

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 10th September, 2026

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Lyons (Chairperson);
Aldermen McCoubrey and McCullough;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, T. Brooks, Collins,
M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, Groogan,
Long, Magee, McCann,
Meenehan and Walsh.

In attendance: Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth
and Anti-Poverty;
Ms. S. Healy-Thow, Food Systems Coordinator;
Ms. B. Roddy, Project Support Officer – Climate; and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th August 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 September.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor T. Brooks advised the Committee that a number of the funding updates involved her employer, Queen's University, however, as she was not involved in the projects and the item was for noting, she did not leave the meeting when the item was discussed.

Presentation - Community Garden Support

The Food Systems Coordinator introduced Ms. Miriam Turley, Co-Leader of Community Garden Support (CGS), to the Committee. She explained that CGS was a lead of the Community Growing Forum under the Belfast Food Partnership.

Ms. Turley outlined the development of community growing and food-growing initiatives across Belfast and Northern Ireland, and the increased role of public bodies in supporting access to land for community cultivation. She outlined that the 1932 Allotments Act was outdated.

She highlighted research which had been undertaken in 2021, with officers from all 11 Northern Ireland councils examining how publicly owned land could be managed

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by communities for food growing. This was followed in 2022 by a report proposing a benchmark standard for community growing and allotment provision by public bodies in Northern Ireland, establishing a broader policy basis for increasing access to growing space.

She highlighted that a key development was the Council's "Right to Grow" Motion, passed in 2023. The motion recognised the importance of ensuring citizens had access to sufficient fresh food and the Council had agreed, in principle, to adopt a right to grow on suitable Council-owned land. She explained that the proposed approach would involve community groups obtaining licences to cultivate appropriate Council land.

She added that the Belfast Agenda 2024–2028 committed to the development of a Community Growing Forum as part of the Sustainable Food Partnership. The forum was intended to bring together community growers, funders, support organisations, the Council, the NI Housing Executive, other major landowners and central government representatives. The Agenda also set out an ambitious longer-term objective of working towards 1,250 square metres of community growing space per 1,000 households by 2035.

The Belfast Community Growing Forum had been established in spring 2024. The forum provided a mechanism for bringing together the different stakeholders needed to expand community growing, particularly where access to land, funding and organisational support were required.

Finally, she highlighted how community growing fitted within the wider Belfast food-system strategy, "The Belfast Way", described as a strategy and roadmap towards a thriving, fair and resilient food system.

In response to a Member's question, she outlined that the biggest barriers to community growing were a lack of finance, time and resources. She also highlighted that having a single point of contact was key to a successful scheme.

She also outlined that while Northern Ireland had received funding through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the allocation was insufficient to meet local community growth needs.

In response to a Member's question about unadopted alleyways, she stated that a legislation change was required.

A Member stated that perhaps the Committee could send a letter of support to the Community Growing Forum, to encourage the work they were doing, and to write to other statutory bodies to ascertain if they had any vacant sites which could be suitable for growing.

A number of Members stated that land mapping was crucial and there was always the possibility of raised beds on non-greenfield sites.

A further Member stated that an audit of land was important and that there were other competing priorities, such as housing, and that sites did not have to be singular use.

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A Member requested that the report would consider the Right to Grow motion which the Council had passed in 2023.

A further Member stated that they would like officers to consider allotments, akin to those beside the community gardens in Musgrave Park, within any report.

A further Member stated that she would like to receive an update on the Beechvale Farm site.

In response, the Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty advised the Committee that there were a number of Council audits ongoing and that officers could bring a report to a future meeting, linking in with the Estates Team and other service areas, to explore and highlight any potential sites which could be used for community growing.

After discussion the Committee agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting:

- asking officers to liaise with the Estates Team and other service areas to explore and highlight any potential areas which could be used for community growing;
- for an update on the Beechvale Farm site; and
- taking the previously agreed “Right to Grow” motion into consideration.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Turley for her presentation and she retired from the meeting.

Climate Behaviour Change and Training Plan 2026/27

The Committee considered the undernoted report in conjunction with the Training Plan:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on training and awareness opportunities for Elected Members and Council staff in relation to climate change.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is requested to:

- (i) note the Climate Change Training Opportunities and Plan (attached at Appendix 1) which seeks to address two of the actions committed to in the Climate Action Plan (actions 1.1 and 1.2).**

3.0 Main Report

Background

3.1 Members will be aware that the Belfast City Council Climate Action Plan (2025), highlights the need for and benefit of increasing the awareness levels and knowledge of climate related change within the organisation and among Elected Members and staff. Accordingly, within the Climate Action Plan (CAP), there is a commitment to:

- support skills development, education and training internally for climate action, tailored for the specific needs of the departments / teams. Run periodic surveys to assess the effectiveness of the training (1.1 CAP)**
- implement an internal climate communications campaign to engage staff on climate-related topics and news internally and externally (1.2 CAP)**

3.2 Elected Member climate and sustainability training

Members will recall previous discussions within the Climate and City Resilience (CCR) Committee in relation to the need for staff and member training on climate change and sustainability, noting the increased demands on Council to support the new Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations which have been introduced.

