

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 7th December, 2021

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Cobain (Chairperson);
Aldermen Copeland; and
Councillors Black, Bunting, Michael Collins,
Corr, de Faoite, Flynn, Garrett, M. Kelly, Magee,
McAteer, McReynolds, Newton, Smyth and Verner.

Also attended: Councillor Mullan and O'Hara.

In attendance: Mr. R. Black, Director of Neighbourhood Services;
Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mrs. C. Matthews, Director of Resources and Fleet;
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were recorded on behalf of Councillors Baker and Mulholland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 2nd and 9th November 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 December, subject to the minute of 9th November in relation to the "Update on DfC Community Recovery Funding" being amended to note that Councillor de Faoite had left the meeting before a vote had been taken on a proposal relating to the decision under the heading, and that the minute would be formally varied to provide for the removal of his name from the list of Members who had voted.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Black declared an interest in relation to item 5 (a) Naming of New Park and Sportzone at Divis Back Path, in that she was a Member of the Naming Panel. As there was no pecuniary request she was not required to leave the meeting and she took no part in any discussion.

Councillor Smyth declared an interest in item 5 (c) Partners Agreements Quarter 2 Update, in that he was a Member of Ulidia Playing Fields Steering Committee. As there was no discussion on the report he was not required to leave the meeting.

Restricted

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 3 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 Committee meeting during discussion on the following 3 items as, due to their nature, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Section 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Requests for the use of Parks for Summer Events 2022

The Committee considered requests seeking permission for the use of various parks and facilities during 2022, as follows:

- NI Science Festival, 17th – 20th February, at Botanic Gardens;
- Detonate Outdoor Dance Festival, 1st – 2nd April at Boucher Road;
- Bloomfield Gospel – drive thru Sunday services between 27th March – 2nd October at Dixon Playing Fields;
- Finaghy Cultural Festival, 9th - 13th June at Wedderburn Park;
- Belfast Vital extension August/September 2024 at Boucher Road; and
- Panoramic Wheel Botanic Gardens, 1 July – 25th September at Botanic Gardens.

The Committee granted authority for the aforementioned requests and delegated authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to:

- i. negotiate an appropriate fee which recognises the costs to Council, minimises negative impact on the immediate area and takes account of the potential wider benefit to the city economy, in conjunction with the Council's Commercial Manager;
- ii. negotiate satisfactory terms and conditions of use via an appropriate legal agreement prepared by the City Solicitor, including managing final booking confirmation dates and flexibility around 'set up' and 'take down' periods, and booking amendments, subject to:
 - the promoter resolving any operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
 - compliance with Coronavirus restrictions in place at the time of the event; and
 - the promoter meeting all the statutory requirements of the Planning and Building Control Service, including the terms and conditions of the Park's Entertainment Licence.

The Members 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 Council's Commercial team.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 2 2021/22

The Committee noted the contents of a report which summarised the Quarter 2 financial position for the People and Communities Committee, including a forecast of the year end outturn. It noted that the Quarter 2 position showed an under spend of £2.897m (6.8%), with the forecast year end position being an underspend of £418k (0.5%), which was well within the acceptable variance limit of 3%.

The Members were advised that the main reasons for the quarter 2 Committee under-spend related to vacant posts across a number of services, the receipt of additional income and the timing of grants and programmes.

The Committee noted the financial update.

Update on The Waterworks

The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided the Members with a verbal update regarding the recent outbreak of Avian Influenza, bird flu, affecting birds at the Waterworks Park.

He advised that, as well as working with the Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and the Public Health Agency (PHA), an independent expert had been brought in to help manage the situation.

He reported that, so far, 16 dead birds had been removed from the location. The Council had arranged for an on-call vet to be available to assess sick and dying birds and, if required, to humanely euthanise.

Following a query, the Director advised that dead birds were being removed from the site by Council officers and that it was mainly swans that had been affected.

It was noted that as the outbreak continued to escalate that the Waterworks Parks would close until the situation had been brought under control.

The Committee noted the update provided and the Director of Neighbourhood Services undertook to keep the Members regularly updated via e-mail.

Matters referred back from the Council/Motions

Notice of Motion - Street Tree Planting

The Committee was advised that, the Standard and Business Committee, at its meeting on 23rd November, had agreed that the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor McMullan and seconded by Councillor Long, in accordance with Standing Order 37(h), be referred directly to the People and Communities Committee for its consideration:

Street Tree Planting

“Noting this Council’s pledge to plant one million trees by 2035 and the ongoing work to deliver that commitment on our own land, its declaration of a climate emergency in October 2019 and our commitment to work towards being carbon neutral by 2050. However, as highlighted in the Belfast Carbon Roadmap Pathway to Net Zero we can close the gap by 2033 through a range of innovative interventions, including planting trees. Therefore this Council commits to drastically increasing the number of street trees across the Belfast. City Council area

Recognising that street tree planting is a function of the Department for Infrastructure, we will write to the Minister to join us in making this commitment and partner with us in drastically increasing their number across the city.

Working with our partners we will establish a strategy and action delivery plan (including maintenance), including setting a target for increasing the number of street trees in each of the 60 wards that comprise the 10 district electoral areas of Belfast City Council.

We will also write to the Minister for Infrastructure, as well as Ministers for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and Communities, to establish a rolling funding scheme for tree planting, maintenance and accompanying structural works (e.g. footpath widening) to enable more sites to be viable for street tree planting.

This Council will also join the new call for pledges to the UN Economic Commission for Europe’s ‘Trees in Cities Challenge’ joining other cities around the world including Barcelona, Bonn, Victoria (Canada) and Mexico City to demonstrate our intent internationally and to learn from and share learnings with other cities.”

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor McMullan addressed the Committee and outlined the context of the motion.

The proposer agreed, at the request of Councillor Matt Garrett, to amend his proposal to provide for the following additional penultimate paragraph to the proposal:

“As a further commitment to our pledge in supporting the ‘One Million Trees Initiative’ on Council land, that the Council commit’s, in 2022, to planting a number of suitable living Christmas Trees in publicly accessible locations in each quarter of the City. Members of Area Working Groups will be consulted on the sites and scale of trees (which may include more than one) and the Council will illuminate, maintain and work with community organisations in each quarter of the City in the creation of annual Community Christmas focal points and events.”

A number of the Members spoke in support of the motion. During discussion the need for careful planning regarding the location of any additional trees was highlighted to ensure that the locations were viable in terms of lighting, footpath width and to allow for adequate access to permit long-term maintenance. The need for a simultaneous maintenance budget was also highlighted.

The Committee adopted the motion with the addition of a paragraph seeking the planting of living Christmas trees and agreed that the proposals within the motion would be considered and progressed within the context of the City Tree Strategy which was currently being developed.

**Item referred back from November Council –
Erection of Dual Language Street Sign at Clifton Street**

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To consider the dual language street sign application for Clifton Street.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- 1. Consider the current updated survey results, noting the one outstanding survey, and either**
 - a) Make a decision to approve or refuse the application based upon the current survey results**
 - b) Defer any decision until the full survey results are available**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Key Issues

Background

3.2 The Clifton Street dual language street sign application was considered under the existing Street Naming and Numbering policy.

Policy:

In the introduction section of the policy it states:

3.3 **'2.0 Introduction**

The legislation requires the Council, in deciding whether and how to exercise its discretion to erect a street name in a language other than English, to take account of the views of the occupiers of premises in the street.

For the purposes of this policy occupiers shall be taken to be any person whose name appears in the current Electoral Register plus the owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises, but not employees in such premises.'

The procedure within the policy states:

3.4 **'3.0 Procedure**

The procedures for seeking and assessing the views of occupiers and the criteria to be applied in deciding whether to erect a street sign in a language other than English are as follows:

- (i) Only applications supported by a petition representing not less than one third of the people appearing on the Electoral Register of the street for which the application is made will be progressed.
- (ii) Where the foregoing requirements have been met the Council will canvass by post all people appearing on the Electoral Register of that street and seek their views on the request to erect a street sign in a second specified language. This letter is designed so as to make the expression of views as simple as possible. Reply will be by way of a pre-paid envelope and should be returned within one month of receipt.
- (iii) Where two thirds or more of the occupiers appearing on the Electoral Register have indicated that they are in favour of the erection of a second language street sign, then such a sign will be erected. People not returning a reply will be deemed not to be in favour of the application.'

The practice is to consider all residential properties within a street, checking for those residents who are on the electoral register, and checking for commercial properties. In addition, a site visit is carried out to check all the properties on the street during the survey. Commercial properties are included in the survey, with one survey form being provided. The policy states that the method of consultation is to canvas by post. The practice is to hand deliver surveys

where possible or post them using Royal Mail where this is not possible.

