

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 23rd May, 2025

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Murphy (Chairperson);
Alderman McCoubrey; and
Councillors Beattie, Black, Brennan, Bunting, Cobain,
de Faoite, R-M Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett,
Groogan, Long, Maghie, McDonough-Brown,
I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Nelson and Whyte.
- In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
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;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. J. Girvan, Director of Neighbourhood Services; and
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th and 28th April were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 1st May.

Declarations of Interest

Alderman McCoubrey and Councillors Beattie, Duffy and Groogan declared an interest in item 2(a) Social Supermarket Fund in that they were associated with organisations which applied for funding and left the meeting while this item was under discussion.

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Councillors Groogan, R-M Donnelly and Duffy declared an interest in item 7(d) Minutes of the Shared City Partnership in so far as it related to PEACEPLUS in that they worked for organisations which had applied for funding. As the item did not become the subject of debate, they were not required to leave the meeting.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following four items are 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 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 also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Social Supermarket Fund 25/26

The Committee considered a report with suggested options in relation to the approach to provide funding for social supermarkets in 2025/26 following its decision in April not to proceed with the current process.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor R. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Black,

That the Committee agrees:

- to adopt option 1 for funding social supermarkets in 2025/26;
- that the criteria for funding be reviewed by September, 2025; and
- not to fund organisations which received funding in 2024/25 but did not apply for funding in 2025/26.

Amendment

Moved By Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the Committee agrees to proceed with option 3 for the funding of social supermarkets for 2025/26.

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On a vote, four Members voted for the amendment and twelve against and it was declared lost.

The original proposal standing in the name of Councillor R. McLaughlin was put to the meeting and passed.

The Committee agreed also to:

- grant delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to make further allocations based on the agreed option, if further funding becomes available; and
- approve that the Council provide any additional funds required to provide 25% bridging support to 2024/25 funded groups, up to a maximum amount of £13,738 per group.

City Hall Income Generation Project

The City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services submitted for the Committee's consideration a report providing an update on the City Hall Income Regeneration Project and which sought approval for the introduction of the charges set out in the next phase of the project.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and agreed a £4 entrance fee for visitors to the City Hall Ground Floor Exhibition, except for under 18s and community visits organised via elected members, with a review to undertaken after 1 year.

Asset Management

The Committee:

- i) **Glenbryn Park – Licence to Groundwork NI** - Approved a Licence agreement from Belfast City Council to Groundwork NI for the purpose of a community garden.
- ii) **Requests For Council to act as Sponsoring Body** – Approved the Council granting in principle approval to act as Sponsoring body in the acquisition of surplus assets available through the D1 trawl at Northgate Business Park, Duncairn Gardens, Belfast to North City Business Centre and Dill Road DVA centre Belfast to East Belfast Enterprise and The Turnaround Project.

City Centre Regeneration Scheme

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter to enable further information to be submitted to a special meeting.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

**Corporate Plan 2025-28 and
Corporate Delivery Plan 2025-26**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present Committee with the Corporate Plan 2025-2028 and the accompanying annual Corporate Delivery Plan 2025-26 for consideration and approval.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- i. agree the draft Corporate Plan (2025-28) as attached at Appendix 1, for publication, subject to minor edits based on Member comments;**
- ii. agree the draft annual Corporate Delivery Plan (2025- 26) as attached at Appendix 2.**

3.0 Key Issues

Background

- 3.1 Members will be aware of the challenging environment within which the Council currently operates. The escalating fiscal strain, fuelled by rising prices, a cost-of-living crisis and economic challenges are having significant adverse impacts on individuals, families and services across the city and widening inequalities.**
- 3.2 Members have set the challenge to the Council of pivoting its focus and resources to meet the challenges and opportunities which emerge over this Council term. The process through which the new three-year corporate plan has been co-designed with elected members was essential and provided a platform to help inform and connect the Council’s resource planning cycles (budgets, people, capital and assets) and the development of a Medium-Term Financial Plan.**
- 3.3 Members will be aware of the discussions which has taken place since the election of the new Council through Standing Committees, Party Group Leaders meetings and all Member workshops in relation to the emerging draft Corporate Plan and proposed priorities for future investment.**

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- 3.4 In December 2024, SP&R Committee agreed that a draft Corporate Plan be published for a public consultation exercise between January – March 2025. Whilst response numbers were small, most comments received were supportive of the priorities outlined in the corporate plan. Minor changes to language have been made to the draft corporate plan where feedback highlighted the need for greater clarity in some areas.

Corporate Plan 2025-2028

- 3.5 Members will be aware of the importance of the corporate plan as a key governance document, cited in the Council's constitution as the means by which the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee sets the strategic direction of the council. It sets out what the council wants to achieve for the city and the key priority actions to make this happen. These priorities are then used as the basis for informing any emerging medium-term financial plan.
- 3.6 The corporate plan is also a key communication tool for staff across the organisation in understanding the strategic importance of their work in terms of helping to shape the city and improving people's lives. This contribution and impact ranges from cleaning our streets, lifting bins, maintaining our excellent parks, delivering key strategic programmes such as our employability schemes, delivering large scale events or providing essential back office support.
- 3.7 Subject to Committee consideration and approval, it is proposed that the members approve the draft Corporate Plan 2025-28 for publication (subject to Full Council). Should Members do so, it will be published online, and an underpinning communications plan will commence in June that articulates the Members ambitions for the Council, as laid out in our corporate plan.

Corporate Delivery Plan 2025-2026

- 3.8 As the 3 year corporate plan is strategic in nature, it is accompanied by an annual Corporate Delivery Plan (2025-16). This gives Members greater detail on what will be delivered against each priority with the resources allocated for 2025-26. It also contains a series of performance indicators for 2025-26 and associated targets. This give Members greater oversight of what is being delivered within the financial year and articulates the scale of work which continues to be delivered by Council and the impact of this within communities across the city. Members are asked to endorse this

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draft Delivery Plan, which will form the basis of progress updates to Committee throughout the year and accompanied by a year-end report to SP&R Committee.

3.9 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no immediate resource implications. However, the priorities agreed in the corporate plan will form the basis of the rate setting process over the coming years. Members are also asked to note that a financial planning workshop for Members is currently being arranged that will discuss the financial needs of the priorities contained within the corporate plan.

