

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 18th September, 2026

HYBRID MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor I. McLaughlin (Chairperson);
Councillors Beattie, Black, Brennan, Bunting,
Carson, Cobain, Doran, de Faoite, Garrett,
Long, Lyons, Maghie, R. McLaughlin, Murray,
Murphy, Nelson, Ó Néill, Smyth and Verner.

In attendance: Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director
of Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. K. Forster, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet, Transport and
Open Spaces and Street Scene;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of City and Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Mr. K. Heaney, Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance
Coordinator.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st 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, subject to the following amendments:

- ***Independently Managed Community Centres (IMCC's)*** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that funding would continue until the review of the IMCC's was complete.
- ***TEO Rapid Response Funding*** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that delegated authority be granted to the Strategic Policy and Resources in respect of the removal of any offensive signage displayed throughout the city.

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- ***Irish Language Policy – Implementation Plan*** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that a report be submitted to the next meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee which would provide further information on the expenditure associated with the implementation of the Irish Language Policy.
- ***Minutes of the Disability Working Group of 14th August, 2026*** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that a workshop be held for all Members by the end of October in relation to the delivery of a strategic roadmap to create an accessible city by 2035.
- ***Correspondence received – Removal of Ring-fenced Protection for Youth Service Funding – Department of Education*** - the Council agreed that the decision be amended to provide that the Council writes back to the Minister of Education to highlight its concern that the Education Authority's youth services budget would no longer be ring-fenced and to call on the Education Authority to ensure that funding for youth services would be protected.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 2.g) North Foreshore, Councillor Long declared an interest, in that his wife was the Justice Minister, Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest under the same item, in that his partner was a Junior Minister, and they both left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor de Faoite declared an interest under item 4. (b) Planning Information, in that he was on the Board of Governors of Forge Integrated Primary School. As the item did not become the subject of debate, he was not required to leave the meeting.

Request to Present – NI Water PC28 Business Plan

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from Northern Ireland Water at a future meeting.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following eleven 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 eleven 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

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no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Revenue Estimates and Medium-Term Financial Planning

The Committee considered an update on the key issues influencing the rate setting process for 2027/28.

The Committee:

- noted the challenges since the last update to be taken into consideration as part of the annual and medium-term rate setting;
- agreed to monthly rate update reports to enable the striking of the district rate by February 2027; and
- noted that the next Transformation and Efficiency Workshop had been scheduled for 15th October, at 5pm.

Area-based Community Planning and Community Wealth Building

The Head of Inclusive Growth and Anti-Poverty provided an update on the proposed next steps in relation to the development of area-based community plans alongside enabling communities to bring forward proposals to transform local places through demonstrator projects.

The Committee agreed to allocate funding to take forward the proposals submitted for South Belfast, as outlined in 3.6 of the report.

Governance Review update

The Committee noted that a report on the Governance Review would be presented for consideration in October. It was further noted that any governance issues identified by the Committee during discussion of other agenda items could be incorporated into that report for consideration.

Belfast Alleyways Transformation programme update

The Director of Resources, Fleet, Transport and Open Spaces and Street Scene presented an update on the 'Belfast Alleyways Transformation' programme, including work that was commencing on the piloting and scaling phase.

During the discussion, and in response to a request from Members, the Director advised that the resilience and sustainability of the programme would be included in future update reports. He also noted that the potential future use of alley gates could be addressed as part of engagement with community groups, and that other options for closing-off access could also be explored.

After discussion, the Committee:

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1. Noted the progress on the Belfast Alleyway Transformation programme, including the appointment of the Programme manager;
2. Approved the allocation of £300,000 to support the 800+ resident engagement and pilot;
3. Approved £100,000 to the alleyway assessment and options model; and
4. Noted the visit of the Bloomberg team to Belfast in October.

Leisure Update

The Director of Property and Projects provided an update on Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility, the last project of the £105m Leisure Transformation Programme.

She advised the Committee that approval was also sought on the proposed USPs at Shankill and Whiterock, which had been agreed to be brought forward under the next phase of the Council's leisure programme, together with future site optimisation at both sites.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Ó Néill,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the Committee agrees that the planning application for the current Girdwood Plan be progressed in relation to the sporting facility.

After discussion, the Committee:

£105million Leisure Transformation Programme - Girdwood

- noted the update on Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility and agreed that the planning application for the current Girdwood Plan be progressed in relation to the sporting facility.

Next phase of leisure – Shankill, Whiterock

- agreed to the proposed USPs for Shankill and Whiterock;
- noted the update in respect of site optimisation plans for Shankill and Whiterock;
- agreed that further sites visits be undertaken reflecting the proposed USPs at Shankill and Whiterock; and
- Shankill – agreed to progress the refurbishment of the reception area at Shankill and introduction of new Padel product in the main hall in Shankill, as an interim measure ahead of the future Shankill leisure transformation project to be funded by GLL as part of their ongoing investment programme.