- 3.5 For the Clifton Street application, based on the information taken from the electoral register, and site checks of commercial properties, 12 surveys were originally issued, to both residential and commercial properties. 10 were hand delivered. 2 survey forms were posted through Royal Mail as they could not be hand delivered due to no letter box or no one present.
- 3.6 On review of the processing of this application, it was noted that two occupiers who had signed the initial petition had not been surveyed as their properties were deemed to be vacant at the time officers carried out their physical inspection of the street. However, it now appears they are in fact occupied.
- 3.7 At the committee meeting on 9th November members agreed to survey these two occupiers and asked that a report be brought back to December committee. Survey forms were hand delivered to these two properties, with an explanation on the survey to confirm the decision of committee, and that these surveys were being carried out without prejudice, pending ratification at December council meeting. One survey form has been returned and the occupier's preference is reflected in the revised totals. The other survey form has not been returned to date, however we are still within the standard response deadline. The result from this survey cannot therefore be fully reflected in the percentage totals for and against until a return is made or the deadline for return has passed
- 3.8 In addition, following the agreement at the committee meeting on 9th November a survey form was also re-issued by post to the secretary of Belfast Orange Hall, a property on the street. This property was originally surveyed by post and was declared a non-return and therefore the occupiers were deemed not be in favour of a dual language street sign in accordance with the policy. This survey has since been returned and is reflected in the revised percentage totals.
- 3.9 Application details:

English Name	Non-English Name	Location	Applicant	Persons surveyed
Clifton Street	Sráid Clifton	Between Carrick Hill, BT1 and Carlisle	Carrick Hill Residents Association	14

		Circus BT14		
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- 3.10 The translation was authenticated by Queens University, the approved translator for Belfast City Council.

Results for survey carried out for Clifton Street

- 3.11 In accordance with the Council's policy for the erection of dual language street signs surveys of all persons appearing on the Electoral Register plus owners or tenants in actual possession of commercial premises carried out and the following responses were received.

- 3.12 A revised number of 14 surveys have now been issued in total, 12 hand delivered and 2 posted using Royal Mail. The revised results are:

- 9 occupiers (64.3%) were in favour of the erection of a second street nameplate
- 1 occupier (7.1%) had no preference either way
- occupiers (14.3%) were not in favour of the erection of a second nameplate
- 1 occupier (7.1%) did not respond to the survey
- 1 survey is still outstanding within the standard response deadline (7.1%)

- 3.13 The Council's policy on the erection of a second street nameplate requires that at least two thirds (66.6%) of the occupiers on the street surveyed must be in favour of the proposal to erect a second street sign in a language other than English.

Provision of street signs.

- 3.14 The practice on siting the street signs is to identify those that exist on the street, and these are either added to or replaced to reflect the street name in a second language, as approved. The position of the street signs on Clifton Street are as follows:

- Junction with North Queen Street – on metal railings
- Junction of Westlink on-slip (north) – wall mounted to bridge
- Junction of Westlink on-slip (south) – wall mounted to bridge
- A sign on railings at the junction with Carlisle Circus was damaged and is not currently in place.

3.15 There is no street sign on or beside the Belfast Orange Hall building.

3.16 **Financial & Resource Implications**

There is a cost of approximately £450 to cover the cost of the manufacturing and erection of the dual language street signs in the current locations. The cost for these street signs has been allowed for in the current budget.

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

There are no direct equality/rural needs implications.”

Moved by Councillor Magee,
Seconded by Councillor Garrett,

“That the Committee agrees to the erection of dual language street signs.”

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Alderman Copeland,

“If the street signs are to be erected, that the sign at Carlisle Circus on Clifton Street is erected in English only.”

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

Amendment

With no agreement on the substantive proposal, a further amendment was made:

Moved by Alderman Copeland,
Seconded by Councillor McReynolds,

“The Committee agrees to defer any decision until the January meeting of the Committee when the full survey results would be available.”

On a vote, nine Members voted for the proposal and six against and it was declared carried.

Committee/Strategic Issues

Notices of Motion Quarterly Update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide the quarterly update to People and Communities Committee on Notices of Motion.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the updates to all Notices of Motion / Issues Raised in Advance that the Committee is responsible for as referenced in Appendix 1; and**
- **Agree to the closure of Issue Raised in Advance, as referenced in Appendix 1 and noted in paragraph 3.5 below.**

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 Members will recall that the previous quarterly Notices of Motion update was presented to People and Communities Committee in September 2021.

3.2 This report provides an overview of the progress on those Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which remained open following the September 2021 update.

Notice of Motion Updates

3.3 There are currently 24 active Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which the People and Communities Committee is responsible for. An update on those Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which remain active on the live database is attached at Appendix 1.

Closure of Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance

3.4 At SP&R Committee on 20th November 2020, it was agreed that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:

- **Category 1 - Notices of Motion which contained an action that has been completed. All Notices of Motion within this category contained a specific task that has since been complete. It is worth noting that, when Committee agree to action a Notice of Motion, there are sometimes additional actions agreed alongside the Notice of Motion. As these are not technically part of the Notice of Motion, they are taken forward through normal committee decision making processes. The Notice of Motion can therefore be**

closed, but additional actions related to it will continue to be progressed and reported to the committee. These additional actions are not contained in this report, but will be noted in the live database moving forward.

- Category 2 - Notices of Motion have become Council policy or absorbed in to a strategic programme of work. These Notices of Motion did not contain a specific task that could be complete. Instead, they were more strategic in nature and required changes in Council policy and/ or strategy for long term outcomes. Those listed within this category have all been agreed by Committee and are now either Council policy or are currently being implemented through a Council strategy that is managed by a Standing Committee through the corporate planning process.

3.5 Following an update of those Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance on the live database, it is recommended that Members approve the following Motions/Issues for closure.

Category 1 Recommended Closures:

- Future Fossil Fuel Development (No 26) - the Member has been provided with an update on this request and is content with the advice provided. This issue is now recommended for closure.
- Portacabin at Wedderburn (No 32) - request withdrawn by Member.
- Proposal for pedestrian crossing at new BCC play park on Upper Dunmurry Lane (No 38) - correspondence has been issued to DfI with a formal request for pedestrian crossing on Upper Dunmurry Lane beside the BCC carpark.

3.6 Financial & Resource Implications

There are no additional financial implications required to implement these recommendations.

3.7 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.”

Following a query from a Member regarding the Littering NOM (no 76), the Director of Neighbourhood Services undertook to liaise directly with the Member directly to discuss the progress of the BOSS strategy.

The Committee noted the update report in respect of the Notices of Motion / Issues Raised in Advance and agreed to the closure of the following 2:

- Future Fossil Fuel Development (no 26); and
- Portacabin at Wedderburn (no 32),

It was agreed that the proposal for a pedestrian crossing at the new Council Play Park on Dunmurry Lane (no 38) would remain open to enable officers to ascertain if a response had been received from the Department for Infrastructure.

The Committee further agreed, due to current workload pressures on Council staff, that the Notice of Motion Quarterly Update report could move to a six-monthly update.

Boxing Strategy Quarterly Update

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reminded the Committee that the Council had previously agreed to provide £200,000 in funding to the Irish Athletic Boxing Association Ulster Branch (IABA) in the current financial year for delivery of an agreed action plan which supported the Belfast Boxing Strategy and he then provided an update on the progress in relation to the agreement up to the end of September 2021.

He explained that, in line with the Council's objectives, the Belfast Boxing Strategy Steering Group had met quarterly. The Steering Group was chaired by the Director of Neighbourhood Services and attended by Council officers, IABA officers and officials and Co. Antrim officials.

The Committee was reminded that the Council had previously agreed a total of 37 Indicators with the IABA to monitor delivery of the programmes. The Director reported that the IABA had been compliant with all the reporting matters.

The Committee noted that whilst the performance reports indicated significant underperformance against most targets, it was important to note that participation in boxing, as a full contact indoor sport, had been heavily restricted by the Covid-19 restrictions. The IABA had endeavored to mitigate against this by modifying, where possible, delivery of many elements to online methods.

The Members were also asked to note that the 2021 – 2022 action plan had been developed to take account of the ongoing restrictions.

Noted.

Representation on Association of Port Health Authorities Executive Board

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on recent changes made by the Association of Port Health Authorities (APHA) to their processes for regional representation onto the Association's Executive Board.

The Members noted that Belfast City Council had previously provided an Elected Member representative to this Board, however, going forward, in line with APHAs requirements, this role would now be undertaken by a nominated officer from the NI Ports Liaison Area Network.

The Committee noted the change from Elected Member to Officer representation.

**Update - The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC)
Tree Planting Initiative**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services provided the Members with an update in regard to the planned Queen's Green Canopy tree planting event in Belmont Park that had previously been agreed by the People and Communities Committee at its August 2021 meeting, when it had been agreed that 500 small native trees would be planted between November 2021 – March 2022.

The Director advised that a subsequent request had now been received by the Council from Colonel Dan Rex MVO, CEO seeking the Council to consider applying to becoming a Champion City under the Queen's Green Canopy Tree Planting Initiative (QGC).

