

# Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 15th April, 2022

## MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AND  
REMOTEY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Groogan (Chairperson);  
Aldermen Haire, Kingston and Sandford; and  
Councillors Black, Bunting, Carson, Garrett,  
Heading, Lyons, McAllister, McLaughlin, McReynolds,  
Murphy, Pankhurst and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;  
Mr. R. Cregan, Deputy Chief Executive and Director  
of Finance and Resources;  
Mr. R. Crozier, Director of Neighbourhood Services;  
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Physical Programmes;  
Mr. J. Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer; and  
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Alderman Dorrian and Councillors Beattie, Long and McDonough-Brown.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 28th March were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th April, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

### Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

### Restricted Items

**The information contained in the reports associated with the following eight items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.**

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the Press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following items as, due to the nature of the items, 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.

**Appointment of Director (Operational)  
of City and Neighbourhood Services**

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing details of the recruitment and selection process which had resulted in the appointment of Mr. David Sales to the post of Director (Operational) of City and Neighbourhood Services.

**Update on Industrial Action**

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing an update on the regional industrial action involving members of Unite the Union, which had taken place between 21st and 27th March and advising of the potential for further action.

**Update on Organisational Recovery**

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing an update on the Council's organisational recovery and adopted the recommendation that priority be given to introducing a phased return of customer facing services to normal business as soon as possible.

**City Hall Recovery Plan - Update on Progress**

The Committee noted the contents of a report providing an update on the progress being made across each of the operational areas in implementing the City Hall Recovery Plan.

**Requests for the use of Council Parks**

The Director of Neighbourhood Services submitted for the Committee's consideration a report providing details of the following requests for the use of Council parks in 2022:

- Belsonic – Ormeau Park – 13th to 26th June (9 live events);
- Belfast Mela – Botanic Gardens – 28th August; and
- Planet Love Festival – Boucher Road Playing Fields – 10th September.

The report also sought multiple year approval for Belsonic to use Ormeau Park up to and including 2024, for up to a maximum of ten concerts each year, and for the Council to continue to provide financial support of £20,000 to Belfast Mela, given the positive impact which it had on the City. Accordingly, she recommended that the Committee:

- i. approve the requests for the use of Ormeau Park, Botanic Gardens and Boucher Road Playing Fields, on the dates outlined above and delegate authority to her:

- a. to negotiate, in conjunction with the Council's Commercial Manager, an appropriate fee, where applicable, which recognised the costs to Council, minimised negative impact on the immediate area and took account of the potential wider benefit to the City's economy; and
- b. to negotiate satisfactory terms and conditions of use via an appropriate legal agreement, to be prepared by the Council's Legal Services section, including managing final booking confirmation dates and flexibility around 'set up' and 'take down' periods and booking amendments, subject to:
  - the organiser resolving any operational issues to the Council's satisfaction;
  - compliance with any Covid-19 restrictions in place at the time of the event; and
  - the organiser meeting all statutory Planning and Building Control requirements, including the terms and conditions of the Park's Entertainments Licence.
- ii. grant multiple year approval for Belsonic to host concerts in Ormeau Park each June up to and including 2024, and remove the need for Committee approval in 2023 and 2024 by allowing each concert to be approved under the scheme of delegation, based on a review of the previous year's outcomes and officer recommendations; and
- iii. agree to continue to provide funding of £20,000 to the Belfast Mela.

After discussion, the Committee adopted the recommendations, subject to recommendation ii. being amended to reflect that a decision on whether or not to grant approval to Belsonic to hold concerts in 2023 and 2024 would be taken by the Committee, rather than under delegated authority, also on the basis of the previous year's review.

### **Official Visit of US Secretary of Labor**

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that Martin J. Walsh, United States Secretary of Labor, would be undertaking an official visit to Belfast on 26th and 27th May. Secretary Walsh had, in the past, addressed the Council in his role as Mayor of Boston and retained a strong interest in Belfast and Northern Ireland.