The Committee also noted that a report on how smaller community leisure centres could be supported would be submitted to a future meeting.

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New Crematorium Update

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the report until a special meeting on 2nd October so that further information could be provided.

North Foreshore Update

(Following advice from the City Solicitor, the Members of the Planning Committee: Councillors Brennan, Carson, Doran, Garrett, Lyons and Murphy left the meeting.)

The Director of Property and Projects provided an update on the proposed development at North Foreshore.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor Verner,

That the Committee agrees to grant approval for an application to be made to Department for Communities in relation to the disposal of the land in accordance with the details of the report.

On a vote, eleven Members voted for the proposal and none against, with one no vote and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- noted the proposed development at the Northforeshore;
- granted approval for an application to be made to Department for Communities in relation to the disposal of the land in accordance with the details of the report; and
- noted that this was subject to further due diligence and the necessary Council and Ministerial approvals.

Bye Laws Update - City Hall

The City Solicitor provided a verbal update on the Bye Laws at the City Hall.

The Committee:

1. Agreed that the signage at City Hall would be updated to ensure that the public are aware of the Bye Laws;
2. Agreed that the only signage/material erected by Belfast City Council would be permissible at City Hall; and
3. Noted that the Bye Laws only applied to City Hall grounds, including its railings. Therefore, the cobbled area remained unaffected.

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The Committee also noted that a report on the wider enforcement of the Bye Laws would be submitted to the Committee in October for consideration.

Irish Language Policy – Implementation Plan

The City Solicitor provided the Committee with an update in relation to the Irish Language Policy Implementation Plan.

In response to a Member's request to defer consideration of the report pending the provision of further financial information, the Democratic Services Manager advised that, as the report was presented to provide an update and for notation only, a proposal to defer its consideration would not be competent.

After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of the report.

Minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum

The Committee noted the minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 10th September, 2026.

The Strategic Director of Neighbourhood Services provided an update on a request which had been received in relation to the use of a Council contractor.

The Committee agreed to allow access to the Council's contractor by the Department for Infrastructure.

The Committee also agreed to delegate authority to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, where necessary, to consider and determine any future requests for the use of this contractor and noted that further updates would be provided to Party Group Leaders.

Contracts Update

In relation to the "Curation of Fringe Programme for the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann" tender (Table 1), the Committee agreed that a report on the feedback from the Fleadh Fringe Programme 2026 be submitted to a future meeting before consideration of that tender.

The Committee approved the other recommendations as outlined in the report.

Matters referred from Council/Notices of Motion

Notices of Motion – 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 City Solicitor highlighted that officers were exploring measures to improve the management, tracking and reporting of Member Motions and Issues Raised in Advance. In order to establish clear arrangements for the management of Motions and Issues

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Raised in Advance that related to correspondence, it was proposed that if no response had been received after a period of three months, a follow up correspondence would be sent by officers. After a further three month period, any Motions and Issues Raised in Advance that had received no or partial responses would be reported back to committee. In this way, Motions and Issues Raised in Advance would be addressed in a timely fashion.

During discussion, one Member requested that the motion titled Cost of Living (ref 243) remained open to enable a further report to be submitted to the Committee.

The Committee:

- Noted the updates to all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance that it was responsible for;
- Agreed to the closure of the following motions 51, 375, 394, 417, 457, 460, 479 and 514;
- Agreed the proposals for the timely management of Motions and Issues Raised in Advance; and
- Agreed that the Cost of Living motion (ref 243) remained open to enable a further report to be submitted to the Committee on a review of the Council's Hardship Fund, to include a horizon scan of initiatives being undertaken by other councils, future options and associated costings, and engagement with the Department for Communities regarding resourcing arrangements pending the introduction of an Anti-Poverty Strategy.

**Notice of Motion – Ensuring Fair Access to Funding
for Faith-Based Organisations Tackling Addiction**

The Committee considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of report or summary of main issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Notice of Motion received for the meeting of the Council on 2nd February 2026 in relation to Ensuring Fair Access to Funding for Faith-Based Organisations Tackling Addiction.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note that, following a review of the Council's current funding arrangements and eligibility criteria, there does not appear to be any unnecessary obstacles that would exclude faith-based organisations from applying for and receiving support.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 Members will recall that a Notice of Motion was received for the meeting of the Council on 2nd February 2026 in relation to Ensuring Fair Access to Funding for Faith-Based Organisation Tackling Addictions, the contents of the report are as follows:

Ensuring Fair Access to Funding for Faith-Based Organisations Tackling Addiction

“Belfast City Council recognises the essential role played by faith-based organisations in serving the most vulnerable members of our city, particularly those battling life-controlling issues such as drug and alcohol addiction.