The Members were advised that the Champion City goals were:

- to inspire Cities and encourage proactive community engagement within urban environments around the UK;
- to promote the importance of urban trees and woodland, and the benefits they bring to mental health, physical health, air quality, flood defences, microclimate and more; and
- to exemplify best practice and the core principles of the (QGC) including stewardship, inclusivity and education.

The (QGC) panel had asked that any City offered Champion City Status would commit to the following:

1. to actively promote engagement with the (QGC) and its goals;
2. to arrange an iconic tree planting which emphatically embody the spirit of the (QGC); and
3. to ensure an ongoing maintenance plan for trees planted under the (QGC) initiative.

The Members were advised that, as a result of the short deadline for submissions in advance of National Tree Week 27th November - 5th December 2021, a presentation had been made to Party Group Leaders on 11th November to enable a decision to be taken under delegated authority to submit an application to become a (QGC) Champion City.

The Director advised that the application had subsequently been submitted and the Council had been selected as one of the (QGC) Champion Cities along with other cities (Manchester, Leicester, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Southampton, and York).

The Committee noted the update and welcomed the successful application for Champion City Status.

External Consultations on: Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework, WEEE Compliance Scheme Methodology, Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers DAERA Environment Strategy consultation response

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 provide the Committee with an update on recent and current consultations which may have an impact on Waste, namely

- the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework
- the WEEE Compliance Scheme Methodology.
- The Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked

- To note the draft response to the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework subject to council ratification. (Consultation paper as Appendix I and Draft response as Appendix II)
- To note the proposed approach to the WEEE Compliance Scheme Methodology
- To invite members to comment in advance of the submission on the DAERA consultation for the Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers and to forward any comments for consideration for inclusion in the response from Belfast City Council by Monday 13th December 2021 to Jennifer Stephens Waste Officer stephensj@belfastcity.gov.uk The consultation document is attached at Appendix III.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 A summary of each of the consultations is provided below:

(1) Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework

- 3.2 The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) recently published a consultation on a draft Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework. The document presented proposals for a new strategic food systems approach for Northern Ireland, and on the proposed vision, principles and goals of the Framework. Subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise, it is anticipated that an agreed Framework will be published in early 2022.
- 3.3 DAERA highlights that there is growing international acceptance of the interconnectedness between food, health and the environment. It notes that there is an expectation that a food system should ensure environmental, social and economic sustainability and also that there is also a growing interest in sustainable healthy diets.
- 3.4 The draft Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework recognises the interconnectedness around food and proposes a strategic food systems approach. It sets out a long-term vision, high level principles and areas for strategic focus to optimise cross-departmental working on food matters in Northern Ireland to deliver Programme for Government and departmental objectives. The vision is a transformed food system that protects natural resources for future generations, is economically and environmentally sustainable and provides safe, nourishing, accessible food to people.
- 3.5 DAERA has been leading on the development of the cross-departmental Framework with input from other Departments and a wide range of external stakeholders.
- 3.6 During the development process six strategic priorities were identified:
- Priority One: Building connections between health /wellbeing and food
Priority Two: Building Sustainable Economic Prosperity
Priority Three: Building a Food Culture and Food Conscious Society
Priority Four: Protecting and Enhancing our Natural Resources
Priority Five: Building Healthy Lives through Food Education
Priority Six: Building and maintaining appropriate Emergency Contingency plans across the supply chain.
- 3.7 Following the development process, DAERA launched a public consultation in order to seek views on this new collaborative approach under a Northern Ireland Framework from across a much broader range of stakeholders and the general public.

The Consultation launched on Friday 24 September 2021 and closed on Friday 19th November 2021. The consultation presented 24 questions relating to the proposed Food Strategy Framework.

- 3.8 A copy of the Consultation document is attached as Appendix I.
- 3.9 A copy of our draft response to the consultation is attached as Appendix II. The response has been provided pending People and Communities Committee and full Council further input and authorisation.
- 3.10 Generally speaking, we are supportive of the proposals contained within the consultation, including a 'whole of government approach' which will align policies that affect the food system. We do note in our response that if the NI Food Strategy Framework aims to be a cross government unifying strategy, it should be mindful of the work currently being undertaken by DAERA in relation to waste (For example, in developing a Waste Collections Consistency Framework).
- 3.11 Within our response, we emphasise the importance of a life-cycle approach and we propose a 'soil-to-soil' principle, (going beyond the farm-to-fork concept), incorporating a closed loop food system approach. We reference the Circular Economy, pollution, ecosystem services, climate change and EU exit as issues which need to be considered within the new Framework. We also note the omission of linkages to the new NI Biodiversity Strategy and to existing legislation such as the Habitats Directive and Water Framework Directive.
- 3.12 It is noted that our responses to the consultation questions are mainly from a waste perspective and that they also include comments relating to Biodiversity issues. No other comments were received from across the Council in response to the consultation.

**(2) Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment (WEEE)
Compliance Scheme Methodology**

- 3.13 The Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) recently launched a four-week consultation on setting a compliance fee under the Waste Electronic and Electrical Equipment Regulations. The consultation closed on 15th November 2021.
- 3.14 The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations 2013 established a system in which producers of equipment are required to finance the cost of collection, treatment, recovery and recycling of WEEE arising from private households. The WEEE Regulations introduced a

system of annual collection targets that are imposed on Producer Compliance Schemes (PCSs).

- 3.15 This particular consultation invited views on setting a compliance fee for 2021, as well as on two proposals (from external organisations JTA and Valpak) for managing this year's fee.
- 3.16 After consulting with arc21 and European Recycling Platform (ERP), who are the Producer Compliance Scheme managing WEEE collected from Belfast City Council, we note that Producer Compliance Schemes, rather than Local Authorities are best placed to respond to this consultation.
- 3.17 Currently, the compliance fee and any associated calculations do not affect local authorities: Belfast City Council receives WEEE collections from ERP free of charge. ERP have confirmed that the fee referred to in the consultation and its calculation will not impact the service provided by ERP and they will continue to collect WEEE free of charge from Belfast City Council.
- 3.18 As a major WEEE Compliance scheme, ERP has been closely involved in the development of the proposal from the JTA (Joint Trade Associations) every year since 2014 and has confirmed support of the JTA proposal for managing this year's fee.
- 3.19 As a result, and having taken on board comment from arc21 and ERP, it is not felt necessary for Belfast City Council to comment on this consultation.

(3) Consultation for the Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers

- 3.20 The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) had published a consultation on proposals for the reduction of the usage of Single-use Plastic (SUP) beverage cups and food containers in Northern Ireland. The aim is to encourage a more sustainable environment and circular economy for everyone across Northern Ireland.

The consultation has been designed collaboratively with the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) to consider a number of policy options on the most effective way to ensure a substantial reduction in the use of SUP beverage cups and food containers.

The Department is seeking views on the suggested policy options to ensure the most effective method of reducing the consumption of SUP beverage cups and food containers is identified.

- 3.21 The goal of the policies is to reduce the use of the targeted types of SUP packaging, by encouraging wider take up of multi-use and/or single-use non-plastic alternatives.

The responses to the consultation will be used to determine the best policy options to help to promote the reduction in SUP items.

- 3.22 Within the consultation document, three policies are modelled for both SUP beverage cups and food containers:

- A ban on their use.
- A levy of 25p on each cup and 50p on each food container; and
- A voluntary scheme or schemes implemented by businesses that make use of SUP cups or food containers, which may comprise a range of charges for cups/food containers, discounts for multi-use cups/food containers and communication efforts. This is modelled as having the same effect as a 10p levy for a beverage cup and 25p for a food container.

- 3.23 The consultation document poses 32 questions based around these policy options and invites responses by Friday 17th December 2021. Waste officers are currently examining the proposals presented within the consultation and welcome any additional comments for consideration within the council response to be received by Monday 13th December 2021.

A copy of the consultation on the Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers is attached as Appendix III

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.24 None in relation to responding to the consultations.

Equality or Rural Needs Implications

- 3.25 None in relation to responding to the consultations.

Abbreviations

DAERA - Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

DEFRA - Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

ERP - European Recycling Platform

JTA - Joint Trade Associations

PCS – Producer Compliance Scheme

SUP - Single-use Plastic

WEEE - Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment

WRAP - Waste and Resources Action Programme”

The Committee:

- retrospectively approved the Council's draft response to the Northern Ireland Food Strategy Framework that had been submitted in line with the 19th November deadline, available [here](#), and noted that the draft had been submitted subject to Committee approval and Council ratification;
- noted that, given the comments from arc21 and the European Recycling Platform (ERP), in that Producer Compliance Schemes rather than Local Authorities were best placed to respond to the consultation, it was not therefore deemed necessary for the Council to submit a response;
- agreed that the draft DAERA consultation, available [here](#), for the Reduction of Single-Use Plastic Beverage Cups and Food Containers be forwarded to all Members seeking comments for consideration to form part of the Council's response for inclusion, by Monday 13th December, to Jennifer Stephens Waste Officer stephensj@belfastcity.gov.uk ; and
- agreed that the final draft response, clearly highlighting any additional comments received, be forwarded via e-mail to all the Members in advance of the January Council meeting for final endorsement.