He reported that a request had been received on behalf of Secretary Walsh to meet on 26th May with the leaders of the Political Parties and, immediately afterwards, to address a special meeting of the Council on issues such as inclusive economic recovery, city resilience and climate intervention, Innovation City Belfast, investment and business ambitions with the United States. A "US International Homecoming" lunch event, involving business, community and political representatives, would also be taking place in a City centre venue that afternoon, during which Secretary Walsh would

reinforce his country's ongoing support for Belfast and Northern Ireland. The Council had been allocated ten places at that event, at an estimated total cost of £3,000, which would be met from existing budgets.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee approve:

- i. a request for Secretary Walsh to address a special meeting of the Council at 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 26th May;
- ii. a request for Secretary Walsh to meet with the leaders of the Political Parties at 9.15 a.m. on Thursday, 26th May; and
- iii. the attendance of up to a maximum of ten people at the lunch event being held on the afternoon of Thursday, 26th May, at a cost of approximately £3,000.

After discussion, the Committee agreed, given the cost to the Council of attending the lunch event, to adopt recommendations i. and ii. only.

## **2 Royal Avenue**

The Chief Executive submitted for the Committee's consideration a report providing an update on future proposals for 2 Royal Avenue and on the Levelling Up Fund - Round 2. Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee:

- i. note the success of the current meanwhile use of 2 Royal Avenue and approve, in principle, the proposal to seek a further meanwhile use until the end of December 2023 (with appropriate break clauses), with a similar focus on cultural, animation and creative activities.
- ii. note the update in relation to the Levelling Up Fund - Round 2;
- iii. grant approval for officers to develop a bid to the Levelling Up Fund - Round 2 in relation to the future use of 2 Royal Avenue, with regular updates to be provided to the Committee to ensure oversight and contribution to the application;
- iv. agree that officers use existing Levelling Up capacity funding to procure external support to assist officers in terms of bid development; and
- v. agree that officers develop a mechanism by which requests from other organisations for letters of support for funding applications be provided, if they support existing Corporate priorities.

After discussion, the Committee adopted recommendations i. ii. iv and v., as set out above.

In terms of recommendation iii., it was agreed that officers would continue to work up the bid for Round 2 funding for 2 Royal Avenue, with final approval to be deferred until its next monthly meeting to allow for other potential projects across the City which might qualify for this funding to be identified.

### **Update on Physical Programme**

The Director of Physical Programmes submitted for the Committee's consideration a report seeking approval to proceed with the implementation of procurement processes and providing details of recently awarded contracts.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. agreed that any necessary procurement processes, including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements, be initiated for any non-recurrent projects for 2022/23, for 2 Royal Avenue, in connection with the extended meanwhile use and/or the Levelling Up application and any externally funded projects for 2021/22 and 2022/23, as required, with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver;
- ii. noted the update in relation to contracts awarded between January and March 2022, as well as the emergency works completed under Standing Order 56; and
- iii. noted the comments of a Member on the need to progress community consultation on the proposed new leisure facility at Girdwood, under the Leisure Transformation Programme.

### **Matters referred back from Council/Motions**

#### **Motion - Energy Price Crisis**

The Chief Executive informed the Members that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 22nd February, had referred the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Smyth and seconded by Councillor O'Hara, to the People and Communities Committee in the first instance for consideration:

"This Council notes the spiralling cost of energy bills and the increased pressure on households across the City, particularly the most vulnerable. In order to provide long-term solutions to escalating energy prices the Council will:

- commit to civic leadership on the development of community energy projects across the City. These projects will focus on developing renewable energy in partnership with communities and expert organisations, including the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and sourcing financing for these community energy projects;
- engage with the Department for the Economy for support in developing community energy schemes; and
- write to the UK Government Treasury stating its support for a Windfall Tax on the Energy Companies which have recorded record profits.