3.10 Equality of Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

Equality screening has been completed as part of the plan development process.”

The Committee agreed:

- i. the draft Corporate Plan (2025-28) as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, for publication, subject to minor edits based on Member comments which had been raised at the meeting; and
- ii. the draft annual Corporate Delivery Plan (2025-26) as attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to update members on the findings of the public consultation on the draft performance improvement objectives and to present the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2025-26 for Committee consideration and approval.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Committee is asked to:

- Approve the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2025-26 attached in Appendix 1, for publication on the Council’s website, subject to minor edits and formal ratification by the Full Council on 2 June 2025.

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1** Part 12 of the Local Government Act (NI) 2014 requires councils to consult residents on proposed improvement objectives and to publish an annual Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) by the 30 June. The PIP identifies the agreed improvement objectives for the year ahead, the actions to be delivered and the measures of success to be achieved. The PIP helps to meet the outcomes and objectives of the Community Plan and the Corporate Plan 2025-28. The PIP doesn't include everything that the Council plans to do in a given year, it focuses specifically on areas for improvement and feeds into the Annual Corporate Delivery Plan 2025-26. The performance improvement objectives are aligned to the key themes and priorities identified within the new Corporate Plan 2025-28 and the Belfast Agenda 2024-28.

Consultation exercise and findings

- 3.2** Members will be aware that we carried out an eight-week public consultation in relation to Council's draft improvement objectives 2025-26 and associated actions between 17 February - 14 April 2025. The public consultation process included an online survey via Council's Your Say Belfast consultation and engagement website and two targeted focus groups. The survey was promoted using a range of communication methods including social media posts, posters in community buildings, email marketing to existing mailing lists, intranet promotion and websites.
- 3.3** Out of the 88 people that completed the survey, it should be noted that:
- there was broad consensus across majority of respondents supporting the improvement objectives.
 - the highest level of 86.3% was received from respondents who strongly agreed or agreed with 'Our people and communities' improvement objective based on supporting our residents to become healthier and engaged.
 - the lowest of level of 73.9% was received from respondents who strong agreed or agreed with the 'Compassionate city' improvement objective based on supporting our most vulnerable people to make Belfast a more caring, safe and inclusive city.

- 3.4 In addition, two focus groups with 62 young people and 9 older people were facilitated to enable participants to reflect their priorities and areas for improvement. A detailed summary of the feedback received is included in the consultation report in Appendix 2.
- 3.5 The qualitative feedback and comments received was shared and considered internally by key officers from the relevant departments to action where relevant and help inform future delivery and/ or amend current activity. Some minor amendments were made to realign actions within the PIP. Members will also be aware that some of the areas suggested are being progressed through existing strategies, plans and programmes of work, and in partnership as part of the Belfast Agenda 2024-28 including addressing key issues across the city such as housing provision, homelessness, mental health and addiction.

Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26

- 3.6 The updated Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26 is attached in Appendix 1 which reflects public consultation feedback and engagement with key Council officers.
- 3.7 Members are asked to approve the Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26 in Appendix 1 and to authorise its publication on the Council website by 30 June 2025. In order to meet our statutory deadline, the plan will be published subject to formal ratification by the Full Council on the 2 June 2025.

3.8 **Financial and Resource Implications**

The improvement plan has already been reflected in the formal planning and budgeting processes of council; there are no resource implications contained in this report.

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

There are no direct equality, good relations or rural needs implications of the Performance Improvement Plan 2025-26.”

The Committee approved the Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) 2025-26 attached in Appendix 1 to the report, for publication on the Council’s website, subject to formal ratification by the Full Council on 2 June 2025.

**Sustain Exchange Climate Leadership
Project – sponsorship**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform Committee of a proposal by the non-profit Management and Leadership Network (MLN) to host a prominent climate leadership event ‘Sustain Exchange’ with up to 300 decision-makers. To request approval for a funding agreement to be put in place between Belfast City Council and the event organiser with the value of £8,450+vat. The event will put the challenges, opportunities and absolute need for positive action associated with climate change, on the agenda for local organisations and leaders.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Support this climate leadership conference by approving a funding agreement to the value of £8450+vat be entered into with the event organiser.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

It is now beyond doubt that organisations of all shapes, sizes and sectors need to radically reduce their environmental impact both directly and indirectly through their supply chains. The extreme weather experienced across the globe over the past 12 months has further evidenced the reality that the effects of climate change are being felt now and the need for decisive action from organisations, championed by their leaders, is now. We are fast approaching the point of no return.

It is a truly transformative time for organisations as they address climate risks and identify new opportunities in the green economy. The transition is not straightforward. Organisations need help in developing planet positive practices, securing cleaner power, heat and transport solutions. They need help in navigating new markets to find more environmentally sustainable solutions in their supply chain, and they need to do it fast. There has never been a more important time to find specialist help to navigate the transition, and to educate, inform and engage by sharing

the existing knowledge and exemplar experience of those at the forefront of the transition.

3.2 Purpose and format of event

The Sustain Exchange Summit will deliver on the objectives above and will connect local decision-makers with international thought leaders as well as those at the forefront of the transition locally.

The event is expected to attract some 300 local leaders (primarily business leaders but also those from the public, NDPB and third sectors) to a Belfast City Centre venue with strong public transport links to ensure the carbon footprint of the event is kept to a minimum. The Sustain Exchange project will ensure the messages, around the need and importance of positive climate action are heard, and the Council's proactivity in this area will be strongly profiled before and during the event.

3.3 Content

Previous speakers at this event have included the eminent writer, broadcaster and commentator Sir Jonathan Porritt CBE, Norman Crowley (global entrepreneur and founder of CoolPlanet) and Sit Tim Smit KBE (Founder of The Eden Project and world-renowned thought leader in sustainability) and John Elkington (the global godfather of sustainability and creator of the triple bottom line concept). The 2025 Sustain Exchange Summit will again be delivered to a world-class standard and will feature globally-renowned speakers (Mary Robinson is the first in-person speaker to be confirmed). The speakers will encourage and empower attending organisations to consider their own climate impact and take the first (or next) steps in their quest to become 'planet positive'. Previous local speakers at this event have demonstrated how leaders from humble beginnings in Belfast have become game-changers in their respective fields. These include the likes of Dr Andrew Woods from Catagen (Sustain Exchange 2022), Eddie McGoldrick from The Electric Storage Company (Sustain Exchange 2021), Philip Rainey from Weev (Sustain Exchange 2023) and Dr Katrina Thompson from Artemis Technologies (Sustain Exchange 2024). The 2025 event will once again showcase how leaders from Belfast are leading the charge when it comes to the quest to avoid what is now a 'code red for humanity'. In doing this MLN plans to galvanise existing businesses to act and to inspire the next cohort of planet positive pioneers to emerge from our city.