DAERA Environment Strategy consultation response

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present the compiled council draft response to the consultation on the Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland for Members to consider and agree. The Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland document is attached in Appendix 1 and the compiled council draft response is attached in Appendix 2.

2.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Review the report and the Council's draft consultation response to the Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland (Appendix 2) and agree to the submission to DAERA by the 19th January 2022.

3.0 Main report

3.1 The Consultation

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/environment-strategy-consultation> opened on 11 November 2021 and with a closing date of 19 January 2022 at 16:00.

- 3.2 The Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA), on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive, has published a consultation on the draft Environment Strategy and welcomes the views of everyone across Northern Ireland.
- 3.3 DAERA advised that the Environment Strategy is intended to be an overarching document setting out Northern Ireland's environmental priorities for the coming decades and will form part of the Green Growth agenda (the Green Growth Strategy will provide more detail on actions in respect of climate change & greenhouse gas emissions).
- 3.4 The Department advise that this Environment Strategy will form the basis for a coherent and effective set of interventions that can deliver real improvements in the quality of the environment and thereby improve the health and well-being of all who live and work here; elevate Northern Ireland to an environmental leader; create opportunities to develop our economy; and enable us to play our part in protecting the global environment for decades to come
- 3.5 Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback and our full response (Appendix 2) provides the specific commentary for members consideration. Members are advised that given this consultation was only issued on 11th November that officers have attempted to coordinate a response to the key relevant areas which we would have greatest interest in, from City and Neighbourhoods Department and Place & Economy.
- 3.6 A summary of feedback including specific page references within the Council response at Appendix 2 follows in the key issues section of this report:

Key issues

- 3.7 The breakdown of the comments from BCC within the draft Environment Strategy document is as follows:
- 3.8 Strategic Environmental Outcome 1 - Excellent air, water, land & neighbourhood quality

Air quality – new Air Quality Strategy for NI by 2022 (Council's draft responses are included on pages 2-5 of Appendix 2)

Water Resources: Quality & Quantity - Implement the 'Living with Water in Belfast Plan'. Marine and Coastal Water Resources: Quality & Quantity.

Sustainable Drainage & Wastewater Management - Engagement with district councils to include SuDS

(Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/managing-stormwater-strategy-promoting-use-sustainable-drainage-systems-within-northern> in Local Development Plans (page 6 App 2).

Neighbourhood Environment Quality - Increase the maximum Fixed Penalty Notice for litter and dog fouling offences to £200 by 2023. Publish Northern Ireland's first Litter Strategy by 2024. Amend the Environmental Offences (Fixed Penalties) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations (NI) 2012 to give Councils greater powers to vary fines by 2023. Include litter in Extended Producer Responsibility legislation (pages 6-7 App 2).

Dilapidated Buildings & Neglected Sites - Engage with Councils through Local Development Plans process to prioritise dereliction in plan strategies & policies. Develop a wide-ranging Dilapidation Bill. Introduce to the NI Assembly by 2023. New provisions to tackle low level dilapidation. Significantly enhance district councils' cost recovery powers. (pages 7-12 App 2).

3.9 **Strategic Environmental Outcome 2 - Healthy & accessible environment & landscapes everyone can connect with & enjoy.**

Connecting People to the Environment: Landscapes, Seascapes & Natural Beauty - Landscape policy/ legislation review (page 13 App 2).

Connecting People to the Environment: Outdoor Recreation & Natural Space Provision - Develop Community Path Network & Places Plans. Development of revised / new outdoor recreation legislation. Development of a new Strategy for Sport and Physical Activity for the next 10 years and beyond. Update Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for NI. Improve quantity, quality & accessibility of existing natural spaces, parks, recreational routes and marine & freshwaters. Expand off-road network of both local community paths and regionally significant NI wide routes (page 13 App 2).

Environment Engagement Index (EEI) - The EEI is unique to NI and explores engagement and connection to nature through an annual survey.

The Next Generation – Eco schools (page 13 App 2).

Sustainable Settlements - Build and strengthen the resilience of our city by creating places where people want to live and work, to visit and invest. Develop and support sustainability and Green Growth. Work across Government to promote the Greenway network encouraging walking and cycling and reducing car dependency (included in planning policy response pages 13-14 App 2).

3.10 Strategic Environmental Outcome 3 - Thriving, resilient & connected nature and wildlife.

Protecting Nature on Land - 30% of land and water protected for nature by 2030. Increase NI woodland cover to 8.8% (122,000 hectares) by 2030 (*page 14 App 2*).

3.11 Strategic Environmental Outcome 4 - Sustainable production & consumption on land and at sea.

Producer Responsibility - By 2030: Increase recycling of packaging from 60% to 78%. From 2024, phase in new UK wide Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for packaging. By end of 2024, 80% of full net costs of packaging contributed by producers. 2021/2: UK consultation on Review of Waste Electrical & Electronic Equipment. 2023: UK review of producer responsibility and increased recycling for End of Life Vehicles. 2022: review of producer responsibility for batteries (*pages 15-17 App 2*).

Reducing Single-Use Plastic (SUP) (*pages 17-18 App 2*).
Carrier Bags (*page 18 App 2*).

Chemicals

Environmental Regulation: Permitting - Digital transformation of application services for waste, water and pollution control authorisations. Digital transformation of site inspection forms for waste, water and pollution control regulatory staff. Publication of consultation on policy proposals for a new environmental permitting regime during 2022.

Antimicrobial & Disinfectant Contamination.

3.12 Strategic Environmental Outcome 5 - Zero waste & highly developed circular economy.

Circular Economy - Publish Circular Economy Strategic Framework by 2022. Appoint members to a NI Circular Economy Coalition representing a diverse range of industries, sectors and interest. (*page 19 App 2*).

Waste Management - Publish new Waste Management Strategy by 2023. Introduce new UK wide Extended Producer Responsibility Scheme for packaging in 2023. Bring forward all actions set out in the Waste Prevention Plan 2019. By 2035, send no more than 10% of waste to landfill. (*page 19-20 App 2*).

Illegal Waste Disposal & Fly-tipping – Commence outstanding sections of 2011 Act. Secure agreement to the protocol of all 11 councils. DAERA and councils to review protocol annually. Consistent approach to data collection across NI regarding Fly-tipping and illegal waste disposal (pages 20 – 21 App 2).

3.13 We have also included within our response that the impact of the administration and application of any new changes for which District Councils would have a role need to be formally appraised and evaluated and further consulted on. The economic impact of the roll out of this future strategy would need to be determined to ensure there is no additional burden on the rate payers within the Belfast City Council area.

3.14 **Next steps**

Members are asked to consider and agree the council response to DAERA attached at Appendix 2.

3.15 **Financial & Resource Implications**

None associated with this report.

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

None associated with this report.”

The Committee agreed the draft consultation response to the Draft Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland, available [here](#), and agreed its submission to DAERA by the 19th January, subject to it being made clear within the response that the Council was keen to progress with the full scheme and the reference to ‘bin hoking’ being removed.

Belfast City Airport Request - Bird Strike Management at Victoria Park: Implications to Air Safety

The Committee considered a request from The George Best Belfast City Airport (GBBCA) in regard to bird strike management at Victoria Park.

The Members were advised that the control of birds in the flight path to the airport was a requirement of the airport’s Civil Aviation Authority licence. In line with GBBCA’s national aerodrome license requirements and associated guidance material presented in CAP772: Wildlife Hazard Management at Aerodromes, and that the airport was required to identify sources of risk and to reduce and maintain any risk to an acceptable level in compliance with the Civil Aviation Authority licensing requirements.

The Members were reminded that, in January 2021, the airport had removed 12 old rook nests and undertook structural pruning of trees and ivy at Victoria Park. These works had been required as a result of the establishment of a rookery at Victoria Park with an increased frequency of rook occurrence around the airport.

The Director of Neighbourhood Services advised that, following the aforementioned works, rook nests and total rook numbers had been monitored from 28th February to 15th April 2021. This had demonstrated that nest building had lowered by 35% with reductions in both average flock size, down from 27 to 14, and the maximum flock size from 30 to 17.

The Members noted that, as suitable nesting habitat was prevalent throughout the park, the airport remained concerned that there might be potential for the rookery to re-establish and expand unless further habitat modifications were implemented. As a result of this, GBBCA were seeking to carry out continued remedial actions which would involve the removal of old nests, outside of the breeding season, and selective pruning of branching forks and other potential anchor points in trees to further inhibit nest building attempts in 2022. In addition, the airport also wished to remove circa 4 pines along the eastern edge of the rookery and to reduce the shelter provided to nesting trees behind. Permission to remove these pines had been granted under the previous licence but had not been actioned at the time. If required, the Airport also wished to continue to reduce any shelter provided by ivy at the site.