This Council acknowledges the work of Teen Challenge Belfast, a registered charity which provides critical intervention services to individuals struggling with addiction. These include on-street outreach, counselling, crisis intervention, and referrals to an 11-month residential rehabilitation programme – reportedly delivering an estimated 85% success rate.

This Council further notes that, despite delivering life-saving services without discrimination, organisations such as Teen Challenge face structural barriers to funding due to their faith-based governance models – barriers which inhibit access to public funding streams otherwise available to comparable service providers.

Accordingly, this Council commits to reviewing its current funding arrangements and eligibility criteria, with a view to removing unnecessary obstacles that exclude faith-based organisations from applying for and receiving support – provided their services are offered to all, without discrimination, and meet the pressing social needs of our communities.

This Council further calls on officers to bring forward proposals to ensure that funding frameworks are inclusive of organisations with a faith ethos, in recognition of the diverse contributions required to tackle addiction, homelessness, and social vulnerability across Belfast.”

Proposer: Alderman Dean A. McCullough
Seconder: Councillor Sarah Bunting

The motion calls upon the Council to review funding arrangements and eligibility criteria.

Legal Services have reviewed the Council's current funding arrangements and the eligibility criteria outlined therein and have concluded that there does not appear to be any unnecessary obstacles that would exclude faith-based organisations from applying for funding. Whilst it is recognised that the eligibility criteria of certain funding streams might differ slightly due to the nature of that particular funding stream, Legal Services have been unable to identify any that would preclude Faith Based Organisations from applying.

Members should note that this conclusion is based on an overarching view of faith-based organisations and their governance structure against the Council's funding criteria. Legal Services have reviewed the governance structure of Teen Challenge Belfast as highlighted in the original notice of motion, and this review supports the conclusion that they would be eligible to apply.

Members should further note that although Legal Services have concluded that there are no governance barriers to Faith-Based Organisations applying for funding, their proposed project would thereafter be subject to the same assessment against project specific eligibility criteria which are applied to all organisations on a project by project basis before grant funding decisions are made.

3.2 Financial and Resource Implications

None associated with this report.

**3.3 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

None associated with this report.

The Committee noted that, following a review of the Council's current funding arrangements and eligibility criteria, there did not appear to be any unnecessary obstacles that would exclude faith-based organisations from applying for and receiving support.

Strategic Issues/Belfast Agenda

Planning Update

The Committee noted the update on Major planning applications and applications that had been determined by the Planning Committee.

Northern Ireland's Draft Artificial Intelligence Strategy – Consultation

The Deputy Chief Executive provided the Committee with an overview of the Northern Ireland Draft Public Sector AI Strategy and sought approval for Belfast City Council's draft response to the consultation - which closed on 7th October, 2026.

She advised that the Council's response, as set out in [appendix one](#), sought to strengthen the Strategy through greater recognition of local government, stronger adoption mechanisms, improved collaboration and a continued focus on inclusive growth, environmental considerations, trust and responsible innovation.

During discussion, Members raised concerns, including energy costs, AI bias and EU legislation.

After discussion, the Committee approved the draft response to the Northern Ireland Draft Public Sector AI Strategy as the Council's corporate response on the matter and noted that Parties could submit their own responses independently, if required.

Regional Balance Bill Call for Evidence

The Committee considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Members for the attached response to the Economy Committee's Call for Evidence in relation the Regional Balance Bill.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- **Consider and approve the submission attached at Appendix 1, as the Council's response to the NI Assembly's Committee for the Economy.**

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 The [Regional Balance Bill](#) is a Private Member's Bill introduced by Foyle MLA Sinéad McLaughlin to the Northern Ireland Assembly on Monday 8 June 2026. The Bill seeks to improve regional economic balance across Northern Ireland. It seeks to do so by imposing a duty on the NI Executive to develop and implement a framework setting out how disparities in regional economic performance and living standards are to be addressed and to review the effectiveness of the framework.**

The Northern Ireland Assembly's Committee for the Economy launched a call for evidence and is inviting individuals and organisations to share their views on the Regional Balance

Bill. The evidence received will play a role in informing the Committee's scrutiny work, which will include evidence sessions with stakeholders; clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill, and recommendations to the sponsor of the Bill and the Department for the Economy.

- 3.2 The Bill gives statutory recognition to regional balance (i.e. the difference in economic performance and living standards between geographic regions) as an Executive-wide priority, requires the Executive to adopt and maintain a Regional Balance Strategic Framework, imposes a duty on departments to pay due regard to the Framework when developing policies, strategies and plans, and requires annual reporting to, and scrutiny by, the Assembly. The Department for the Economy (DfE) is given a lead role in monitoring, reporting, issuing guidance and conducting research to support delivery.