The event will also provide the opportunity to make the broader leadership community in NI aware of the proactive work of Belfast City Council when it comes to the climate emergency.

3.4 Management and Leadership Network Experience

The Management and Leadership Network (MLN) is a non-profit which exists to connect decision-makers in NI with the insights of thought-leaders and world-class performers. The rationale is that by enhancing our leadership competence we will, empower local organisations, strengthen our economy, enrich our society and ultimately improve lives.

MLN has worked with some of the most respected leaders on the planet and is vastly experienced in creating and delivering truly world-class events that engage, enrich and elevate attendees. As host, MLN will facilitate the event and invite all speakers to provide their slides in advance so that the idea-sharing session is delivered in a concise, visually impactful and professional manner. Belfast City Council would once again be invited to participate and profile its extensive climate work i.e the Mini Stern Report, Resilience Strategy, Climate Commission, One Million Trees etc.

3.5 Date, Venue & Contingence

The Sustain Exchange Summit will take place on 20th October 2025. The total cost of the project will be in excess of £75k. Belfast City Council has been a key partner in the Sustain Exchange Summit since its inception in 2021 and its support has been crucial in the growth of the initiative and its impact. In order to reduce the financial cost to Belfast City Council and increase collaboration MLN will seek financial support from additional sources to include the private sector. MLN will give previous sponsors the opportunity to remain as partners. They have included Belfast-based organisations such as Danske Bank, AAB, CarbonFit, International Synergies (circular economy specialists), Belfast Harbour and Mills Selig Solicitors. As well as demonstrating real collaboration, these partnerships have allowed MLN to reduce Belfast City Council's financial contribution from £10,000+vat in 2021 to £8,450+vat in 2025.

3.6 Partner Contribution & Profile Benefits

If Belfast City Council chooses to support the Summit, it would be profiled as an 'Event Partner' alongside several other lead event partners (examples given in 3.5). The Council brand would be prominent on all event marketing collateral as well as

‘at-event’. A Council representative would be invited to participate in the event press launch and MLN would be delighted for the Lord Mayor of Belfast to speak at the event. Council would also promote the conference through its social media and other relevant communication channels.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.7 £8,450+vat to support this initiative has been allocated from within the existing Climate programme budget.

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

- 3.8 There are no direct equality or good relations/rural needs implications.”

The Committee agreed to support the climate leadership conference by approving a funding agreement to the value of £8450+vat to be entered into with the event organiser.

Planning Information

The Committee noted the contents of a report which provided an update on major planning applications and applications which had been determined by the Planning Committee and agreed that revised target dates be included in future reports.

Smart Belfast: Inclusive Innovation programme

The Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To seek Committee approval for the design and delivery of a Belfast inclusive innovation public dialogue series that will inform a new programme of work that seeks to unlock new inclusive growth opportunities from the Belfast Region City Deal and other investments.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

1. To approve the Inclusive Innovation public dialogue series at City Hall as part of the development of an Inclusive Innovation programme.
2. To note that the £85,000 proposal by Newcastle University to work with Belfast and three other cities to develop tools and techniques for inclusive innovation,

has been accepted by the Economic and Social Research Council and that the project will commence in June 2025 with a planning workshop with partners in Newcastle Upon Tyne.

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 The innovative adoption of technology by all sectors of the economy is a core element of the Government's strategy for increasing productivity, generating new jobs and businesses. By way of example, in the realm of AI tech adoption alone the Government is projecting a boost to UK's GDP by over 10% by 2030. To support this approach the Government is encouraging cities and regions to build the conditions that will encourage collaborative innovation by all actors including industry and business, government, academia and communities.**
- 3.2 The Government's approach is echoed in the strategic rationale for the Innovation, Digital and Skills pillars of the Belfast Region City Deal. These investments are designed to foster a regional innovation ecosystem that encourages R&D, innovation, tech adoption in ways that generate inclusive benefits for SMEs, communities and individuals.**
- 3.3 However, an innovation-driven economy offers both opportunities and challenges for city leaders committed to inclusive growth. While such an economy will generate significant growth and wealth for a region, there is evidence that without well-planned, citizen-focused interventions, such an economy can actually widen inequalities and generate new barriers to jobs, services, and business opportunities.**
- 3.4 'Inclusive innovation' is an increasingly popular term for the types of interventions that are required to address such risks. While there is no settled opinion as to which interventions are likely to be the most effective, there is important, current research in this area by institutions including King's College, Cardiff University, Newcastle University, Nesta, and locally at Queen's University. Much of this research is being considered by UK Government as it seeks to ensure an inclusive approach to the national economic strategy.**
- 3.5 Locally, the Belfast Innovation Commissioner recently co- authored a new paper with Robyn Klingler-Vidra and Alex Glennie of King's College on measuring inclusive innovation.**

The research draws on the Belfast experience and will be published in Global Policy Journal¹ on 16 May.

- 3.6 Working with the Belfast Innovation Commissioner, and City Deal partners, the Council's City Innovation Office is aiming to unlock this research and practice to generate new inclusive growth opportunities through the Belfast Region City Deal investments. While there is recognition nationally about the inclusion risks and challenges of an innovation-driven economy, there has been only limited local discussion on the mitigations that need to be put in place to address them.
- 3.7 As a first step the City Innovation, Office working with the Commissioner, is therefore proposing an initial series of public engagements at City Hall aimed at politicians, leaders and policy makers to build shared understanding about the challenges that inclusive innovation represents, and work towards a series of interventions and programmes at scale. (It's proposed that this would take a similar format to the Council's influential '*Belfast: State of the City*' dialogue that sought to engage on urban policy in the period leading up to the Review Public Administration.)
- 3.8 Co-chaired by the Council's Chief Executive and the Belfast Innovation Commissioner, each session would bring leading thinkers to bear on the critical elements of any future Belfast inclusive innovation programme. A small steering group working with ICB would establish the final programme themes such as:
- Activating community infrastructure to realise the benefits of inclusive innovation
 - The impact of AI on education and learning
 - Skills for Good Jobs in a rapidly changing economy
 - New models of entrepreneurship in the era of AI
 - Measuring inclusive innovation
- 3.9 The series would support a number of outcomes:
- Help shape a shared understanding and approach to inclusive amongst Belfast partners.
 - It would ensure a framework for citizen co-design and collaboration is informed by thought leaders across inclusive skills, economies and innovation.