For the purpose of this motion, the use of the term ‘community energy’ to mean community projects or initiatives focused on the four strands of reducing energy use, managing energy better, generating energy or purchasing energy. This included communities of place and communities of interest. These projects or initiatives share an emphasis on community ownership, leadership or control where the community benefits”.

The People and Communities Committee, at its meeting on 8th March, had agreed to refer the motion to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, on the basis that it was considered to fall more within the remit of that Committee.

Councillor Smyth, who had proposed the motion, referred to the increasing challenges being faced by families across the City, in terms of rising energy costs. He highlighted the need for a long-term approach to be adopted to address the issue and pointed out that the Council, as a civic leader, had an important role to play in driving new solutions around energy needs, with the concept of community energy at its core. Northern Ireland lagged behind Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland in terms of community energy policy and development support and significant work was required across all sectors to address this.

He went on to highlight the important role being played by the Northern Ireland Community Energy Co-operative in taking forward community owned, renewable energy initiatives and energy efficiency services. The co-operative had recently supported a project in Edenderry Village, covering approximately 200 homes, which enabled participants to make a just transition from a fossil fuel to an affordable low carbon heating system. He concluded by commending the work of the Council’s Climate Resilience Team and the Climate and City Resilience Committee and by urging the Committee to support his motion.

The Committee adopted the motion and agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting on how it would be facilitated, resourced and managed.

### **Governance**

#### **Revision to Scheme of Allowances**

The Chief Executive informed the Committee that the Department for Communities had forwarded to local councils a circular setting out revised maximum limits for basic and special responsibility allowances, with effect from 1st April, 2021. The maximum basic allowance had increased from £15,486 to £15,757, with the total maximum special responsibility allowance having risen from £117,774 to £119,835.

Accordingly, he recommended that the Committee consider whether it wished to apply the increases in the basic and special responsibility allowances, as outlined.

After discussion, the Committee:

- i. agreed not to apply the increases in the basic and special responsibility allowances, with effect from 1st April, 2021; and
- ii. agreed to write to the Department for Communities calling for the current legislation to be amended to provide for the establishment of an independent process to deal with the scheme of allowances, thereby removing Elected Member involvement.

### **Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

#### **Update on Belfast Region City Deal**

The Committee considered the following report:

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

**1.1 This report seeks to update the Committee on the progress of the Belfast Region City Deal (BRCD) which was formally signed on 15th December 2021 by the Belfast region partners, the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive. The report also includes an update on development of the Outline Business Cases (OBCs) and an overview of next steps in the implementation of the deal.**

#### **2.0 Recommendations**

**2.1 The Committee is asked to note:**

- the update on the signing of the Belfast Region City Deal in December, 2021;
- the programme overview and the next steps in the implementation of the deal; and
- the update in respect of the BRCD Council Panel.

#### **3.0 Main Report**

##### **Programme Update**

**3.1 The Belfast Region Deal Document and Governance Framework was approved by the SP and R Committee in October 2021 and individual BRCD partners also sought approval through their own governance structures in tandem. Following these formal approvals by partners including UK and NI Government the deal was formally signed on 15 December 2021 at the ICC Belfast, representing a key milestone for the Belfast region.**

- 3.2 As Members will be aware, the original planned event had to be scaled back and moved to an online format due to the emerging revision of Covid-19 restrictions at that time. Whilst this was not how partners had envisaged marking the signing of the Deal, moving to an online format allowed for a wider audience than would have been possible with an in-person event. Over 200 people viewed the event online on the day, including partners, Elected Representatives, Government officials and representatives from the business community.
- 3.3 It was a momentous day for partners across the Belfast region, with the first ever signed City Deal for Northern Ireland securing £1billion co-investment to help transform the region's economy over the next decade. On the day of the signing the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the First Minister and deputy First Minister and the Finance Minister signalled their full support for the implementation of the deal and for the partners' aim to deliver a 'Decade of Opportunity', resulting in significant press and media coverage for BRCD both on the day of the announcement and in the days following.
- 3.4 A number of communications products were developed in line with the announcement, including a programme video and an updated BRCD Summary document which has been circulated. Plans for strategic engagement and programme communication reflecting the new phase of the deal are currently being developed and Members will be updated as this progresses.