This latter point is important, as the Bill is seeking to balance recognition that departments need to work together in the context of an overall, strategic framework with the expertise and lead responsibility resting with the DfE. This means that the Framework will have a clear owner in terms of reporting and recommending improvements, whilst ensuring the Executive drives it across the board.

- 3.3 During the initial 12-week online public consultation conducted between November 2024 and February 2025 (which received 115 responses) there was strong support for many of the provisions in the Bill. However, concerns were raised about the potential impact on Belfast as an economic driver and the possible neglect of the region's capital city, should government become more focused on 'left-behind' places. This is a point the Bill Sponsor is alive to, but notes that the legislation is seeking to drive greater regional balance and lift opportunity and standards of living overall, giving the Executive appropriate discretion to make policy choices on that and justify them accordingly. It is the Bill Sponsor's firm belief that regional balance will result in an improved settlement for left-behind areas, whether within the capital city which contains an extensive share of more deprived wards, especially in North and West Belfast, or more peripheral areas such as the North-West.

It was highlighted that regional economic statistics are limited, and any reliance will need to take account of the fact that small regions mean statistics are distorted by the fact many people live in one region and work in another, while a business may be based in one region but employ people from throughout NI or further afield. The Bill Sponsor considers that these are important contributions which should be addressed by the Department through more effective data collation and

improved monitoring. In fulfilling their responsibilities under the Bill, Departments can set out their operating assumptions and approach to any targets they have been assigned.

- 3.4 The proposed response (attached at Appendix 1) supports the principle of addressing regional disparities but raises concerns that the Regional Balance Bill, as currently framed, could unintentionally negatively impact Belfast's role as Northern Ireland's primary economic driver as set out in the Regional Development Strategy.

We set out five key points for the Committee's consideration:

1. The Belfast economy has performed well over recent years;
 2. The city's strong economic performance drives growth across the whole region;
 3. The city's economic performance does not automatically translate into improved living standards or economic benefit for all its residents;
 4. Research consistently shows that cities drive productivity; and
 5. Belfast has spent years playing catch-up – we must maintain that focus rather than take our eye off the ball.
- 3.5 The Council argues that Belfast's economic competitors are comparable UK, Irish and European cities rather than other parts of Northern Ireland and warns that diverting policy attention or investment away from the city could weaken overall regional prosperity. It highlights Belfast's significant contribution to the economy, accounting for around one-third of Northern Ireland's GVA, 30% of all jobs and more than a quarter of net job growth since 2013, while also serving as the region's main hub for inward investment, innovation and high-value sectors.
- 3.6 The draft response emphasises that strong economic performance does not automatically translate into improved outcomes for all residents. Despite economic growth, Belfast contains some of Northern Ireland's most deprived communities, with six of the ten most deprived wards located in the city, significant skills deficits, high levels of economic inactivity and marked inequalities in employment, educational attainment and life expectancy. It therefore contends that any regional balance framework should consider both intra-city deprivation and objective need, alongside disparities between geographic regions.
- 3.7 Drawing on national and international evidence, the Council argues that cities are key drivers of productivity, investment and economic growth, and that policies should focus on

enabling places to realise their own economic potential as well as redistributing growth. The Council advocates an inclusive approach that strengthens Belfast's competitiveness while ensuring that economic benefits are more widely shared. The draft responses recommends that the Bill recognises Belfast's strategic economic role, avoid creating barriers to investment and infrastructure delivery, and ensure that efforts to reduce regional disparities are balanced with measures to raise overall economic performance and living standards across Northern Ireland.

3.8 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

**3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

The Bill's Explanatory and Financial Memorandum states: "An Equality Impact Assessment has not been undertaken. Engagement between the Bill Sponsor and the Equality Commission on the outline proposal did not raise any potential adverse effects on initial reading and the Bill Sponsor is happy to engage on this further. Indeed, if the Bill contributes to achieving its policy objectives it may positively affect some groups subject to disadvantage. By promoting action to reduce geographic disparities, the Bill is expected to have positive equality impacts. Transparent reporting and a duty to pay due regard to the Framework support compliance with existing equality obligations. The Bill Sponsor is therefore satisfied that the Bill will not have an adverse effect on any of the groups identified in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The duties imposed by the Bill will be subject to obligations under Section 75."

During discussion, Members raised concerns in relation to the limitations of the proposed response, together with the economic priorities and balance of investment within Belfast and across Northern Ireland.

The Committee approved the submission as outlined in [Appendix 1](#) of the report, as the Council's corporate response to the NI Assembly's Committee for the Economy and noted that individual Parties could submit separate responses, if they so wished.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme

The Committee:

Capital Programme Stage Movements

- **Corporate Staff Accommodation** – Duncrue - 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.