¹ <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/blog/16/05/2025/we-need-better-framework-measuring-inclusive-innovation-efforts>

- Shape the inclusive innovation programme of Belfast City Council and partners including the work of Innovation City Belfast
- Inform decision-making on projects associated the Skills, Innovation and Digital pillars of BRCD.
- Support Belfast in engaging with potential funders of inclusive innovation initiatives at both the national and European levels.

3.10 Members are asked to approve the Inclusive Innovation dialogue series as part of the development of the inclusive innovation programme.

3.11 Current inclusive innovation initiatives

While a full inclusive innovation programme is still to be developed, the City Innovation Office has been working on a number of 'pilot' inclusive innovation projects. These include a one-year 'citizen science' project in collaboration with Queen's University's QCAP team that will work with two inner city communities and is due to begin this Spring. The City Innovation Office is also working with Ulster University on a new £2.5 million EPSRC funded project that is seeking to maximise the place-based social and economic impact of the new Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology (CDHT).

3.12 Finally, Members will recall that the Council was approached by 'i30' a research collaboration between Newcastle University, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Oslo and EAFIT University. i30 has been particularly interested in how 'City Deal'-type investments have supported inclusive innovation ambitions in cities in the UK and elsewhere. Their work is helping Newcastle City Council to shape its social inclusion strategy, while their work with Pittsburgh is ensuring that that their city's innovation district is having wider social impact. Belfast has been invited to be the fourth city in this inclusive innovation project.

3.13 Members should note that the £85,000 proposal has been accepted by the Economic and Social Research Council and the project will commence in June 2025 with a planning workshop with partners to which officers have been invited to attend. The project will build on i30's existing work to deliver a range of tools, policy guidance and practice that can support cities in delivering their inclusive innovation outcomes.

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.14 Resources for these initiatives have been identified within the existing departmental budgets.**

Based on costings for similar events it's estimated that the series would require a budget of approximately £40,000 (This would include travel, AV, promotional materials, write-ups, catering, etc). The series would be organised in-house.

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

- 3.15 None at this stage."**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Diversity Mark Sponsorship

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st June 2024, it had approved sponsorship of the 2024 Diversity Mark Summit. Diversity Mark was an independent not-for-profit Diversity and Inclusion Accreditation in Northern Ireland and had, to date, accredited almost 200 organisations across the UK and Ireland on their path to a more inclusive workplace. Membership provided support to employers to make and demonstrate progressive improvement in creating an inclusive and diverse workplace. The Council holds the Silver Diversity Mark Accreditation and was currently working towards attaining Gold Accreditation. The Council continued to work closely with Diversity Mark on a number of initiatives and forums aimed at sharing and promoting equality, diversity and inclusion best practice.

The Council had been invited again, along with a small number of other organisations, to contribute to the 2025 summit as a supporting sponsor. The main sponsor of the event was Allstate.

The benefits for sponsoring organisations are as follows:

- **Strategic Involvement:** Continued involvement in the EDI Forum. The forum will support on shaping the strategic direction of this annual summit and meet to explore best practice and global trends in EDI as identified by Diversity Mark.
- **Prominent Recognition:** Elevate your organisation's profile with extensive recognition and promotional opportunities throughout the summit as a valued supporting sponsor, ensuring visibility among industry leaders and decision-makers.

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- **Exclusive Attendance:** Secure up to 15 in-person summit passes for employees, promoting diversity from senior levels throughout, with the flexibility to invite guests or donate tickets to charitable organisations.
- **Thought Leadership Platform:** Opportunity to showcase your expertise by speaking at the summit or suggesting influential speakers.
- **Comprehensive Branding:** Benefit from extensive branding across all promotional materials, advertisements, and the website, with logo prominently displayed throughout the summit venue as a supporting sponsor, reinforcing your organisation's commitment to EDI and its pivotal role in driving economic growth and inclusivity

The investment required for this sponsorship was £2,250. This included 15 places at the summit and a seat at the Steering Committee and would be met from the existing Organisation Development budget.

The Committee agreed to the sponsorship of the Diversity Mark Summit 2025.

Sign Language Bill - response to Call for Evidence

The following report was submitted for the Committee's consideration:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek retrospective approval from Members for the attached officer response to the Call for Evidence for a Sign Language Bill which was submitted to the Northern Ireland Assembly prior to the deadline of 9th May 2025.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that Members:**

- 1. Note the contents of this report.**
- 2. Provide retrospective approval for the officer response to the Call for Evidence which was submitted on 2nd May 2025.**

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1 In March 2004, the then British Secretary of State, Paul Murphy, formally recognised British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) as languages in their own right. This recognition does not provide any statutory protection for the languages.**

- 3.2 The Sign Language Partnership Group (SLPG) led by the Department for Communities (DfC) was established as a forum in 2007 to bring together the government Departments and key organisations and representatives representing the Deaf community to improve access to public services for sign language users. The Council's Language Officer sits on the SLPG.
- 3.3 In 2016, a Sign Language Framework was launched by DfC, which provides details to address the lack of support and historical under investment for ISL and BSL, including proposals for legislation to officially recognise, promote and protect both languages and to provide support for the parents and families of deaf children.
- 3.4 On 23rd January 2025, Communities Minister Lyons announced at the Executive that he was introducing the draft Sign Language Bill to the Assembly. This took place on 18th February 2025. The Sign Language Bill has been referred to the Assembly's Committee for Communities so that the Committee can consider and take evidence on the Bill and report its opinion to the Assembly.