#### Investment Priorities

- 3.5 BRCD Partners have now developed Business Cases for their projects across the programme and Business Cases representing a majority of programme expenditure are now at an advanced stage.

#### Innovation

- 3.6 There has been significant progression in the Innovation Pillar with all five Innovation projects at an advanced stage of development, with a number of the projects having been progressed to RIBA stage 2 (design), through substantial investment at risk by the project sponsors.
- 3.7 The Queen's University led Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre (AMIC), Global Innovation Institute (GII) and the Institute for Research Excellence in Advanced Clinical Healthcare (i-REACH) projects have all received OBC approval from the Economy Minister and the Department of Finance.

- 3.8 The OBC for the Ulster University led Studio Ulster (formerly Screen Media Innovation Lab (SMIL)) project has been approved both by the Economy Minister and Department of Finance and the OBC for the Centre for Digital Healthcare Technology (CDHT) has approval from the Economy Minister but is awaiting approval from the Department of Finance.

**Digital**

- 3.9 Following Programme Business Case approval, the Digital pillar is commencing a new phase of work through the development of project OBCs. The Digital Programme is at an earlier stage of development, with one project, the i4c Innovation Centre at St Patrick's Barracks in Ballymena at a more advanced stage with Economy Minister approval for its OBC received in early April. OBCs for other projects, including investment in advanced wireless and Regional Innovation Hubs in Newry, Mourne and Down and Ards and North Down have commenced.
- 3.10 An OBC for a proposed Digital Twin project, led by Digital Catapult with support from industry, is also being progressed and is due to be further considered by the Digital Advisory Board in summer 2022.

**Tourism and Regeneration**

- 3.11 OBCs for all three regeneration projects, Carrickfergus, Newry City Centre and Bangor Waterfront, have received approval from the Communities Minister and Department of Finance.
- 3.12 In relation to the Tourism projects the Mourne Mountains Gateway project has received approval from the Economy Minister and Department of Finance. Casework for the Gobbins Phase 2 is now complete with feedback pending and Destination Royal Hillsborough casework is scheduled for June.
- 3.13 Belfast Stories is being progressed by BCC and it is expected that following engagement with the Department for the Economy, Tourism NI and BCC, that BCC will now progress design to RIBA 2 to enable a full OBC to be developed, with Casework review in summer 2023.

### Infrastructure

- 3.14 Following signing of the Deal and confirmation of funding, the Lagan Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge will now progress to the next stage of project delivery which involves development of the procurement strategy to procure a Design and Build Contractor to develop the project.
- 3.15 Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) Phase 2 and the Newry Southern Relief Road are at an earlier stage of development. The public consultation on BRT2 is now complete, with a Belfast City Council response agreed by CG&R Committee in October 2021. The project team are now preparing the draft consultation report for consideration by the Minister and following Ministerial decisions an Outline Business Case will be prepared.

### Employability and Skills

- 3.16 The Employability and Skills Board has been reconfigured as we move into the next phase of the Deal with a focus on delivery and responding to collaboration opportunities aligned to priority sectors where city deal investment is focused. The new Board initially focused on the programme of work, with the Action Plan for Year 1 now agreed set within the thematic priorities of the deal's Employability and Skills Proposition i.e. skills for inclusion, skills for growth and skills for a digital future. The work programme will integrate the contribution made by partners through alignment of their Employability and Skills interventions, including through Labour Market Partnerships, as well as seeking to create new opportunities for partnership working to drive improvements in employability prospects and increase skill levels in priority areas. A more flexible way of working that remains closely aligned to the priorities of DfE in terms of the 10X Skills Strategy and will continue to respond to the changing economic landscape resulting from the pandemic and other changes as they occur.
- 3.17 Recognising the scale of employment potential created via the city deal investment, partners are forming a dedicated project team who will have a key role in assessing the need for future skills intervention, working collaboratively to secure new funding in this area and to ensure that inclusion opportunities are maximised across the deal. In this regard work is underway across the programme of investment to integrate social value requirements within upcoming procurements, reflecting local and regional procurement policies and guidance.