Project Updates

- **Belfast Stories** – noted the project update provided and agreed that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of any tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) for the next phase of the project (up to the submission of the Full Business Case [FBC]) be progressed in order to ensure that the project remained on programme. The FBC would be brought back to the Committee in Q2 2027 for approval to submit to the Department, in line with the Contract for Funding (CFF).

Asset Management

The Committee:

- i) **Hannahstown Hill – Land Swap**
Approved a land swap between Belfast City Council and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in respect of lands situated at Hannahstown Hill
- ii) **Duncrue Industrial Estate – Boundary Rectification (Plot 17)**
Approved a Deed of Rectification being entered into, to regularise the physical boundary of Plot 17 under the Head Lease.
- iii) **Duncrue Estate – Deed of Variation (Plot 21)**
Approved the extension of the current term of the ground Lease at Plot 21 Duncrue Estate to an unexpired term of 125 years, from 1st November, 2026, and approved the variation of the rent to reflect the extended lease term and an amendment in the rent review cycle from 7 years to 5 years from November 2026.
- iv) **Clement Wilson Park – New Lease**
Approved entering into a new 5-year lease with DfI for the siting of a pontoon at Clement Wilson Park.

Area Working Groups Update

The Committee considered the minutes of the most recent meeting of the Area Working Groups.

During the discussion, Members highlighted the need for capital investment to be distributed equitably across the city, including all constituencies, and emphasised that investment in the city centre should not be to the detriment of neighbourhood funding.

After discussion, the Committee approved the minutes of the following meetings:

- South Area Working Group – 24th August;
- West Area Working Group – 27th August, subject to the addition of the request for dog park facilities at Falls Park and Woodvale Park to be investigated;
- North Area Working Group – 2nd September, subject to the addition that authority be delegated to officers to undertake the necessary due diligence in respect of the allocated £5,000 Get Active NI Programme funding; and
- East Area Working Group – 3rd September.

Pitches Update

The Committee considered the undernoted 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 ongoing in respect of pitches including the Pitches Strategy.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to note:

- the update on the Pitches Strategy Consultation;
- the update on current minor pitch improvement projects and agree the proposed projects for this year as outlined at 3.5 ;
- that a rolling programme of condition surveys is being commissioned to inform the development of a costed maintenance programme;
- that a detailed report will be brought to Committee next month with further detail on the £1m Partner

**Enhancement Fund, Pitches Implementation Plan and
Events Space;**

- that a response has been received from the Minister for Communities regarding the requirements under the new Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League criteria and agree that officers meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.

3.0 Main Report

Pitch Strategy 2026 - 2036 Consultation

- 3.1 At its meeting on 30th April 2026, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee noted the contents of the draft Pitches Strategy 2026 – 2036 and approved that the draft Strategy would be subject to formal consultation which would also consider any equality implications. Members will be aware of the significant consultation and engagement that has been undertaken as part of the work on the Pitches Strategy and on the agreed overarching Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy. The former included co-design, online surveys, as well as further focused surveys, public consultation events and interviews.
- 3.2 Members are asked to note that it is anticipated the consultation will open for 8 weeks via the Yoursay platform in mid-October, closing in December 2026. An equality screening document will also accompany the consultation along with a FAQ document.
- 3.3 It is estimated that feedback from the consultation will be brought back to Members in February 2027.

**Pitch Projects – Developments already undertaken or planned
for 2026/2027**

- 3.4 Alongside the development of the Pitches Strategy, officers have progressed a number of initiatives which have previously been agreed by Members. These are designed to improve pitch provision across the city, using the Pitches Programme budget allocated. These include:
- Clarendon Playing Fields: Installation of two 6m x 30m long ballstop fences at the grass soccer pitch. Works were completed in March 2026.
 - Fall Park: Installation of 1.2m high spectator fence, 6m high ballstop sections and spectator hardstanding at

grass soccer pitch. Works are progressing well, completion expected by end of September 2026.

- **Wedderburn Playing Fields:** Installation of 2.4m high boundary fence and 1.2m high spectator fence. Works are programmed to commence in October 2026, with completion expected by December 2026. In this regard, a meeting for local councillors will be organised for the end of September with consultation sessions at the start of October.
- **Marrowbone 3G Pitch:** Installation of 1.0m high ballstop netting system to the existing ballstop fence. Fencing is now on order with works programmed to commence in November 2026, completion is expected by mid-December 2026.

3.5 Furthermore, the following projects are proposed to be taken forward utilising the allocated Pitches Programme budget. Again these are small scale works designed to improve pitch provision across the city.