Call for Evidence – Sign Language Bill

- 3.5 The Committee is seeking views from stakeholders on the objectives, proposals and potential consequences of the Bill. **[Link to Sign Language Bill.](#)**
- 3.6 The Bill has 15 clauses. Clauses in Chapter 2 of the Bill requires prescribed organisations, which includes Councils, to carry out duties to ensure information and services provided are as accessible to individuals in the deaf community as they are to individuals who are not in the deaf community and to offer or facilitate the use of British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language for the benefit of the individuals in the deaf community in accessing information and services provided by the organisation. Prescribed organisations will be required to develop and implement five-year Sign Language Action Plans and to submit updates to the Department for Communities.
- 3.7 The Council has prepared and submitted a response to each clause by the submission deadline, Friday 9th May 2025.
- 3.8 Committee will note that the Council has already committed to the proposed obligations in the Sign Language Bill. We have a Language Strategy which includes Sign Languages as one of the language strands. We have a Language Action Plan which

covers actions to improve Sign Language provision within the Council. Our work to date in relation to Sign Languages is set out below.

British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language Charter - In March 2019, the Council signed up to the British Deaf Association's British Sign Language and Irish Sign Language Charter and one of the pledges made was to ensure council staff working with Deaf people can communicate effectively using British Sign Language and/or Irish Sign Language.

Sign Language Users' Forum - A Sign Language Users' Forum consisting of local Sign Language users was established in June 2019 and meets twice a year to advise, guide and support the Council to respond better to the needs of Sign Language Users in Belfast.

Staff training - Sign Language courses are provided to council staff.

Video Relay Service/Video Remoting Interpreting Service - The Council established a contact with SignVideo in 2020 to deliver interpreting support for Sign Language customers contacting the Customer Hub and visiting council venues.

City Hall Visitor Exhibition & Tropical Ravine Sign Language Videos - Sign Language visitors can access translated videos via the Council's YouTube channel when visiting the Visitor Exhibition at the City Hall and at Tropical Ravine, Botanic Gardens.

Public events - Sign Language interpreters are present at Council public events during the year e.g. Christmas and St Patrick's Day.

Communication Support - Sign Language users can request a Sign Language interpreter for appointments/meetings. Documents/leaflets can also be requested in British Sign Language and/or Irish Sign Language.

3.9 Financial and Resource Implications

None at this time.

3.10 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Implications

The Sign Language Bill if passed will promote equality of opportunity for Deaf Sign Language Users."

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The Committee granted retrospective approval for the officer response to the Call for Evidence which was submitted on 2nd May 2025.

City Centre Governance

The Strategic Director, Place and Economy submitted the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide proposals on a refreshed approach to city centre governance in the context of existing and established Community Planning structures.**

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- **Agree to proposed refreshed approach to city centre governance in the context of existing and established Community Planning structures.**

3.0 Main Report

- 3.1 Members will be aware of the city centre governance arrangements agreed by this Committee in 2022. These were designed and implemented with relevance to a specific point in time which allowed responses to the emerging and often sensitive and difficult issues and anchored within established Community Planning Structures.**

- 3.2 As the operating environment and circumstances have changed, and taking account of feedback on duplication from representatives in relation to the various groups that had been established, it is timely to revisit the governance and delivery arrangements which had been initially put in place for the city centre, with a view to streamlining, integrating and refocusing to ensure that they are fit for purpose and remain relevant to all involved. In addition, work on the stocktake of the Belfast City Centre Regeneration and Investment Strategy (BCCRIS) was completed last year and recommended ‘a multi-agency approach to place keeping and city management’.**

- 3.3 This is line with the refresh of the Belfast Agenda, following which Community Planning Partnership partners agreed to revisit the associated governance arrangements to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose.**

3.4 Reflecting on the BCCRIS stock-take and status of initiatives, as well as engagement with and feedback from key stakeholders/partners, it is proposed that we seek to consolidate the Multi Agency Operational (Tasking) Group and FCC Leadership Group into one group 'City Centre Leadership Coordination Group' (illustrated in Appendix 1). To ensure a cross sector shared partnership approach it is proposed that this is anchored as per the initial governance under the auspices of Community Planning. This will ensure a multi-agency approach with representation across the public, private and third and community sectors. The proposed draft TOR are set out below to provide Members with a sense of purpose to this proposed forum:

- a) The Group as anchored with Community Planning structures, will contribute to realising the shared vision and ambition as set out in the Belfast Agenda; encouraging greater coordination and collaboration across partners in relation to the city centre to deliver our shared vision of creating *'a vibrant, unique and thriving place where people spend time, live, work, visit and invest'*.
- b) To ensure that a fit-for-purpose vehicle exists to raise and expedite issues relating to the priorities for the city centre across the five pillars of Regeneration & Connectivity; Business Investment, Animation & Distinctive Offering, Clean, Green Inclusive & Safe and Vulnerability.
- c) To enable engagement, discussion and collaboration between key public and private stakeholders (including central and local government, anchor institutions, retail, business and umbrella organisations, developers, community, third sector and other relevant city centre stakeholders) to delivery activities aligned to these pillars.
- d) To support the delivery of priority projects that support the agreed vision for the City Centre.
- e) To provide a forum to develop shared messaging and joined up communications on matters pertaining to the Belfast City Centre.
- f) To be a vehicle for engagement with wider community interests.
- g) It would be expected that respective organisations filter updates and messaging as appropriate through their networks to ensure communication of relevant areas are understood across the board.
- h) The group will provide a forum to allow all stakeholders to feed in relevant workstreams / updates relevant to the ongoing and future success of the city centre.

- i) To monitor overall progress; and to review and update the objectives and priorities at least annually.
 - j) Representatives on the group should be of sufficient level where they are able to convey issues, opportunities etc back into the relevant leadership / governance of their respective organisations as appropriate.
- 3.5 It is proposed that the meetings are organised and structured around the pillars of the Future City Centre (FCC) programme. This is aligned to the priority area under the Our Place thematic area of the Belfast Agenda, providing an opportunity for reporting into the City Centre All Party Working Group, relevant committees and the Community Planning Our Place Board.
- 3.6 It is not proposed to change arrangements in relation to Complex Lives, which are deigned to focus and coordinate multiagency support in relation to a specific group of vulnerable individuals who are experiencing very complex issues.
- 3.7 Positive discussions have taken place with officials in the Department for Communities and Department for Infrastructure on the refreshed governance proposals for the city centre.
- 3.8 **Financial and Resource Implications**
- None
- 3.9 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/
Rural Needs Assessment**
- None associated with this report.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Developer Contributions for Wastewater
Infrastructure – Consultation**