- 3.18 The BRCD partners have already responded to the collaboration opportunity with new interventions such as Digital Futures, led by the FE Colleges and Digital Surge, led by Councils resulting in new interventions being offered within the market. Further success has also been achieved through the City and Growth Deal Complementary Fund with a up to £7.1m pot of funding ring fenced for a Digital Transformation Flexible Fund project. Work is currently underway to develop a business case for this project on a cross deal basis, offering grant support for small businesses to invest in hardware/software to support digital transformation.

#### Next Steps – Delivery Phase

##### Accountable Body

- 3.19 Members will be aware that the Council is the Lead Authority for the BRCD, which means that it carries out a range of functions that support and enable regional partnership working, such as employing the Programme Management Office and providing administrative, professional and technical support as required to support the Deal.
- 3.20 Now that the deal is signed, the Council will act as the Accountable body for the Deal ensuring that the partnership makes decisions in accordance with all legal, financial, and administrative requirements. Steps are being taken to put in place the financial and budget management arrangements and processes to ensure the BRCD funding is managed and accounted for appropriately. Appropriate accounting and reporting arrangements in line with specified requirements will also be established. Arrangements are also being made with partners to fund and establish programme management arrangements on a permanent basis

##### Memorandum of Understanding

- 3.21 As part of the long-term arrangements for working together across the BRCD partnership a Memorandum of Understanding is being developed to reflect partners' commitments to invest collectively and work collaboratively to achieve the ambitions for inclusive growth through delivery of the Deal. Once finalised and agreed this will then sit alongside the formal Deal Documentation.

##### Implementation and Financial Plans

- 3.22 The overarching deal document is supported by both an Implementation Plan and Financial Plan and the committee were provided with an update on both in the update to November committee. The Programme Management

Office has been engaging closely with the Department of Finance and project leads to finalise both documents.

**Contracts for Funding**

- 3.23 Before funding can flow directly to projects Contracts for Funding (previously referred to as Letters of Offer) need to be agreed between Departments and the Accountable Body and between the Accountable Body and Project Sponsors. The BRCD Partners have been working intensively with Departments over recent months to agree key commercial and practical issues and the BRCD Executive Board had previously written to the relevant government departments to emphasise the need for the issue to be prioritised. Following agreement on the key framework for the Contracts for Funding, it will need to be reviewed by all partners, contracts developed in relation to individual projects and appropriate legal advice will need to be taken.

**BRCD Council Panel**

- 3.24 Members will be aware that the BRCD Council Panel provides a forum for members from all six partner councils to meet to jointly discuss issues, progress and benefits of the BRCD. Each council is represented on the Forum by four members and, as previously agreed by this Committee, the four BCC nominees are the party group leaders (or their nominees) from the four largest Parties.
- 3.25 A virtual meeting of the Panel was held on 23rd February 2022, hosted by Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council. At this meeting, the Panel received an update on the signing of the Deal, progress on the overall BRCD programme of activity and key next steps. Members also received a presentation from Professor Paul Maropoulos on the Advanced Manufacturing Innovation Centre, one of the five Innovation centres of Excellence to be delivered by BRCD.
- 3.26 The minutes of the April and November meetings have also been approved and have been circulated. The next meeting will be hosted by Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council on 22 June 2022.

3.27 **Financial and Resource Implications**

All costs associated with the BRCD are within existing budgets.

