and put in place. Projects remaining at

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Stage 2 continue to have the support of a Client Manager for their proposals.

East Belfast – NRF overview

East	Stage 3 - Eastside Container Hotel, Portview Exchange, Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park, Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road Stage 2 - Impact Belfast, Nevin Spence Centre Visitor Experience
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East Belfast – NRF projects at Stage 3 - Delivery

Project name	Funding	Stage	Status	Action/ Recommendation
EastSide Hotel & Visitor Centre <i>(links to SOF project)</i>	£2,050,000 <i>Comprising:</i> <i>SOF- £700k</i> <i>NRF- £950k</i> <i>Group- £400k</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	As above. Value engineering process is continuing. Group is actively seeking more funding opportunities so that sustainability enhancements can be introduced. Planning application to be submitted once additional funding is sourced.	Continued engagement with the group.
Portview Exchange	£3.6m <i>Comprising:</i> <i>NRF- £600k</i> <i>TEO- £2.9m</i> <i>Group- £25k</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	Timeline subject to TEO business case approvals process. Procurement process for design team underway.	Continue engagement with the group.
Development of sporting hub at Wilgar Park	£500,000	Stage 3 - Committed	After a long delay, all Planning consultations have been received in August 2026. Currently with Senior Planning Officer for review. Anticipated funding shortfall. Dundela FC awaits a decision on their DCMS/IFA funding application.	Continue engagement with planners re planning decision.
Hosford Community Homes: 335 Newtownards Road	£400,000 <i>Comprising:</i> <i>NRF- £300k</i>	Stage 3 - Committed	In Planning. Design team has been appointed.	Continue engagement with the group.

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	<i>LIF- £20k</i> <i>WF- £80k</i>			
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7. Capital Programme

The Capital Programme is the rolling programme of enhancing existing Council assets or building / buying new assets. Members are reminded of the 3-stage approval process in place for every project on council's Capital Programme, as agreed by SP&R Committee. The table below provides an update on current live projects in East Belfast. Members are asked to note the status and update.

East Belfast – Capital programme overview

Project	Status and update
Depot Charging Scheme	Project completed. Installation of EV chargers at five Council depot sites at Blanchflower, Duncrue, Mallusk, Zoo and Ormeau. See Appendix 1.
New Crematorium	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Technical Design and Contractor procurement complete. At the March Council meeting, Members noted that the decision of 20 February 2026 relating to the crematorium had been Called-in and therefore was not before the Council for consideration. A report will be brought back to SP&R Committee in September.
Cremated Remains Burial Plots	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Planning application on process. A decision is anticipated in September 2026.
Playground Improvement Programme 25/26	<i>Project underway.</i> Works complete at White Rise, Ohio Street, and Finvoy Street playgrounds. Refurbishment works at Roddens Crescent playground due to complete in October 2026.
Sporting Pitches Investment 25/26	<i>Project underway.</i> Pitch improvement works agreed at SP&R Committee in December 2025. In East, Belfast Met Campus (Montgomery Road) small-sided games pitches completed and operational.
Communications Boards in playgrounds	<i>Project underway.</i> Inclusive communication boards in playgrounds. Citywide installation underway, completion expected by October 2026.
Basketball Courts	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> The work includes creation or upgrade of basketball courts at five BCC park sites including Victoria Park, Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park, Ormeau Park, Blacks Road Park and Páirc Nua Chollann. Planning applications for Black's Road and Páirc Nua Chollann have been submitted. Working towards end of September for pre tender estimates; planning approval and final technical pack.
Pitches Programme	<i>Stage 3 - Committed.</i> Agreed at SP&R Committee in February 2026. Draft implementation plan being refined.

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Parks and Open Spaces Improvement Programme 2025-2027	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Programme of improvement works to parks and open spaces across the Council estate. In East, Wandsworth Road – design work and cost estimate complete, programming works with contractor to commence by November 2026. Ballyhackamore Parklet (Sandown Road) – resident letter drop and 2 engagement sessions complete, design work updated, programming works to commence by November 2026. Tullycarnet Park and CS Lewis Square – site visits to take place to make arrangements for works to progress. Cherryvale Playing Fields – progressing.
Sydenham Greenway	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> DfI Greenways Fund Letter of Offer (50% funding) received. Design team has been appointed and are in the process to develop detailed drawings. Discussions with DfI are ongoing to ensure the different phases of the Greenway are aligned. Procurement process to appoint a contractor has started.
Electric Vehicle Charging Network	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Tender published in August 2026.
Historic Tiled Street Signs	<i>Stage 3 – Committed.</i> Currently compiling a list of signs for pilot project to restore historic tiled street signs across the city.
Historic Cemeteries	<i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted.</i> Restoration programme for heritage cemeteries in the city including Friar's Bush, Knock Cemetery, Balmoral Cemetery and Shankill Graveyard. Surveys have been completed for Friar's Bush, Knock and Balmoral Cemetery.
Mobile Changing Places modular facility	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Following some market research, options to progress this project have now been identified. Further internal discussions need to take place to identify best options and finalise budgets.
Artificial Lighting in Parks Sites	<i>Stage 1 – Emerging.</i> Creation of lit spine and associated path/ access improvements to facilitate extended opening hours on selected parks.
Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan. Education Authority (EA) is continuing to develop a business case for capital funding for youth provision at the council owned Ballymacarrett site.
Ballymacarrett Area Masterplan	<i>Stage 1- Emerging.</i> Link to the Shared Youth and Community Facility Inner East project.