The Director of Planning and Building Control submitted the following report for the Committee’s consideration:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

To update the Committee on the consultation published by the Department for Infrastructure on 21 March 2025 on Developer Contributions for Wastewater Infrastructure and to agree a draft response to the consultation.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to

- Note the contents of the consultation and agree the draft response set out in Appendix 2.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 Long term underinvestment in wastewater infrastructure continues to have a significant effect on development in NI and in Belfast. Upgrades to the system haven't been able to proceed at the pace required and much of the infrastructure is aging and needs upgrading. There are now areas across Belfast that have limited or no capacity to allow for new connections to the NI Water sewerage network.**
- 3.2 The Living with Water Programme provided a route through which to implement improvements to the wastewater infrastructure across Belfast. Whilst projects were progressed, the funding required to deliver improvements has been cut and the programme itself has effectively been paused.**

Consultation

- 3.3 A consultation on Developer Contributions for Wastewater Infrastructure was published on the 21 March. The document sets out that DfI are taking a three-pronged approach to resolving the current issue:**
- 1. Working with Executive colleagues to try and increase wastewater investment**
 - 2. Exploring options for developer contributions and**
 - 3. Introducing the Water, Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Bill to the Assembly to enable the Department to issue future guidance on the design, maintenance and adoption of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)**
- 3.4 DfI are also working at a strategic level with colleagues in DfC and DAERA to identify steps which can be taken to maximise the building of houses and with NI Water to identify projects that can release capacity. No further information is given on the other workstreams within the consultation document.**

The proposals

- 3.5 The consultation document recognises that there is no expectation that developer contributions will provide all, or even most, of the significant funding needed to address the full capacity challenges within the existing wastewater infrastructure network.
- 3.6 There is also recognition that any contribution towards upgrading or replacing wastewater infrastructure would increase the costs to the developer of building new houses, that this could be passed on to the purchaser and that this could be the case for both private and social housing developers.
- 3.7 Whilst the consultation considers ‘developer contributions’, it is clear that what is being proposed under the two options contained within the report is not what is currently considered as a planning agreement under s76 of the 2011 Planning Act (commonly referred to as developer contributions). Neither option would be operated by the local planning authority (although the consultation asserts that a payment made under the first option could be considered to be a material consideration in decision making).
- 3.8 A synopsis of the two options is set out below:

Option 1 – Voluntary Contributions	Option 2 – Compulsory Levy
Developers could opt to pay to offset the costs of upgrading or replacing infrastructure.	Requires a financial contribution from developers with the money then used on a prioritised needs basis across NI.
Legislation required – to make financial contribution directly to NI Water to pay some or all of the costs.	Creates a ring-fenced fund which would help to offset the funding gap between the amount that NI Water receive from the Executive and the amount needed to address constraints.
Developers could pool contributions to meet the required level of funding.	

<i>‘Allows developers to decide whether and how much to contribute in consultation with NI Water’</i> Secured through an upfront payment or bond. Planning authorities would not be party to the agreement nor the transfer of funds, but the existence of the agreement would be a material consideration in determining a planning application (may require negative condition). If developer pays for infrastructure that others then benefit from, a reimbursement scheme could be introduced.	<i>‘Consistent and predictable source of funding’</i> Automatically increases the cost of all development but seems to be limited to housing. Legislation required & administratively complex. Wouldn’t provide immediate solution – the fund cannot grow until houses are built, but houses cannot be built without the funding to improve infrastructure. The levy calculation and methodology as well as how the funds would be allocated and prioritised would need to be the subject of consultation. Possible exemptions (rural housing) are suggested.
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- 3.9 The consultation also considers that it is possible to combine options 1 & 2 by allowing voluntary contributions in the short term whilst working on introducing the levy in the longer term.

BCC consultation response

- 3.10 A draft response to the consultation is set out in Appendix 2. The questions posed in the consultation are very focused, so additional commentary has been drafted to consider a number of issues around the proposals outlined.

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- 3.11 If the response is agreed and the decision ratified at Council on the 3 June, it will be submitted in time to meet the deadline for consultation responses on the 27 June 2025.**

Financial and Resource Implications

- 3.12 There are no finance or resource implications as a result of the consultation, however there may be financial implications should a compulsory levy be introduced on Council projects.**

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

- 3.13 The consultation has been subject to its own s75 screening, Human Rights Impact Assessment and Rural Needs Impacts Assessment.”**

The Committee noted the contents of the consultation and agreed the draft response set out in Appendix 2, subject to amending the response to question 1 to “agree” and including commentary on developer contributions being part of an overall funding package for wastewater infrastructure and the need for NIW to consider their blanket approach to objecting to development.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Council’s Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council’s Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme and an update on Wilmont House.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to –**
- Capital Programme Movements –**

- Historic Tiled Street Signs - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up.
 - Historic Cemeteries Phase 1 - Agree that a first phase is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up.
 - Bridges Improvement Programme Phase 1 - Agree that the first phase is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up.
 - Beacon Programme - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up.
 - Communications Boards - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up.
 - Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme - Agree that the project is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up.
 - Corporate Accommodation CWB and Duncrue Complex – Agree that the project is added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.
- Note the update on Wilmont House and that funding has been secured by Golden Thread Gallery from National Lottery Heritage Fund for a feasibility study which will be carried out in partnership with the Council.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

Physical Programme

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. The Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.

Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

- 3.2 As outlined above Members have agreed that all capital projects must go through a three-stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial

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control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme:

Project	Overview	Stage movement
Historic Tiled Street Signs	Restoration of historic tiled street signs.	Move to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>
Historic Cemeteries Phase 1	Conservation and restoration improvements at listed graveyards.	Move to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>
Bridges Improvement Programme Phase 1	Programme of remedial works on bridges across the Council estate.	Move to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>
Beacon Programme	Provision of beacons as an alternative to traditional bonfires.	Move to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>
Communications Boards	Inclusive communications boards in playgrounds.	Move to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>
Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme	Feature lighting to exterior of Ulster Hall.	Move to <i>Stage 2 – Uncommitted</i>
Corporate Accommodation - CWB and Duncrue	Enhancements to office accommodation at Cecil Ward Building and Duncrue Complex.	Add as <i>Stage 1 – Emerging</i>

3.3 Historic Tiled Street Signs

This project was added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* in November 2024. Belfast's iconic black and white tiled street signs have long been a unique and instantly recognisable feature of the city's architectural heritage, believed to date from c 1880 through to 1950's. The signs are either mounted on posts or are fixed to the gable walls of buildings. The survey of the first tranche of 32 signs by conservation architects, 24 of which are listed, showed that many are severely damaged, with fragments missing, and the lettering and blank field tiles also show significant damage. The initial research was carried out in conjunction with DfC's Historic Environment Division. An application for funding to the Pilgrim Trust for this first phase is being submitted this month. Officers are continuing to collate a database of other historic tiled street signs across the city, in order to prepare for further phases of survey work. Members are asked to agree that 'Historic Tiled Street Signs' is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up.