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

The approach taken to develop the City Deal has been subject to independent equality screening and rural proofing and states that:

*'BRCD is inherently inclusive, affording an opportunity for the region to grow in a way that will benefit the economy of Northern Ireland as a whole, thereby enhancing the lives and well-being of its citizens. If during further development of the programme it becomes apparent that there may be an adverse impact on certain groups or communities then the partnership commits to carrying out further Section 75 work and including screening and EQIAs as and when appropriate.'*

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

**PwC Good Growth for Cities 2022 Report:  
Taking Action on Levelling Up**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on PwC's Good Growth for Cities 2022 Report: Taking Action on Levelling Up.

**2.0 Recommendation**

2.1 The Committee is asked to note the update on PwC's Good Growth for Cities 2022: Taking Action on Levelling Up report, a copy of which can be accessed [here](#), which measures the performance of cities and regions across the UK as indicators of 'Good Growth' and ranked Belfast as the highest-ranking city from the devolved nation.

**3.0 Main Report**

**Background**

3.1 The Demos-PwC Good Growth for Cities Index is an annual report which looks at broad measures of economic performance alongside well-being indicators to develop a metric for 'Good Growth' of cities. Specifically, the report ranks 50 of the UK's largest cities based on people's assessment of 12 key economic wellbeing factors, including jobs, health, income and skills, as well as work-life balance, house affordability, travel-to-work times, income equality,

environment and business start-ups. This year's report also includes two new indicators covering safety and vibrancy of local high streets. Indicators within the report align to the Council's strategic objectives such as the Belfast Agenda, Corporate Plan, BRCD. Belfast City Centre and Regeneration Strategy (BCCRIS), Bolder Vision for Belfast and the Reset for Growth report, as well as a number of other strategies and programmes.

- 3.2 Using these 'Good Growth' indicators, the report ranked Belfast in eighth place, and highest ranked city from the devolved nations. Other cities in the top 10 include London, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, Newcastle, Liverpool, Leicester, Sheffield and Bristol. Members will be aware of the projects and programmes Council are delivering aimed at job creation, regeneration and place making, vibrancy and making Belfast a city a great place to live, work, visit and invest. The recent findings from this report are a positive sense check in terms of our direction and focused priorities, and also highlighting the need to ensure that we continue to work to position the city to compete both nationally and globally.
- 3.3 Contained within the report are case studies of best practice at how investment in townscapes, support in community cohesion, efforts to foster local pride and attract new types of businesses are being used to boost growth. Belfast was selected as a case study for inclusion within the report, referencing a balanced and deliberately interventionist approach to regeneration. Work being undertaken by the city to invest in place-making, open and green spaces, community infrastructure, connectivity and cultural and tourism offerings in order to create a more attractive, accessible, and vibrant city centre which connects to surrounding communities are highlighted as best practice. It also referred to city investment plans including a citywide commitment to investing in neighbourhoods, leisure and community facilities and to strategies that integrate physical regeneration with cultural, social and environmental regeneration. It highlighted the Bolder Vision for Belfast as being key to a stronger and more resilient city core and acting as a call to action for the council, civic partners, local businesses and the wider local community. It also highlighted how Belfast is working to establish itself as a cultural centre in order to realise its global cultural and economic ambitions, referencing the 10-year cultural programme, UNESCO City of Music and the Belfast Stories development plans. The city's innovation and inclusive economic growth plans, supported by the BRCD investment and Belfast's position as the number one city for FinTech investments were referenced and that further investment in digital connectivity and supporting centres of excellence would drive Belfast forward as a global digital and scientific centre and globally significant destination for innovation.