The Committee was advised that, if approved, the GBBCA would appoint a suitable contractor with previous experience to undertake the works. In addition, officers would review the submitted risk assessment and insurance certificates in line with procedure and work with Legal Services to issue the requested licence. The licence would include relevant conditions to ensure that the airport had confirmed that all works were permissible and that any required licences were in place to permit the works to take place within the required timescales. The licence would also place an onus on the airport to ensure that health and safety measures were implemented, essential signage was assembled, one-way systems were established where necessary, and any COVID specific mitigations were in place.

The Committee was further advised that in 2021 GBBCA had recorded a goose laying and hatching a clutch of eggs in June. The current annual greylag goose Licence Agreement between the Council and GBBCA extended to the end of May and the airport was requesting that this be extended to the end of June to address any future late laying. It was highlighted that this would align the Council's legal agreement with the DAER and NIEA licence.

The Members considered this request and felt that with the other measures in place this was unnecessary and therefore did not accede to the request from the George Best City Airport to extend their annual licence for managing greylag goose eggs to the end of June.

The Committee agreed the request from George Best Belfast City Airport to permit access under licence to Victoria Park to facilitate the removal of old rook nests by Mid-January 2022 and to carry out the necessary thinning of sheltering pines, structural pruning of preferred nesting trees and to reduce shelter from ivy.

The Committee noted:

- that the decision to grant permission was subject to a legal agreement that would be developed by the Council's Legal Services Department which would ensure that any works were permissible, and the required NIEA
- licence and consents were in place; and
- that the required licence would be progressed under the Director's delegated authority.

It was further agreed that representative from the Belfast City Airport be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss issues in regard to noise and flight paths and that in the interim they be reminded that the Council had previously requested that the Airport publish and promote its 'Bird Control for Air Safety in Belfast Report' via its own media channels to help inform the public in regard to the required actions and measures.

New Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland – Pre Consultation Input

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of the report is for Members to consider a pre consultation response to contribute to the development of the new Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy.

2.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to

- Agree the draft pre consultation response and to note that there will be further opportunity to comment on the new NI Biodiversity Strategy at full consultation stage. Subject to Committee and Council Approval this response will be submitted to DAERA. The Department has not given an indicative date when the Strategy will be issued for consultation but officers will keep Members updated.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 The previous Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 has now elapsed, and the Executive intends to develop a new Biodiversity Strategy to meet the challenges faced by the natural environment.

3.2 The scientific evidence points to an on-going decline in global biodiversity; with that trend very much mirrored in Northern Ireland. Internationally the United Nations, through the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), is refocusing its intention on reducing the loss of biodiversity through a Global Biodiversity Framework.

3.3 In July 2021 the CBD published the first official draft of a new Global Biodiversity Framework to guide actions worldwide to preserve and protect nature and its essential services to people. Work is ongoing but it is likely that the framework will include the 21 strategic targets set out at Appendix 1

- 3.4 The framework includes targets for 2030 including:
- All land and sea areas globally are under integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning addressing land- and sea-use change (Target 1).
 - At least 30% of global land and sea areas are conserved through effective protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (Target 3)
 - At least 50% reduction in the rate of introduction of invasive alien species, and controls or eradication of such species to eliminate or reduce their impacts (Target 6)
 - Reducing nutrients lost to the environment by at least half, and pesticides by at least two thirds, and eliminating the discharge of plastic waste (Target 7)
 - Nature-based contributions to global climate change mitigation efforts of least 10 GtCO₂e per year, and that all mitigation and adaptation efforts avoid negative impacts on biodiversity (Target 8)
 - Increase the area of, access to, and benefits from green and blue spaces, for human health and well-being in urban areas and other densely populated areas (Target 12)
 - Integrate biodiversity values into policies, regulations, planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies, accounts, and assessments of environmental impacts at all levels of government and across all sectors of the economy (Target 14).
 - Redirecting, repurposing, reforming or eliminating incentives harmful for biodiversity, reducing them by at least \$US 500 billion per year (Target 18).
- 3.5 The CBD intends to get international agreement to the framework at the Council of the Parties meeting (CoP15) in May 2022 in China. The targets agreed at this summit will replace the 2020 biodiversity targets, many of which were not met.
- 3.6 In the meantime the four UK countries are refreshing their strategies, based on the draft framework. To assist with development of the new strategy DAERA has requested Council input and comment specifically in relation to strategic targets; 1, 3,6,12, and 14.
- 3.7 A draft response has been prepared at Appendix 2 but principal comments include the need for;
1. Robust Legislation and policies.
 2. Baseline data – the dearth of ecological data across most habitats and taxa prevents informed decision making and monitoring of trends especially at a local level due.

3. Cessation of incentives which are damaging the natural environment.
4. Adequate resources – Lack of investment on invasive alien species are currently estimated to cost £1.8 bn to the UK economy.
5. Resources - There is a significant professional skills gap recognised by the sector.
6. The new NI Biodiversity Strategy needs to SMART Targets with interim milestones, monitoring and be adequately resourced. Funding should be accessible to environmental organisations and Local Authorities.
7. Mainstreaming Biodiversity - Collaboration across all sectors is required to deliver the outcomes.
8. Reinstatement of Local Structures for example the NI Biodiversity Group and the Habitat and Species Action Plan Groups which brought together Government, eNGOs and the business sectors.

3.8 Subject to Committee and Council Approval this response will be submitted to DAERA. The Department has not given an indicative date when the Strategy will be issued for consultation but officers will keep Members updated.

3.9 **Financial & Resource Implications**

There are currently no financial implications.

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

There are currently no equality or good relations implications.”

The Committee:

- noted the draft pre consultation response, available [here](#), and agreed that it be forwarded to all Members seeking comments for consideration to form part of the Council's draft response for inclusion. The final draft response, clearly highlighting any additional comments received, be forwarded via e-mail to all the Members in advance of the January Council meeting for final endorsement, prior to submission to DAERA; and
- noted that there would be a further opportunity to consult and comment on the new NI Biodiversity Strategy at full consultation stage.

DoF Consultation on proposed amendments of Technical Booklet Guidance to Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) (Building Regulations)

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 **Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues**

1.1 To consider a draft response to a Department of Finance consultation on proposed amendments to Technical Booklet

Guidance to Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations (Northern Ireland).

2.0 Decision(s) required and recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Consider the draft response to the Department of Finance consultation and agree, subject to any amendments, a response on behalf of the Council. Subject to Council ratification.
- The closing date for responses to this consultation is 23:59 on Sunday 19 December 2021, with responses to be made online.

3.0 Main report

Key issues

3.1 The Buildings Standards Branch of the Department of Finance (DoF) is seeking the views of the Council on their proposals to amend Technical Booklet Guidance to Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations.

Background

3.2 The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 (as amended) places a duty on a district council to enforce building regulations in its district. Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) of the Building Regulations sets minimum standards for building work with respect to carbon performance and energy conservation measures.

3.3 Building Regulation 43B (*Nearly zero-energy requirements for new buildings*) of Part F requires that new buildings are 'nearly zero-energy buildings' (NZEB). This requirement has applied to all newly erected buildings from 31 December 2020.

3.4 NZEB is defined as '*a building that has a very high energy performance, as determined in accordance with the National calculation methodology, where the nearly zero or very low amount of energy required should be covered to a very significant extent by energy from renewable sources, including energy from renewable sources produced on-site or nearby*'.

3.5 Regulation 39 (Conservation measures) requires reasonable provisions for conservation of fuel and power by limiting heat losses and through use of efficient services with appropriate controls.

- 3.6 Regulation 40 (Target carbon dioxide emission rate) of Part F requires that a new building's rate of emissions does not exceed a Target carbon dioxide Emissions Rate (TER) when modelled in accordance with the National Calculation Methodology (NCM).
- 3.7 Regulation 43A (*Consideration of high-efficiency alternative systems*) of Part F requires that designers of new buildings consider 'high-efficiency alternative systems', (e.g. decentralised renewables, district heating, combined heat and power systems, heat pumps, etc.). The requirement is only to demonstrate that these options have been considered. In practice, very few high-efficiency alternatives are proposed for inclusion in the proposed building after consideration.
- 3.8 The UK government is developing a programme of amendments to the NCM software to reflect the latest scientific understanding of building physics, revised carbon, primary energy and cost factors for UK fuels, and to implement various technical adjustments necessary for compliance with Directive 2018/844/EU.
- 3.9 These changes will result in new software, a new Primary Energy (PE) target metric and revised cost and carbon factors, which will input to the calculation of a revised TER. The new software will apply alongside an uplift in Building Regulation requirements in each administration, rolling out from early 2022 onwards. However, the outworking of these revisions is complex, and consequences need local consideration (e.g. reduced carbon and PE factors could encourage uptake of electric heating, which would be more expensive to operate than standard boilers). The Department and industry will need to consider these issues and proposals once the position in England has settled.
- 3.10 However, considering concerns that energy efficiency standards here have been too low for too long and in consideration of the Assembly's declaration of a climate emergency and commitments to address climate change in the *New Decade, New Approach* proposals, the Department is keen to prioritise improved standards around NZEB and not to delay uplift further whilst we consider this, more complex, position. While some subsequent re-adjustment of standards and a potential further uplift will be necessary in consequence of the UK NCM development process, the Department is of the view that this should not delay action where possible.
- 3.11 The Department accepts that a fundamental in-depth review of Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) and Part K (Ventilation) will be required to take account of the position and proposals of the other administrations and that ongoing work will be required thereafter.