- **Woodlands Playing Fields:** Creation of additional junior GAA pitch, installation of 3no. ballstop nets, 1.2m fence to car park and new player access ramp to the pitch area.
- **Cherryvale Park:** Surface improvement work to existing grass GAA training pitch and installation of dugout areas.
- **Henry Jones Playing Fields:** Installation of 2no. player dugouts.
- **Loughside Playing Fields:** Installation of 4m high ballstop fence to boundary of small sided, grass soccer pitch.
- **Westlands Soccer Pitch (Waterworks Upper):** Construction of new spectator hardstanding at grass soccer pitch.
- **Dixon Park:** Installation of additional 1.2m high spectator fencing with ballstop section and new car park kerbing.
- **Strangford Playing Fields:** Installation of ballstop nets.
- **Brook 4G –** following a condition survey of the playing surface at Brook, a re-crumbing exercise will be completed to improve the playing surface.

Members are asked to agree the minor pitch improvement projects outlined above. If agreed works will be carried out by end of March 2027.

Partner Enhancement Fund – Update

- 3.6 At February 2026 Committee, Members agreed to ringfence £1million from the current Pitches Programme budget towards a Partner Pitch Enhancement Programme. This Fund is aimed at supporting partner organisations, who can demonstrate projects with community benefits, that will provide increased pitch availability to help address the deficit of pitch hours, as outlined in the Pitches Strategy. Work on this is being finalised and Members are asked to note that further detail will be brought back to Committee next month, outlining the open-call application process, eligibility criteria and assessment process.

Condition Surveys

- 3.7 Members will be aware that a rolling programme of condition surveys is being carried out across the Council's buildings with surveys currently underway of all the community centres. This is to inform the development of a full evidence based planned maintenance programme. To ensure that the Council has a full understanding of all future maintenance requirements it is proposed that a programme of condition surveys of the Council's pitches both grass and 3G is undertaken.
- 3.8 A spec for this work is currently being finalised and an update on the timeline will be brought to Committee as part of a future update.

National Conference League – DFC response

- 3.9 Recent proposals presented by new Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League facility criteria, was discussed at the special SP&R (30th April 2026). The Committee agreed to write to the Minister for Communities to engage the IFA in relation to the impact on football clubs on the level of pitches available that meet this criteria and request that interventions are made.
- 3.10 A response has been received from the Minister for Communities, indicating that whilst he does not have any direct influence over the structures, criteria or regulations governing leagues, he will support the continued engagement with Irish FA and league operators, around the impact of the onerous and challenging facility requirements introduced. A

copy of this is attached at Appendix 1. It is proposed that officers meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.

Next Steps

3.11 Members are asked to note the work that has been ongoing in respect of pitches and note that it is proposed to bring a detailed update to Committee next month covering

- Pitches Strategy – Implementation Plan – proposed next steps following the outcome of the feasibility studies
- Proposed procurement strategy
- Update on the Event Space - extensive work on this piece of work has been undertaken and extensive engagement with promoters and other key stakeholders has taken place, with continued dialogue ongoing.
- Continue to engage with Minister for Communities and Northern Ireland Amateur Football League regarding new requirements under the Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League and officers to meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.

3.12 **Financial and Resource Implications**

None in relation to this report.

3.13 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**

The legislation requirements have been met including screening.

All physical projects are designed for people and are inherently inclusive and accessible.

During discussion, the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services and the Director of Property and Projects answered a range of questions in relation to the status and timelines of pitch improvements across the city and highlighted that a further detailed report would be brought to the Committee next month to include information on the outstanding queries raised.

After discussion, the Committee noted:

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- the update on the Pitches Strategy Consultation;
- the update on current minor pitch improvement projects and agreed the proposed projects for this year as outlined at 3.5;
- that a rolling programme of condition surveys was being commissioned to inform the development of a costed maintenance programme;
- that a detailed report would be brought to the Committee next month with further detail on the £1m Partner Enhancement Fund, Pitches Implementation Plan and Events Space and the other queries raised at Committee in relation to the Pitches Strategy; and
- that a response had been received from the Minister for Communities regarding the requirements under the new Northern Ireland Amateur Football League, National Conference League criteria and agreed that officers meet with the IFA/Northern Ireland Amateur Football League to discuss the proposed National Conference League criteria.

Finance, Procurement & Performance

Belfast City Council Statement of Accounts 2025/26

The Director of Finance provided an overview of the Statement of Accounts of the Council, including the Annual Governance Statement, for the period ending 31st March, 2026.

He highlighted that the Statement of Accounts were an important element of the council's overall corporate governance framework as they provided assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the council's finances and its financial position.

He advised that the Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March, 2026, (appendix 1), had been prepared in line with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2025/26 based on International Financial Reporting Standards and the Department for Communities Accounts Direction, Circular LG 07/2026.