3.4 Historic Cemeteries

This project was added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* in November 2024. Members will be aware that the

Council owns five historic graveyards, four of which are currently closed namely Balmoral, Clifton Street, Friar's Bush and Knock. Surveys have identified a programme conservation and health and safety works which are required to improve the condition of the graveyards. Conservation and restoration improvements will allow the graveyards to be more accessible to the public and contribute to neighbourhood tourism. Safety works to monuments are being brought forward within a first phase of works. Members are asked to agree that 'Historic Cemeteries Phase 1' is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up.

3.5 Bridges Improvement Programme

Development of a multiyear approach to bridge improvements is continuing for 50+ bridges across the Council estate, following on from the initial surveys that have already been carried out. A programme of remedial work is now being finalised for the first phase. Members are asked to agree that 'Bridges Improvement Programme Phase 1' is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up.

3.6 Beacon Programme

Members will be aware that demand is increasing for beacons as a managed, environmentally more acceptable alternative to traditional bonfires. Members are asked to agree that 'Beacon Programme' is moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up.

3.7 Communication Boards

This project was added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* in April. As agreed by Council, officers are exploring options in respect of funding the provision of communication boards for Council playgrounds in 2025/26, in addition to the recouped monies made available following the UKSPF funding last year. Members are asked to agree that 'Communication Boards' is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up.

3.8 Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme

This project was added to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* in April. The project involves the installation of an LED lighting display on the façade of Ulster Hall capable of changing colour similar to City Hall's Illuminate scheme and will be in keeping with the building's listed status. An offer of

funding to the Council is being finalised from Linen Quarter BID for the design phase. Members are asked to agree that 'Ulster Hall Lighting Scheme' is moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted to allow the options to be fully worked up.

3.9 Corporate Accommodation - CWB and Duncrue

This project will include upgrades to staff accommodation on the first floor CWB and in Duncrue to include office and staff welfare facilities such as canteens, kitchens, toilets and locker rooms. Members are asked to agree that 'Corporate Accommodation – CWB and Duncrue' is added to the Capital Programme as a Stage 1 – Emerging project to allow a business case to be developed.

3.10 Wilmont House – Update

This project was added at *Stage 1 – Emerging* on the Capital Programme in November 2024. Wilmont House is a Grade B+ Listed property in the grounds of Sir Thomas and Lady Dixon Park. The house has had various uses over the years and has now fallen into a serious state of disrepair. HED have assessed Wilmont House as 'at risk' and officers have been in close liaison with HED officials on the condition of Wilmont House. In order to look at bringing forward a sustainable end use for the building and restoring it back to its original condition officers have been working with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Golden Thread Gallery. Members are now advised that the Golden Thread Gallery has recently secured initial funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a feasibility study on the restoration of the building. This study will explore the transformation of Wilmont House into a cultural venue to house the Golden Thread Gallery's Collection of Northern Irish Art. Members are asked to note the update on Wilmont House and that funding has been secured by Golden Thread Gallery from National Lottery Heritage Fund for a feasibility study which will be carried out in partnership with the Council.

3.11 Financial and Resource Implications

Financial Implications – None at this time.

Resource Implications – Officer time to deliver.

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

All capital projects are screened as part of the stage approval process."

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The Committee adopted the recommendations and noted that the Shankill cemetery should have been included in the list of historic cemeteries and agreed also that a report be submitted to a future meeting on the City Cemetery Visitor Centre.

Area Working Groups Update May 2025

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the South Area Working Group of 19 May 2025.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Discretionary Payments Framework

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter.

Requests for Funding

The Committee was advised that the following requests for funding had been received:

1. Shankill Juniors Football Club for funding of approximately £12,000 to support their participation in the Milk Cup in July.
2. NI Walking Football Federation to provide funding of £5,000 to support five individuals from Belfast who are competing in the International Federation World Championship in Malmo, Sweden on the 3rd to 7th July.
3. Irish Athletic Boxing Association for £25,000 towards the cost of hosting an elite boxing camp in Belfast in August 2025 in advance of the Elite World Championships in Liverpool in September.

The Committee approved the requests.

The Committee agreed also that a request from Antrim Ladies Gaelic Football and Camogie Club for funding of £20,000 to jointly promote the two associations as well as provision of kit, physical and nutritional advice, which had previously been deferred by the Committee, be approved.

Contracts update

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 1);
- approved the award of Single Tender Actions (STAs) in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 2);
- approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 3); and

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- noted the award of retrospective STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Appendix 1 (Table 4).

Commercial and Procurement Services
Social Value Working Group

The Committee noted the attached 3 papers presented to the SPWG:

1. *SPWG Report - Sustainable Procurement Policy* which provides an update on proposed amendments to the current Social Value Procurement Policy 'SVPP' and asks Members to approve and/or provide further feedback on the proposed approach i.e. publish a new Sustainable Procurement Policy.
2. *SPWG Report - Short duration projects (including Appendix 1)* which asked Members to approve an amendment to the SVPP to allow for additional flexibility so that Officers can include a simpler/ more flexible social value scoring approach in tenders that are <6 months (approx.) in duration.
3. *SPWG Report - SVPP Delivery Report May 25 (including Appendix 1)* which provides an update on the delivery of social value outcomes via open tender competitions awarded in accordance with the 'SVPP'

Equality and Good Relations

Minutes of Shared City Partnership
Meeting on 12th May 2025

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 12th April 2025 including:

Good Relations Quarter 4 Update

- The Partnership recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it notes the contents of the report.