8. Externally funded programmes

The Council is the delivery partner for a number of government departments on significant capital investment programmes, namely the Urban Villages Initiative (UV) funded by the Executive Office, and number of schemes with DfC. The following is an overview of projects within each programme relevant to East Belfast.

Urban Villages Initiative

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Project	Status and update
Titanic People Exhibition	Project completed. Handover of project completed June 2026. Official opening to be scheduled. See Appendix 1.
Portview Exchange <i>Link to NRF 'Portview Exchange'</i>	Timeline subject to TEO business case approvals process. Procurement process for design team underway.

PEACEPLUS – Capital Project

Members are asked to note updates on the capital project under the PEACEPLUS Programme.

East Belfast – PEACEPLUS LAP Capital Project overview

Project	Status and update
Sanctuary Theatre	Part of the Belfast PEACEPLUS Local Action Plan. Refurbishment of the Sanctuary Theatre at Castlereagh Street. Design Team has been appointed. Steering group and design team meeting held and project progressing. Procurement process for contractor has begun.

Dfl funded project

Below is the status update on project funded by Department for Infrastructure in East Belfast.

Dfl – East Belfast projects overview

Project	Status and update
Sailortown/ Titanic Quarter Bridge	Consultants have been appointed to undertake RIBA Stage 1 & 2 design services for a proposed new cross harbour pedestrian and cycle bridge. Draft Stage 2 Report received, with final report expected September 2026.

9. Local Community Ownership Fund

The Local Community Ownership Fund (LCOF) is a £1.5 million initiative to support the acquisition of community assets. It will invest in the transformation of local places, supporting community wealth building and capacity development.

The LCOF has involved an open call for applications, with three stages to the application and approval process. The fund will remain open to applications until respective area allocations are exhausted. The amount allocated to East Belfast is £337,810.

The Stage 1 Expression of Interest closed on Wednesday 16 June. The Stage 2 Application process closed on Wednesday 2

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September. It is anticipated that updates on all applications and the assessment results will be brought to the Council's Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for decisions on next steps."

The Director of Property and Projects highlighted that, as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Improvements Programme for 2025-27 and in addition to the dog parks opened within Ormeau Park and Grove Park, it had been agreed that potential locations for further dog parks across the city be identified. The Working Group agreed that Orangefield Park would be a suitable location for a dog park within East Belfast.

During discussion, a Member highlighted the lack of space for owners to let their dogs off-lead, the misuse of playgrounds and the issue of dog fouling. The Member requested that, in consultation with the Council's cleansing staff in respect of reported issues, a report be brought back to the Working Group which would outline and highlight possible areas of need.

In respect of the Playground Improvement Programme, a Member highlighted the playground within Knocknagoney Linear Park as one that required additional investment. In response, the Director of Property and Projects advised the Member that feasibility studies had been commissioned for a number of parks including Knocknagoney Linear Park and added that officers would be engaging with local representatives in due course. The Member requested that the Working Group consider the playground within Knocknagoney Linear Park as a priority for any potential future investment.

During further discussion, a Member also highlighted the deterioration of the boundary fencing at the Alderman Tommy Patton Park and Dundonald Cemetery and requested that a report be brought back to the Working Group which would provide an indication in respect of the feasibility to restore or replace fencing at both sites.

In addition to the above-mentioned matters, the Director also answered a range of questions from the Members in respect of the future capital programme and emerging priorities, the Ballyhackamore Parklet project and Cherryvale Park.

After discussion, the Working Group:

- i. noted the Physical Programme update for East Belfast which included the recently completed projects, Capital Programme Depot Charging Scheme and the Urban Villages Titanic People Exhibition;
- ii. noted the update on the Local Community Ownership Fund (LCOF);
- iii. agreed that, as part of the Parks and Open Spaces Improvements Programme, Orangefield Park would be a suitable location for a dog park within East Belfast;
- iv. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting in respect of spaces for dogs and potential areas of need;

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- v. agreed that the playground within Knocknagoney Linear Park be considered as a priority in respect of any potential future investment in playgrounds; and
- vi. agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting on the potential restoration or replacement of boundary fencing at Alderman Tommy Patton Park and Dundonald Cemetery.

Get Active NI Programme

The Leisure Development Manager submitted for the Working Group's consideration a report which provided an overview of a funding application made to Sport NI through the 'Get Active NI Programme 2026/27'.

The Working Group noted:

- i. the tight timeline associated with the funding application;
- ii. the funding application approach which had been approved by the People and Communities at its meeting on 11th August, 2026, for Get Active Grants from SportNI in partnership with The London Marathon Foundation; and
- iii. that officers would identify an innovative neighbourhood sport or physical activity programme within the East area which would require up to £5,000 in funding.

Employability and Skills Update

The Labour Market Partnership Coordinator provided an update on the roll out of the employment and upskilling academies which would take place over the coming year and outlined the wide range of sectors which those academies would cover.

He advised the Working Group that Community Connection events for employability and skills would be held across the city to bring community organisations and groups together and that those events would provide further information on the employment academies and business support services. He highlighted that the East Belfast Community Connections event would take place on Friday 18th September, 2026, at the Skainos Centre on the Newtownards Road.

The Working Group was also provided with an update on the development of a Labour Market Partnership three-year action plan for 2027-30 and the ongoing work in relation to skills initiatives to support the maritime sector and the aerospace, defence, security and space industries.

Chairperson