He pointed out that, following further technical advice which had been received from the Local Government Auditor, there was a required change to the Balance Sheet in relation to the specified reserve after the report had been published.

The Committee:

- Agreed that the report was not subject to call-in on the basis that an inability to immediately implement the decision would result in a breach of statutory duty in publishing the Council's Statement of Accounts by the legislative deadline of 30th September 2026;
- Noted that, following further technical advice which had been received from the Local Government Auditor, there was a required change to the Balance Sheet in relation to the specified reserve after the report had been published; and

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- Approved the Council's Statement of Accounts and incorporated Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31st March, 2026.

**Response to Department of Finance
consultation on Business Growth Accelerator
and Non-Domestic Vacant Rating**

It was reported that, on 29th June, 2026, the Minister of Finance had announced that a further public consultation was being taken forward on two measures relating to the non-domestic rating system:

- a Business Growth Accelerator, providing temporary, targeted relief for businesses taking practical steps to expand; and
- Non-Domestic Vacant Rating, including how any increases in liability levels should be introduced

The Committee considered the draft response by the Council to the Department of Finance consultation on Business Growth Accelerator and Non-Domestic Vacant rating.

It was highlighted that the closing date for responses was 23rd September, 2026 and the proposed response, if agreed, would be submitted subject to Council ratification.

The Committee agreed the response to the consultation included in [Appendix 2](#) of the report and noted that the response would be submitted, subject to Council ratification.

Request for Funding for Halloween event in City Centre

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

The Committee considered the following report:

1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The report details a request from BID One for part funding to support Halloween activities in the City Centre.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 Members are asked to consider the request.**

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 Belfast One is aiming to create a joined-up Halloween experience that is highly visible, accessible and enjoyable for residents and visitors, bringing the giant Halloween monsters back to landmark buildings across the city centre, alongside the Belfast One Pumpkin Patch, activities at 2 Royal Avenue, business promotions and community participation.**

2025 Halloween experience

- 3.2 The 2025 Halloween programme demonstrated the strong appeal of a coordinated city centre event. The giant monster installations created a highly visible trail across Belfast, encouraging people to explore the city, take photographs and share their experience online. The installations generated more than 1.2 million total views and reached approximately 500,000 people across social media.
- 3.3 At City Hall, the Belfast One Pumpkin Patch distributed 1,300 pumpkins and welcomed around 5,000 visitors. Visitors were also directed to other Halloween activities across the city centre by an interactive map, helping to extend their visit and encourage movement between locations.
- 3.4 The Spooktacular Activity Centre at 2 Royal Avenue welcomed more than 5,000 visitors over the weekend, with pumpkin painting, face painting, crafts and the Creepy Crawly Farm. Quiet sessions were also provided each morning for children with additional needs. Together, these activities created a fun, inclusive atmosphere while supporting footfall and engagement across Belfast City Centre.
- 3.5 Members are advised that the 2025 programme was part-funded by Belfast City Council with £50K from departmental budget and reserves created to support city animation. In 2024 £40K was provided through grant funding.

Proposed 2026 Halloween Experience

- 3.6 The total proposal for 2026 BID One activity is a continuation of this activity with an estimated total delivery cost of £125K
- 10 Giant inflatable monsters on buildings across Belfast City Centre, creating a strong visual attraction and encouraging visitors to explore and share content online.
 - A free, ticketed two-day Pumpkin Patch at City Hall, linked to pumpkin decorating and carving activities at 2 Royal Avenue.
 - Family-friendly creative and interactive activities, including storytelling, workshops and displays developed with local community and cultural organisations at 2 Royal Avenue
 - A Halloween trail map and participating business offers to encourage footfall and spend.
- 3.7 The two city centre shopping centres will also fund and deliver activity in their areas as part of the wider programme and the

overall programme will be supported by marketing campaign involving promotion across digital, social media and other relevant channels.

3.8 BID One have identified the following expected outcomes and impact from the programme of activity:

- Increase footfall across Belfast City Centre during Halloween.
- Create a positive, safe and memorable experience for families, residents and visitors.
- Support local businesses through increased visibility, visitor movement and promotions.
- Generate strong social media engagement through highly visual installations.
- Increase community and cultural participation.
- Strengthen Belfast City Centre's reputation as a fun and family-friendly Halloween destination.

3.9 Financial and Resource Implications

BID one are seeking financial support from BCC on par with 2025 of £50,000 to support the delivery of the programme

Funding for city animation was included as a growth proposal for 2026/2027 but as Members will be aware, following the quarter 1 financial report, funding is not available to support further growth proposals at this time. It is understood that In the absence of funding from Belfast City Council whilst monster installations would still be delivered, potentially at a reduced level, the Pumpkin Patch would not go ahead and other elements of the programme would either be removed or be significantly scaled back.

3.10 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report.