- 3.12 The Department is developing a Discussion Document for public consultation in the coming months, which will provide further input on the relevant issues and seek to outline pathways towards very high efficiency standards for new buildings in the medium term. The proposals within this current consultation are intended to provide an uplift to the requirements for new buildings as an interim 'steppingstone' measure.

Consultation proposals

- 3.13 The Department is consulting on proposals to uplift the minimum energy efficiency standards for new buildings. Three options have been considered –
Option 1: do nothing.
Option 2: require NZEB buildings to better the current Target carbon dioxide Emissions Rate (TER) outputs by 25%, in the case of new dwellings, and 15%, in the case of new non-domestic buildings; and
Option 3: require NZEB buildings to better the current Target carbon dioxide Emissions Rate (TER) outputs by 40% in the case of new houses, 25% in the case of new flats, and 15%, in the case of new non-domestic buildings.
- 3.14 Option 3 is the Department's preferred option with a better overall return on investment. It would deliver more carbon savings and better reductions in energy bills, albeit with higher build costs for developers. In the draft response we have confirmed that this is the preferred option for the Council as well.
- 3.15 The proposed variation in betterment between houses, flats and non-domestic buildings is proposed so that in the case of dwellings, any on-site renewable generating technologies (e.g. photovoltaic panels), used to achieve the improved emissions performance, should normally be able to avail of the more straightforward (G98) grid connection processes.
- 3.16 Options 2 and 3 set new limits on fabric standards to require provision of building fabric with U-values (and in the case of dwellings, a glazing assessment), as specified within TBF1 and TBF2. A whole building area-weighted U-value assessment provides an alternative approach, provided the overall U-values deliver the same level of performance; and encourage air tightness testing, including removing options on air permeability assessment for a default value of 15 m³/(h.m²) to be submitted on small sites for untested dwellings and the similar 500 m² threshold currently permitted for non-domestic buildings.
- 3.17 All options retain the use of the existing SAP 2009 software, while the new NCM software is developed at UK level. Carbon factors in SAP 2009 do not reflect recent decarbonisation of the electricity grid supply. This means

that where the ‘betterment’ is delivered with an electricity-led solution (e.g. with photovoltaic panels), the actual carbon abatement is likely to be significantly less than the betterment requirements.

- 3.18 New guidance is proposed to deal with circumstances where the local electricity network cannot accommodate export from on-site renewables that generate electricity (e.g. photovoltaic panels, small wind turbines, etc.) which cannot be directly used in the building. It is unclear if this will be a long-term issue as increasing use of electricity and smart systems developments may facilitate more renewables in the medium term. Future uplifts and a revised NCM should also look to deal with this again in future uplifts.
- 3.19 Other amendments are intended to clarify, or rectify, previous guidance to reflect the current working and enforcement practices. The changes include re-wording to promote an expectation of air-tightness testing and to clarify provisions in relation to thermal bridge assessments.
- 3.20 The package of consultation documents can be found on the Department’s website: [-https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations](https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations) and includes the following: –
- Consultation document outlining the proposals.
 - Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment.
 - Draft amended Technical Booklet F1
 - Draft amended Technical Booklet F2
 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment
 - and
 - Draft Equality Screening, for the proposed changes.
 - The proposed consultation response is included as Appendix 1 to the report.

3.22 **Financial & Resource Implications**

Some additional training of staff on the changes to the requirements/guidance will be required, as well as guidance for customers on the council website, etc. These will be carried out as normal course of business by existing staff.

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

The proposed amendments have been screened out of equality impact assessment requirements by DoF. The draft equality impact screening assessment is on the Departmental Website.”

The Committee endorsed the draft response, available [here](#), to the Department of Finance consultation on proposed amendments of Technical Book Guidance to Part F (Conservation of fuel and power) (Building Regulations) and agreed that it be submitted in draft form by 19th December deadline, advising that it was subject to Council ratification on 10th January 2022.

DoF Consultation on Proposed Building (Prescribed Fees) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To consider a draft response to a Department of Finance consultation on proposed amendments to Schedules 1 and 2 of the Building (Prescribed Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 and general comments on the Regulations which are also being invited to inform a wider review of the fees regulations.

2.0 Decision(s) required and recommendations

The Committee is asked to:

- Consider the draft response to the Department of Finance consultation and agree, subject to any amendments, a response on behalf of the Council. Subject to Council ratification.
- The closing date for responses to this consultation is 23:59 on Sunday 19 December 2021, with responses to be made online.

3.0 Main report

Key issues

3.1 The Buildings Standards Branch of the Department of Finance (DoF) is seeking the views of the Council on their proposals to amend Building (Prescribed Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 and general comments on the Fees Regulations are also being invited to inform a wider review.

Background

3.2 The Building Regulations (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 (as amended) places a duty on a district council to enforce building regulations in its district, and also authorises district councils to charge prescribed fees for or in connection with the performance of prescribed functions of theirs relating to building regulations.

- 3.3 Prescribed fees for building regulation applications were introduced in Northern Ireland in 1982, prior to which the cost of processing applications and inspecting the associated building works on site was borne fully by ratepayers, rather than by those making the applications.
- 3.4 The Building (Prescribed Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 (as amended) sets out the prescribed functions for which a district council may charge a fee for and the level of fee that may be charged. The prescribed functions are:
- approval or rejection of plans or building notices;
 - inspection of works;
 - regularisation of unapproved works; and
 - approval or rejection of type approval certificates.
- 3.5 In the current Fees Regulations, the fees are set out in three schedules to the regulations:
- Schedule 1 for one or more small domestic buildings (new build dwellings);
 - Schedule 2 for certain small domestic buildings, extension and alterations; and
 - Schedule 3 for all other work, with fees based on estimated costs of the work.
- 3.6 The Fees Regulations have not been amended since 2013, when Schedule 1 and 2 fees were raised as part of a proposed two stage uplift. The second uplift did not happen and this has resulted in major shortfalls in the fees income covering the work set out in Schedule 1 and Schedule 2. As a result the ratepayer is subsidising these activities.

Consultation proposals

- 3.7 The Department has identified a full review as being needed to ensure that the level of fees charged by district councils for undertaking prescribed functions in respect of the building regulations follows the 'user pays principle' and moves towards 100% cost recovery. This would mean that the person making a building regulation application meets the full cost of processing an application for that type of work.
- 3.8 However, to achieve this and to bring the fees charged in line with those charged in other administrations in the UK, significant uplifts would be required, in some cases more than doubling the current fee level. The Department has recognised that a move to a 100% cost recovery model would therefore need to be achieved in a phased approach.

- 3.9 The department proposes a two-stage uplift of the fees as set out in Schedules 1 and 2 of the Fees Regulations. The first increase, of 17.5%, is proposed in April 2022, with a further increase proposed in April 2023 resulting in a total overall increase of around 35% for most of the fees included in these schedules. It must be stressed that this level of increase will in no way provide fees that would enable Building Regulations cost recovery for Belfast.
- 3.10 The consultation is also asking for views on the move to 100% cost recovery for the prescribed functions, and for general comments to inform a future wider review of the Fees Regulations.

Draft Consultation Response

- 3.11 Full details of our comments on the proposals are contained within the draft consultation response which is attached as appendix 1.
- 3.12 In summary, the proposals for a two-stage uplift of the Schedule 1 and Schedule 2 fees is welcomed. However, there is a concern that both uplifts may not occur, and that a full review of the Fees Regulations to provide near cost recovery may not take place. Therefore, it is suggested that the Department consider providing a mechanism by which the fees could increase annually in line with inflation in addition to any proposed increases.
- 3.13 The move to 100% cost recovery and the 'user-pays' principle is also welcomed, although it has been highlighted that the prescribed functions do not cover all activities required for the enforcement of the building regulations, and therefore will never equate to 100% cost recovery for the building regulations. For example, matters that are not covered include formal enforcement and court action, inspections to identify unauthorised works, giving general advice to the public, other council departments, etc., and carrying out prescribed functions on fee exempt works.
- 3.14 We also noted that the fee to give near 100% cost recovery in the processing of applications depends on the level of investigation into compliance with the building regulations that is undertaken. Guidance on what is expected of the Council's in this regard would be beneficial in demonstrating what the set fee was calculated as covering and would ensure greater consistency of approach across Councils.
- 3.15 Some issues that have been long recognised as anomalies have been highlighted including instances of disparity between Schedule 2 and Schedule 3 fees.