Good Relations Action Plan Budget Update

- The Partnership noted the contents of the report and recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that they note the contents of the report, including the proposal to proceed with the Good Relations Action plan as detailed in the body of the report

Update from Partnership Members

- The Partnership noted a number of verbal updates from various Members in relation to ongoing good relations issues across the Belfast

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PEACE IV – Secretariat Update

- The Partnership noted the contents of the report and recommends to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it notes the contents of the report.

**PEACEPLUS Belfast City Council
Local Community Action Plan – Update**

- The meeting was inquorate at this stage, as such the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is requested to endorse the report recommendations, summarised as follows:
 - the revised CRT Animation Timeframe subject to SEUPB approval;
 - the cross-community breakdown for participants as outlined in Option 2.

**Equality and Diversity: Equality Screening and
Rural Needs Outcome Report Quarter 4 2024-25**

The Committee was reminded that the Council had a duty to have, under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998:

- Due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity in relation to the nine equality categories; and
- Regard to the desirability of promoting good relations.

In addition, under section 1 of the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016:

- Due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services.

To this end, the Council had a process to carry out equality screening and rural needs assessment of new and revised policies. This allowed any impacts related to equality of opportunity, good relations or rural needs to be identified and addressed.

An equality screening and rural needs impact assessment template was completed by the relevant officer, in collaboration with the Equality and Diversity Unit. On a regular basis, the Unit collates all completed templates into a screening outcome report and publishes it onto the Council's website, along with the relevant completed templates.

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The Committee noted the Quarterly Screening Outcome Report which would be published on the Council's website.

**Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 – DAERA
Annual Monitoring Report**

The Committee was reminded that the rural population of Belfast was comprised of the small settlements of Edenderry, Hannahstown and Loughview.

Section 1 (1) of the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 required public authorities to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing, or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services. As part of that duty, Council officers complete Rural Needs Impact Assessments.

Section 3 (1) of the Act required public authorities to:

- i) Compile information on the exercise of their functions;
- ii) Include that information in annual reports; and
- iii) Send that information to DAERA.

The Annual Return was designed to inform stakeholders and other interested parties of how the Council had had due regard to rural needs in the exercise of its functions. The Annual Return showed how the Council had met this duty for 2024-25.

Subject to Committee and Council approval, the Annual Return would be submitted to DAERA next month for inclusion in its Rural Needs Annual Monitoring Report in order to meet DAERA's deadline for publication.

A copy of the Annual Return, together with a list of the completed Rural Needs Impact Assessments would be published on the Council's website as the Council does not have an annual report.

The Committee approved the Annual Monitoring Return to the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for 2024-25, which provided evidence of how the Council had met certain duties under the Rural Needs Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Operational Issues

**Minutes of Party Group Leaders
Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum of 15th May 2025.

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

The Committee approved the recommendations as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC)	5 September 2025	NILGOSC's 75th anniversary lunch Reception, Lunch, Presentations, and entertainment. Numbers attending – 90	C	Room hire £450	Drinks Reception as significant anniversary
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	25 November 2025	Belfast Trust Chairman's Awards 2025 – Awards ceremony to recognise the contributions and achievements of the staff in the Belfast Trust. Numbers attending – 300	C	Room hire £1250	
Telugu Cultural Society of Northern Ireland (TCSNI)	4 April 2026	Celebration of Ugadi 2026 "Beginning of a New Age" an evening of food and entertainment to celebrate New Year's	C	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception as Voluntary Community Group

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED
		Day for the people of the Deccan region of India. Numbers attending – 300 - 400			
Queen's University Belfast on behalf of Civil Engineering Research Association of Ireland	18 June 2026	Conference Dinner and Awards Evening for CERA Conference for guests attending 3-day conference at Queens. Numbers attending: 220	A &B	Room hire £1250	
Sons of Ulster Shankill Road Flute Band	3 October 2026	60th Anniversary Celebration Drinks Reception, Dinner, Presentations, and entertainment. Numbers attending – 100	C	Current rate free as Voluntary Community Group	Drinks Reception as significant anniversary

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Use of City Hall Grounds - Trad Fest July 2025

The Committee was reminded that requests for the use of City Hall were normally dealt with under the authority delegated by the Committee to the Director of Legal and Civic Services using criteria agreed for this purpose. Occasionally, however, it was necessary to place such requests directly before the Committee, and the request set out below fell into this category.

Belfast TradFest, described as “the pinnacle of world-class traditional music concerts, fiery pub sessions and Ireland’s fastest growing summer school of traditional music, was set to celebrate its 7th edition across Belfast UNESCO City of Music” from Sunday 27th July – Sunday 3rd August 2025.

TradFest was a registered charity and Belfast City Council funded the festival through its Cultural Multi-Annual funding, and organisers plan to use Belfast City Council branding for the site, if available.

As part of the festival, TradFest wished to host a 5-day family-friendly outdoor music stage on the grounds of Belfast City Hall from Monday 28th July to Friday 1st August. The event would take place from 1pm to 5pm each day and would be free to enter. This vibrant stage would showcase the finest up-and-coming traditional music talent from Belfast and beyond. There would be no catering, trading or sale of alcohol.

The proposed event would take place on the front west lawn only and areas such as the East Lawn, the Titanic Garden and Cenotaph would remain open to the public. Access to the City Hall building would not be affected. The organiser would provide an Event Management Plan, risk assessment, insurance, stewarding/marshalling staff and first aiders and would comply with the Council’s standard conditions for hire etc. Sound levels from the outdoor stage would be monitored mindful of event proximity to the committee rooms, party rooms and Chief Executive’s offices.

The Committee approved the use of City Hall grounds between 28th July and 1st August 2025 for TradFest, subject to the submission of an event management plan, risk assessment and the appointment of an event controller to ensure delivery of a safe public events.

**The installation of dual-language signage
in Olympia, including GLL/BETTER
information signage - Councillor Beattie to raise**

The Committee agreed a report be submitted to the next monthly meeting.

**The installation of dual-language signage
on the Forth-Meadow Greenway –
Councillor Beattie to raise**

The Committee agreed a report be submitted to the next monthly meeting.

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**An update on the next stage in the
development of the Irish Language Policy –
Councillor Beattie to raise**

The Committee agreed a report be submitted to the next monthly meeting.

Chairperson