

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 14th January, 2025

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor R. Brooks (Chairperson);
Councillors Abernethy, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley,
Bunting, Canavan, Cobain, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
R-M Donnelly, Flynn, Garrett, Maghie, Maskey,
McKeown, I. McLaughlin and Verner.
- In attendance: Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood
Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. S. Leonard, Director of Resources, Fleet, Open Spaces
and Streetscene;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Magee.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 3rd December were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 9th January.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Verner declared an interest under item 4a., 'Integrated Advice Partnership Fund', in that the organisation Advice Space rented space within the Spectrum Centre, where she was employed. Councillor McKeown declared an interest in item 3c., 'Request from Belfast Healthy Cities', in that his employer provided funding to the aforementioned organisation.

The Committee noted, given that the above-mentioned declarations were non-pecuniary and did not relate to any narrative nor recommendations within the reports, that both Members were not required to retire from the meeting whilst the matters were under consideration.

Proposed Pedestrian Crossing - Knockbreda Road

At its meeting on 6th August, at the request of Councillor Maghie, the Committee had agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) seeking clarity on when work would commence on a proposed pedestrian crossing on the Knockbreda Road. It was reported that a response had been received which had indicated that officials from the Eastern Division had requested that the Council conduct a further consultation with affected residents with a view to work progressing once that process had been completed.

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With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor de Faoite, in his capacity as an elected representative for the area, addressed the Committee. He expressed concern that there had been an unnecessary delay in the commencement of the project, which, he added, had been supported by all of the Elected Members within the area. Several Members of the Committee concurred with the comments made and expressed frustration at the length of time it had taken to resolve the issue, given the associated safety risk posed.

The Committee noted the receipt of the correspondence and expressed the view that the consultation be completed at the earliest opportunity in order to progress the matter.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Biodiversity in the Council's Parks and Open Spaces

Further to its meeting of 3rd December, at which Councillor Flynn had requested that an update be provided regarding a motion which he had submitted entitled, 'Biodiversity in the Council Parks and Open Spaces', the Committee considered a report in this regard. The report addressed several issues associated with the delivery of a Local Biodiversity Action Plan and the steps which might be taken in addressing the proposals outlined within the original motion.

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Maghie and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees that a sum of £50,000 (to support the delivery of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan - LBAP) and a sum of £35,000 (to scope and develop the LBAP) be included within the Department's draft estimates of expenditure for 2025/26, subject to approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee as part of the District Rate setting process for 2025/26.

**Reference Group on Older People –
Minutes of 10th December**

The Committee agreed to note the contents of the minutes of the meeting of the Reference Group on Older People held on of 10th December, 2024.

**Request from Belfast Health
Cities re: WHO Conference**

The Committee considered an invitation which had been extended to the Council by Belfast Health Cities inviting the Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson (or their nominees) to attend the 2025 European Healthy Cities Network Conference.

The Committee agreed not to be represented at the event given the associated time constraints and logistical arrangements. It was noted that that an invitation would be extended to the Belfast Healthy Cities Network to present at a future meeting on its ongoing work.

Operational Issues

Integrated Advice Partnership Fund

At its meeting on 5th November, the Committee had agreed to seek expressions of interest to oversee the distribution of additional DfC funding through the Integrated Advice Partnership Fund. It was reported that, in response to an open call, one bid had been received from Advice Space. That bid would, if approved, provide debt information and advice services across the city through a range of affiliated partners within an approved consortia. Accordingly, the Committee was recommended to approve the bid, which had been assessed against a pre-agreed criteria, in the sum of £82,496.86, details of which were outlined within the associated report.

The Committee agreed to adopt the recommendation within the report. In addition, it was agreed, in respect of the funding model, which incorporated the Greater Shankill area within West Belfast, that sufficient resources be allocated from within that fund to ensure the adequate provision of services within the Greater Shankill area.

Forth Meadow Community Greenway and Park Opening Hours Consultations

The Committee was reminded that it had authorised the undertaking of a consultation exercise on the opening hours for the Forth Meadow Community Greenway, which would examine also opening hours for the Ormeau Park, the Falls Park and the Woodvale Park. The exercise would include also an overview of the feasibility of including the Belmont Park within its scope. It was reported that the survey would consider the views of local communities in examining accessibility to the parks within the context of maintaining health and safety requirements and addressing concerns linked to antisocial behaviour. Accordingly, the Committee considered a report which outlined several key dates for the undertaking of the exercise.

During discussion in the matter on the Forth Meadow Community Greenway, officers undertook to provide, in addition to an option of completing the survey online, hard copy questionnaires if deemed necessary. It was noted that postcodes would be used to identify and reflect specific feedback from families and individuals living closest to the Greenway, and that steps would be taken to address areas where there had been a lower response rate. In addition, the Committee noted that a proposal regarding accessibility to the Falls Park through a gateway at Ardmonagh Gardens would be omitted from the exercise to allow for a wider discussion to take place with local communities.

The Committee noted the information provided and agreed that the consultation exercise would proceed forthwith, subject to the omission of a proposal regarding the 24-hour opening of a gateway at Ardmonagh Gardens within the scope of the exercise.

Requests for Events in Parks

The Committee considered a report which outlined details of number of applications which had been submitted seeking permission to host events in the Council's parks and open spaces.

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Prior to considering the application for the use of the Boucher Road Playing Fields for the purposes of a circus event, it was reported that further information of a financial nature had since been submitted by a third party seeking to host a similar-type event. In accordance with the provisions within Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, the Committee agreed to consider the information as a restricted matter, when it deemed that the additional information had no material bearing on the original application submitted.

The Committee granted permission for the hosting of the following events within the Council's parks and open spaces, further details in respect of which was contained within the associated report:

- St. Patrick's Day 2025 – Cathedral Gardens – 14th to 17th March, 2025;
- Vega Circus – Boucher Playing Fields – 6th to 29th April, 2025
- 'Wellfest' – Boucher Road Playing Fields – 20th to 27th May, 2025;
- Belfast Mela – Botanic Gardens – 17th to 27th August, 2025;
- Belfast Full Marathon – Ormeau Park – 3rd May to 5th May, 2025;
- Belfast Half Marathon – Ormeau Park – 20th to 22nd September, 2025; and
- Bench to Beside Run – Ormeau Park – 28th September, 2025.

It was agreed also that delegated authority be granted to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to oversee and manage the legal and contractual stipulations as set out within the report regarding the hosting of the events.

Proposals for the Naming of New Streets

The Committee agreed to the naming of Ben Madigan Wood and Ben Madigan Gardens.

Proposals for Dual Language Street Signs

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplated, in Irish, at Glengoland Avenue, Rathcool Street, Suffolk Drive, Lagmore Grove, Kenard Avenue, Upper Suffolk Road, Orchardville Gardens, North Circular Road, Palace Gardens, Cloona Park, Willowvale Gardens, Rossmore Park and Ardenlee Rise.

Issue raised in Advance by a Member

**Bin Collections over the Christmas Period -
(Councillor M. Donnelly)**

The Committee agreed that the Strategic Director of City and Neighbourhood Services would consider the provision of a scheme to provide labels on bins that would include information on collection dates in advance of the Christmas period, 2025.

Chairperson