- 3.16 It has also been suggested that the prescribed functions should be reviewed to include additional items such as a charge for pre-application advice and an additional fee for more than one resubmission of plans that have been rejected. By way of illustration over the last 5 years the first-time approval rate for full plans applications is on average just 18%. This brings significant extra workload and an additional charge may well encourage greater diligence in submission preparation.
- 3.17 The fee exempt status of the installation of cavity wall insulation requires review as does the definition of a disabled person along with greater clarity on which works for a disabled person are fee exempt.
- 3.18 The package of consultation documents can be found on the Department's website: [-https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations](https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/consultations) and includes the following: –
- Consultation document outlining the proposals;
 - Draft Regulatory Impact Assessment;
 - Rural Needs Impact Assessment
 - and
 - Draft Equality Screening, for the proposed changes.
- 3.19 **Financial & Resource Implications**
- Some additional training of staff on the new fee scales will be required, along with guidance for customers on council website, etc. These will be carried out as normal course of business by existing staff.
- 3.20 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**
- The proposed amendments have been screened out of equality impact assessment requirements by DoF. The draft equality impact screening assessment is on the Departmental Website.”

The Committee endorsed the draft response, available [here](#), to the Department of Finance consultation on Proposed Building (Prescribed Fees) (amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 and agreed that it be submitted in draft form by 19th December deadline, advising that it was subject to Council ratification on 10th January 2022.

Department for Communities- Notice to Quit Consultation

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 To seek approval to provide a Council response to a consultation from the Department for Communities in

relation to proposals to amend the Notice to Quit period for private tenancies.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to

- Note the draft proposals and agree the Council response under paragraph 3.3 and Appendix 2.

3.0 Main report

Key issues

3.1 In addition to the consultation response agreed by members at the 11th November People and Communities meeting regarding the Communities Committee private tenancies bill a further correspondence has been received. The Department for Communities issued a consultation questionnaire on 1st December (Appendix 1) to seek views and opinions to inform its policy position on the extension of the notice to quit period for private tenancies. The closing date for response is 25th January 2022.

3.2 The Private Tenancies Bill which is currently making its way through the NI Assembly contains a clause to increase the Notice to Quit period that a landlord is required to give a tenant depending on the duration of the tenancy:

- Notice to Quit will be increased to 8 weeks for tenancies lasting more than 12 months up to 10 years.
- It also amends the Notice to Quit that a tenant has to give a landlord to 4 weeks if the tenancy has not been in existence for more than 10 years and 12 weeks if more than 10 years.

3.3 The Department wants to test if 8 weeks is a sufficient timeframe to allow tenants (resident in their homes for more than a year) to find an affordable, suitable new home and has therefore included a range of alternative Notice to Quit options for Council to consider.

3.4 Minister Hargey asked for some further research to be carried out on a range of Notice to Quit options and this work was recently completed by the Chartered Institute of Housing. This research has been summarised within the consultation document to provide additional context.

3.5 It is important to note that the draft Bill contains a provision which would allow the Notice to Quit to be amended in the future.

3.6 The current notice to quit period under the Private Tenancies (NI) Order 2006 as amended by the Housing (Amendment) Act (NI) 2011 are as follows:

- Less than 5 years tenancy- 4 weeks' notice to quit.
- More than 5 years but less than 10 years- 8 weeks' notice to quit
- More than 10 years – 12 weeks' notice to quit.

3.7 The response to the questionnaire is contained in Appendix 2, however the draft response is summarised as follows;

1. The Council supports the view that the landlord should be required to give a longer Notice to Quit period than the Notice that a tenant is required to give a landlord.
2. The Council supports the view that Notices to Quit should vary depending on the length of the tenancy.
3. The Council supports the view that 12-month fixed term tenancies should be given more than 4 weeks' notice to quit
4. The Council supports the view that the Notice to Quit period that a landlord should be required to give a tenant where the tenancy is between 12 months and 10 years in length should be 12 weeks
5. The Council agrees that exemptions should be applied for certain defined circumstances and the Notice to Quit period should be reduced to 4 weeks where exemptions apply.
6. The Council supports the view that tenants of HMOs should be given the same legislative protection as other private rented tenants. Tenants of HMOs are often the most vulnerable members of the community members so should be treated equitably in terms of the Notice to Quit period.

3.8 Financial and Resource Implications

The Private Tenancies Bill when enacted will give local councils additional enforcement powers to deal with issues in the Private Rented sector. These additional powers will mean more enforcement officers will be required to deal with the additional workload. There will be fixed penalties introduced for some of the offences, but fixed penalty income will not cover the additional staffing and administrative resources required.

3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

None associated with this report.”

At the request of a Member, the Committee agreed that the Department for Communities – Notice to Quit Consultation, available [here](#), be amended to stipulate an 8 week notice to quit period.

The Committee endorsed the draft response, subject to the aforementioned amendment, and agreed its submission by the 25th January deadline, following ratification at the Council meeting on 10th January.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Naming of New Park and Sportszone at Divis Back Path

The Committee was reminded of the agreed policy framework for managing requests to name parks, as agreed by the former Parks and Leisure Committee, at its meeting in August 2008.

The Director Neighbourhood Services advised that the 'The Westlink Sports Activity Park' (its working title for funding purposes) was situated at the Divis "Back Path" area located between the rear of Cullingtree Road and the Westlink. It stretched from Devonshire Place, near the Grosvenor Road to land adjacent to the Frank Gillen Centre, near Divis Street. It had opened to the public in early July 2021, following a major £1m development, creating a valuable new asset for residents in this part of the west of the city.

In terms of the Divis "Back Path" Naming Process, in line with the policy framework, local stakeholders had been asked to submit suggestions for potential names for the Divis "Back Path". A panel (including nominated members of the "Back Path" Forum which was the local reference group for the development) had considered the submissions against the criteria in the Council's policy framework. Engagement had subsequently taken place via local meetings with Youth Organisations, Healthy Living Centres, Churches, Community Groups and Sporting Organisations and suggestions had been submitted by the groups after they had received information around the site and its historical background. A range of three potential names had been discussed, with the following having been agreed:

- Nuggets Nest – this had been suggested to acknowledge the work carried out by Gerry "Nugget" Nugent who had volunteered in the community, particularly Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club, for over 45 years. However, it had been highlighted that naming the park after a living individual did not comply with the criteria of the naming policy;
- Divis Back Path – The site had always been referred to as "Divis Back Path" and people often associated the location with the name; and
- Páirc an Lonnáin (Loney Park) – this had been the most popular amongst local groups, given the historical context of the site which was the location of the old Pound Loney. Many people still living in the area were originally from the Loney.

In line with the Council's naming policy framework, the Committee granted approval to proceed to full public consultation using the Council's Citizenspace around the following two proposed naming options:

- Divis Back Path Park
- Páirc an Lonnáin

It was noted that the results would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee where approval would be sought for the final name of the park.

Stadia Community Benefits Initiative update

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To advise Committee of progress with the Stadia Community Benefits Initiative (SCBI) and update on the action plan.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note progress to date.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 The Council has been undertaking the Leisure Transformation Programme to renew its Leisure facilities across the City. This Programme has been influenced by the Partnership opportunities presented by the NI Executive Stadia Programme.

3.2 The Council, Department for Communities (DfC) and the Irish Football Association (IFA) have recognised the opportunities presented by the Stadia Programme, have committed to work together to maximise these benefits, and have agreed to establish a Stadium Community Benefits Initiative as part of the Belfast Community Benefits Initiative (‘the Project’) to implement and deliver agreed objectives including promoting equality, tackling poverty, and tackling social exclusion within the Belfast area.

3.3 In March 2016 the Council, DfC and IFA signed an agreement which sets out their respective commitments to the project. As other major stadia are developed in Belfast it is anticipated that other sports governing bodies shall become parties to the agreement. At its April 2018 meeting People and Communities committee agreed that Council would work with the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) within the Stadia Community Benefits Initiative and recognised their significant planned investment in gaelic games in the city to support their Gaelfast strategy. GAA activities became fully incorporated into the action plan at the start of financial year 2019-2020, with Gaelfast staff imbedded into the governance structure at Communications Board, Delivery Board, Policy and Performance Board.

3.4 The agreement is for a period of ten years with financial commitment from Council and IFA in place to the end of March 2026. Delivery is managed through monthly meetings of the Delivery Board, which reports quarterly to the Policy and Performance Board. Financial and performance reports will be presented to Council and other partners’ Boards as necessary. Formal review of the agreement will be carried

out in this financial year in accordance with the requirements to review at years 5 and 10.