3.3 On the 11 September 2025, an interactive climate awareness and behaviour change workshop was held for Elected Members on the CCR Committee. The session was designed by Sustainable NI and co-delivered with support from members of Belfast City Council's Climate Team. The training had been delivered through council existing membership of Sustainable NI.

3.4 Feedback from the session was positive, with members suggesting that that Elected Members, not currently on the CCR Committee, could also benefit from similar training being made available. It was acknowledged that the council's membership of Sustainable NI provided access to comprehensive training. Subsequently, a very initial training needs assessment was undertaken in liaison with Elected Members and senior officers to inform any future training activity. Members should note that a further training needs assessment will be undertaken at the early stage of commencing the new council term.

Future training programme outline

3.5 Given the significance of climate change, there is a growing volume of training and awareness initiatives and programmes being made available at a local, regional, national and international level. Accordingly, it is proposed that a segmented approach be adopted to ensuring that Elected Members and staff are aware of and can access relevant training opportunities. The intention is to utilise a combination of in-house expertise, partnership knowledge sharing and optimising training available through existing Council memberships such as Business in the Community NI, Climate NI and Sustainable NI to provide access to climate and resilience related training opportunities. The initial programme will be rolled out over a twelve-month period (2026/27) and will be subject to review and refinement as lessons are learned and new training opportunities may become available. The proposed initial scope of the training opportunities which will be made available is set out below with further details included at Appendix 1.

3.6 **Elected Members**

- *Area working groups* – deliver interactive sessions with each group on climate tools to support their constituency and committee work, covering topics such as warmer healthy homes and flood risk. Intention would be to deliver at least one workshop for each AWG annually.
- *Specialist workshops* – consult with CCR Committee members to identify specific areas of interest and explore the potential to deliver tailored workshop(s) on climate related issues.

Senior staff

- *Interactive Sessions* – develop and rollout a series of short interactive sessions with the Corporate Management Team and Departmental Management Teams on climate change related matters including e.g. regional and national policy commitments and targets.

Wider staff

- *Informal lunchtime talks* – use in-house staff and external partner expertise to deliver a programme of monthly informal climate-related information lunch time

sessions. Events will be delivered through a combination of hybrid in person and online and will cover topical climate related issues such as new plug-in solar panels, electric vehicles and growing your own food.

- *Specialist climate related webinars* – encourage staff and Elected Members to attend events on the Sustainable NI training programme on specialist and professional topics, allowing unlimited free access available through the Council's membership of SNI. A distribution list, staff training channels and Council intranet will be used to highlight training opportunities run by partners.
- *Toolbox Talks* - develop and deliver a pilot series of 'toolbox talks' - short training sessions for operational staff.
- *Online webinar-based climate training* – work with other NI councils and DAERA to explore the potential and benefit of creating a package of online training modules which can be made available to all staff.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

- 4.1 The training programme is based on utilising in-house expertise and staff resource, optimising training available free of cost through existing membership packages and inviting partners to contribute to events on a pro bono basis. Potential costs and funding sources relevant to any NI-wide online training resources are being explored with any future resource implications being brought back to Committee for consideration."

In response to a Member's question, the Project Support Officer explained that officers were currently focusing on in-house training. However, she would circulate a list of the training providers to the Members if they wished to share them with community organisations.

The Committee noted the Climate Change Training Opportunities and Plan.

Climate Programme - External Funding Update

The Climate Commissioner presented the following report to the Committee:

“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. Delivery of the Action Plans of The Belfast Way - £7million (over 5-years). 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. Pilot of public diners in Belfast in line with the current pilots being carried out in Scotland - £6million (over 5-years). 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.

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 Financial and Resource Implications
None at present.

4.1 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment
None.”

A number of Members congratulated the Climate Team on the significant amount of funding which they had secured to date.

A further Member stated that it was important for Members to ensure good governance and he requested the overall figure which had been spent on net zero/climate activity by the Council, and how it measured against the targets.

In response, the Climate Commissioner provided an overview of the annual figure, highlighting the significant leverage of external funding which had been secured to support the delivery of the Council's climate programme. She stated that she would submit a report to a future meeting with a more detailed summary of the funding.

The Committee noted the external funding and the pipeline of projects.

One Million Trees - Councillor Lyons to raise

At the request of a Member, the Committee agreed that officers would:

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- submit a six-monthly update on the One Million Trees project to the Climate and City Resilience Committee; and
- liaise with the Burren Pine Project (<https://burrenbeo.com/pine/>) with a view to exploring any opportunities to identify a location(s) within Belfast which would be appropriate for planting.

Chairperson