During discussion, Members suggested that, when considering the extended cultural package for 2027, Halloween and New Year's Eve events should be included in those discussions. One Member also suggested that community organisations be considered for the direct delivery of events at City Hall and that consideration be given to expanding such events along arterial routes. In response, the Director of Finance advised that both the events and future years' requirements would need to be factored into the rate-setting process.

After discussion, the Committee agreed, in principle, to allocate £50,000 to BID One to support the delivery of the Halloween Programme and delegated authority to the Director of Finance to authorise the funding, subject to the availability of a specified reserve.

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 the 2nd September, including:

Members Updates

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

Asylum Dispersal Programme – Update

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

TEO - Rapid Response Funding

- The Shared City Partnership noted the report.

PEACEPLUS – Local Community Action Plan Secretariat Update

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

Community Regeneration and Transformation Thematic Update

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

Any Other Business

The Good Relations Manager updated in terms of the meeting with MEARS, Migrant Help, TEO and the Home Office and updated in terms of the New Good Relations Framework and views being sought by the Executive Office. It was agreed representatives of the Shared City Partnership would meet week commencing 7th September to complete the online form.

Operational

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out in Appendix 1 of the report:

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	CHARGES
The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB)	10 December 2026	PEACEPLUS Prosperity Stakeholder Consultation – event for Greater Belfast voluntary community sector and any other interested parties on the PEACEPLUS successor programme 2028-2034 Numbers attending - 200	Yes	- ROOM HIRE OF £1250 - Any applicable additional charges
Confucius Institute at Ulster University	5 February 2027	Confucius Institute Chinese New Year Event is a celebration event with awards following a schools' competition, speeches, performances and lunch to celebrate the Chinese New Year Numbers attending - 220	Yes	- ROOM HIRE OF £1250 - Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Memory Stones of Love/ Cruse Bereavement Care NI	14 March 2027	Covid-19 National Day of Reflection , coinciding with the UK wide commemoration day this local group plans to remember all those who were lost during the pandemic with stories, poems and music. Numbers attending – 200	Yes	- NO ROOM HIRE - Any applicable additional charges <i>With 20% charity deduction applied to final total</i>
Ulster Obstetrical & Gynaecological Society	4 June 2027	Ulster Obstetrical and Gynaecological Society 75th Anniversary , celebration event to mark historic anniversary with reception, dinner, speeches and live music.	Yes	- NO ROOM HIRE - Any applicable additional charges

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		Number attending - 150		
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Minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel minutes of 11th September

The Committee noted the key issues arising at the meeting and approved the minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel of 11th September 2026 at Appendix 1.

Request for the use of Botanic Gardens

The Committee granted authority to the applicant, Belfast Film Festival, to host an outdoor cinema screening at Botanic Gardens on the 3rd October, 2026, subject to the completion of the appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers:

- I. resolves all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
- II. meets all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and
- III. shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.

The Committee also noted that the above recommendations were taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which was currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.

**Request for the use of Bowling Pavilion –
Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park**

The Committee granted authority to the applicant, East Belfast Football Club, to host a supporter and volunteer dinner in Alderman and Tommy Patton bowling pavilion on 26th September, 2026, subject to the completion of the appropriate event management plans and satisfactory terms being agreed by the Director of City and Neighbourhood Services and on the condition that the Event Organisers:

1. resolves all operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
2. meets all statutory requirements including Public Liability Insurance cover, Health and Safety, and licensing responsibilities; and
3. shall consult with adjoining public bodies and local communities as necessary.
4. The Committee also approved the free use of the facility to include the staff costs to open, close and manage the building during the event.

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The Committee noted that the above recommendations were taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which was currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

Fleadh 2027 – Musicians Fund

In response to the request from Councillor R. McLaughlin for a budget to be created for schools, community groups in and other associated groups in Belfast to get funding for instruments and other associated costs to help train aspiring musicians for Fleadh 2027, the Committee agreed a report on how this would be facilitated, resourced and managed would be brought back to the Committee.

Ethical Procurement Policy Update Request

In response to the request from Councillor Brennan in relation to an update on the Ethical Procurement Policy, including a timeline of the Working Group meetings, the Committee agreed that an update report would be brought back to the Committee.

During further discussion, a Member raised a request arising from the Governance Review, highlighting delays in a number of work programmes, including Leisure Transformation, Dual Language Street Signs, the New Crematorium, Bye-Laws, the Pitches Strategy, the Irish Language Policy and the Ethical Procurement Policy. The Member proposed that the scope of the Governance Review be extended to include the development of a framework for monitoring the implementation and delivery of Committee decisions across all departments.

In response, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that the matter would be considered as part of the performance management work programme at the forthcoming Transformation and Efficiency Workshop.

Noted.

Chairperson