3.5 The Policy & Performance Group is responsible for agreeing the Benefits Realisation Plan and associated annual targets. Work was undertaken to ensure the end benefits/outcomes are aligned to partners' strategies. To measure the progress of this the Council and the IFA have developed a range of indicators/intermediate benefits which are monitored through programme delivery:

- a. Number of coaching sessions provided
- b. Number of coaches engaged in delivering coaching
- c. Number of sessions improving club governance
- d. Number of volunteering opportunities
- e. Participation opportunities for under 16s
- f. Female participation rates
- g. Number of people completing skills development programme
- i. Number of sessions for under-represented groups
- j. Number of sessions for school and youth groups
- k. Community group usage of stadia
- l. Number of clubs attaining club-mark
- m. Educational opportunities
- o. Number of programmes targeting ASB
- q. Improved collaborative working
- r. Number of disabled participants
- s. Number of older people participating

3.6 Following the completion of a baseline assessment in early 2017, annual work-plans are developed each year. The 2021 – 2022 action plan was developed with a view to delivering a majority of activities using online methods in Q1 and Q2, with increased direct delivery in Q3 & Q4. The action plan for 2021 – 2022 includes a mixture of sports specific programmes (e.g. National Governing Body specific coach education) and some joint collaborative initiatives delivered by both sporting codes.

Performance

3.7 Programme delivery to date in year 5 (financial year 2021/2022) has been successful. Effective advance planning has mitigated covid restrictions and no planned initiatives were postponed during Q1 & Q2. Details of the IFA and GAA specific activities are included at appendix 1 and appendix 2. Joint initiatives are planned for Q3 and Q4 and include sports nutrition courses, club funding, female coaching, club ethos, mental health first aid, collaborative delivery in schools.

3.8 Financial Implications

In accordance with the Council's obligations under its DfC Funding Agreement for the Olympia Regeneration Project, the Council has committed a sum of £100,000 per annum for a minimum of ten years, so that a minimum of £1,000,000 is contributed in total to the Project.

3.9 Equality Impact/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no additional impacts related to this report."

The Committee noted the update.

Partner Agreements Quarter 2 Update

The Committee noted the quarterly progress report in relation to Partner Agreements at seven sites and that all Partners had been compliant on reporting matters and financial checks for July – September 2021.

Management of Clarendon Playing Fields

The Committee considered the following report:

"1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To request members approval to proposed changes to the legal agreements affecting Clarendon Playing Fields.

1.2 To seek permission to update previous committee approvals regarding Clarendon Playing Fields as set out below.

2.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to approve:

- the variation of the current Facility Management Agreement dated 1st October 2005 and associated Assignment and Variation dated 2nd June 2008 (the Agreement) to effect transfer of the interest thereunder from Clarendon Development Association, incorporated, (CDA Inc.) to Clarendon Development Association, unincorporated, (CDA Uninc.) and that the Agreement would run on a month to month basis (as previously agreed by this Committee on 13th October 2015).
- the grant of a 10 year licence to CDA Uninc. for the siting of a portable building at Clarendon Playing Fields, as per the terms of this Committee approval of 13th October 2015 (note the said Committee previously approved grant of the said Licence to CDA Inc.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

- 3.1** The Council entered into a 10 year Facility Management Agreement with Clarendon Development Association in October 2005 and in June 2008 the Facility Management Agreement was varied to:-
- take account of Clarendon Development Association having registered at Companies House as a company limited by guarantee;
 - amend clause 3.1 of the Agreement regarding the term; and
 - amend the 1st Schedule of the Agreement relating to the description of the playing facilities.
- 3.2** When the Agreement reached its termination date in 2015, approval was granted for a month to month extension by this Committee on 13th October 2015 whilst the future management of the asset was considered.
- 3.3** In May 2017 this Committee approved the termination of the Agreement and, based on the proven track record of community benefit delivered by CDA Inc. at Clarendon Playing Fields, Committee authorised a preferential use agreement for Clarendon Playing Fields to CDA Inc. Community outreach work was to be delivered from the portable building supplied and maintained by CDA Inc. at Clarendon Playing Fields with the grant of a 10 year licence with retrospective approval by Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in November 2017 (the portable building having already been installed at Clarendon Playing Fields by CDA Inc. with planning approval granted in March of that year).
- 3.4** Negotiations between CDA Inc. and Community & Neighbourhood Service Officers regarding the termination of the Agreement and a move to a preferential use agreement were protracted. The Agreement was never formally terminated and a preferential use agreement was subsequently never entered into.
- 3.5** The proposed licence for the portable building was also never put in place although CDA Inc. continued to deliver services from it and in March 2020 Council was advised the governance arrangements for CDA Inc. had changed in October 2018 from incorporated to unincorporated and that CDA Uninc. were delivering the said services since October 2018.
- 3.6** This change has caused delay in issuing the quarterly Agreement payments whilst Community & Neighbourhood Service Officers worked through necessary due diligence assessments for CDA Uninc. That due diligence has been

completed to the satisfaction of Community & Neighbourhood Service Officers.

3.7 Members will be aware that Clarendon Playing Fields is one of the sites identified by this Committee to explore pilot community asset transfer arrangements. In the coming months Officers of CNS will be working with Clarendon Development Association (unincorporated) as the current site manager to develop:

- A community benefits realisation plan
- A business case to demonstrate the organisations long term sustainability
- Recommended mechanism for of the transfer of the asset to community management assessed against the draft framework.

3.8 Community & Neighbourhood Service Officers are therefore seeking Members approval to transfer the interest falling under the Agreement to CDA Uninc. and to enter into a licence with CDA Uninc. for the siting of the portable building on Council lands at Clarendon Playing Fields as set out above.

Financial & Resource Implications

3.9 All costs for the portable building and otherwise associated with this report shall be met by CDA Uninc..

3.10 CDA Uninc. shall pay a licence fee of £375 per annum to Council for the licence of the land on which the portable building is sited at Clarendon Playing Fields.

3.11 City and Neighbourhood Services will recommence payments aligned to provision of services under the terms of the Agreement, the payments being allocated from the relevant revenue budget, when the transfer of the Agreement to CDA Uninc. has been completed, in accordance with this Report to the the satisfaction of Legal Services.

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

3.12 None associated with this report.”

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Operational Issues

Update on Pest Control Service

The Director of City Services provided the Committee with an update on pest control services following the Committee update and recommended actions at its meeting in September 2021.

She reminded the Members that, at that meeting, it had been agreed that all pest control services would resume to all tenures and that officers would investigate the establishment of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with both the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and Housing Associations, with a view to the Council discussing the opportunity of recouping the costs for these services.

The Director reported that, subsequently, on 14th September, the Chief Executive had received correspondence from Minister Hargey, Department for Communities, raising concern about the Council's restricted Pest Control services for the NIHE and Housing Associations. She drew the Members' attention to a response that had been forwarded that had advised that pest control services would be resuming to all tenures and that the Council would be exploring the establishment of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with both the NIHE and Housing Associations with a view to the Council discussing the opportunity of recouping the costs for these services.

As previously agreed, the Operational Director had written to the Regional Manager of the NIHE and all Housing Associations to advise that services would resume and that the Council would welcome a meeting to discuss the establishment of an SLA between both parties. Services had subsequently resumed in early October for all tenures.

The Director reported that a meeting had been held on 16th November with the NIHE to explore the option of an SLA. At that meeting, the NIHE representatives had shared concerns about ensuring equity across all constituents and tenures allowing access to Belfast City Council pest control services free of charge. They had advised that the NIHE had approximately 30,600 properties in the Belfast City Council area and paid 100% rates on all these properties, whether occupied or void, and they had expressed the need to ensure that NIHE tenants were entitled to benefit from the Council's free public health pest control services.

It had also been highlighted that the NIHE had used its own contractor for pest control over the last 18 months and had absorbed this cost directly. Their service requests had totaled approximately 1400 over the period of September 2020 to 2021, this was significantly more than a normal pre Covid year which was, in their opinion, mainly due to the reduced provision of Council services.

The Director reported that, since the last update in September, the waiting time for an appointment for an internal treatment or sewer baiting treatment was now approximately 3 weeks. She detailed that the impact of the pandemic generally and within front line services continued to challenge the resumption of the operational services to pre-pandemic service standards. In addition, recruitment was currently underway to fill vacancies which in turn had reduced the overall capacity of the team. It was expected that in the coming weeks waiting times would increase significantly as referrals fully resumed for Housing Associations and NIHE properties, however, she advised that these would be closely monitored.

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People and Communities Committee
Tuesday, 7th December, 2021

The Committee noted the update report on the current position for pest control services and the resumption of pest control services for NIHE and all Housing Associations.

Chairperson