- 3.4** While the report welcomes the Levelling Up White Paper, analysis within the report demonstrates that Government, public and private sectors need to continue to work collaboratively to address regional inequalities and capitalise on the once in a generation opportunity to create successful places and deliver good growth. Members will be aware that the Council is working collaboratively with public, private, community and key anchor institution partners across a number of partnerships including Innovation City Belfast, Dublin Belfast Economic Corridor, Belfast Region City Deal and the Climate Commission and to deliver strategic programmes of work including A Bolder Vision, a Future City Centre Programme and neighbourhood regeneration aimed at delivering our shared collective ambitions as outlined within the Belfast Agenda.
- 3.5** The report notes that in general cities which performed well in this year's index had strong local economies, and strong environmental and safety credentials. It also notes that the pandemic has caused a shift in public priorities, with people wanting to be more connected with their local communities and to live in greener, fairer places. Members will be aware of the effects of the pandemic in Belfast, and efforts by the Council to address the impact on our communities and businesses, including the delivery of the DfC Covid Recovery Revitalisation Programme and via Belfast: Our Recovery plan. The report has found that the shift in public priorities has also altered the growth prospects of cities and regions as people change how and where they want to work and live, with small and provincial cities benefitting more in the context of the levelling up agenda. This provides an opportunity for Belfast in terms of its desire to attract and retain residents in the city to deliver on our Belfast Agenda ambitions including to attract 66,000 new residents by 2035.
- 3.6** The report tracks regional and city recovery across different demographic and societal groups including young workers, ethnic groups, and women, however it does not publish the breakdown per city and region.
- 3.7** The report also proposed four key areas for cities and regions to consider as they develop Levelling Up plans and continue to address economic recovery. In order to secure a fairer economic recovery and build sustainable growth it highlights that local and central government and the private sector should focus on the following:

1. Levelling up and the reality of regional inequality;
  2. Capitalising on growth outside the larger metropolitan cities;
  3. Driving social mobility and addressing intergenerational inequality; and
  4. Green growth to provide the basis for all future action
- 3.8 There are various actions that sit below these priority areas for central and local government and businesses relating to investment in relationships across the public, private and third sectors to develop place strategies for place-based transformation; investment in high streets; sector focused employment investment; reskilling and apprenticeships; local economic strategies; housing education; improved transportation links; circular economy and green growth; net zero and sustainability.
- 3.9 These action areas align to Belfast’s strategic ambitions as outlined in the Belfast Agenda, and propositions outlined within the Innovation & Growth Commission ‘Reset for Growth’ report aimed at amplifying the city and region’s future success focused around priorities on being more globally relevant; immediate action on climate change and turning this into an economic opportunity; housing development; developing a stronger core city and delivery of a Bolder Vision and a focus on building world-renowned business clusters.
- 3.10 **Financial and Resource Implications**
- None associated with this report.
- 3.11 **Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment**
- None associated with this report.”

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

**NI Assembly Public Accounts Committee**  
**Report on Planning in Northern Ireland**

The Committee considered the following report and accompanying draft response in respect of the Public Accounts Committee’s report on planning in Northern Ireland:

- “1.0 **Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**
- 1.1 The NI Assembly, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has published a report and recommendations in relation to Planning in Northern Ireland. This Committee report provides an overview of the PAC report and recommended response from the Council. The proposed response was considered by

the Planning Committee on 12th April for notation. The Council's proposed response is attached.

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1** The Committee is asked to note this report and approve the attached response to the PAC report.

**3.0 Background**

**3.1** In February 2022, the Planning Committee considered two recent reviews of the NI planning system:

- Firstly, the Northern Ireland Audit Office's review of the NI planning system, a copy of which can be accessed here: <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/publications/planning-northern-ireland> and
- Secondly, the Department for Infrastructure's review of the implementation of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, a copy of which can be accessed here: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/review-planning-act-ni-2011-report>

**3.2** Following publication of the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report, the NI Assembly, Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has been hearing evidence from key stakeholders. The following sessions were held.

- Evidence from the Department for Infrastructure – 10 February 2022
- Evidence from SOLACE – 17 February 2022 (including evidence from Kate Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control, Belfast City Council)
- Evidence from NILGA – 24 February 2022

**3.3** The PAC subsequently published its report on 'Planning in NI' on 24 March 2022. This paper provides an overview of the PAC report and includes a recommended response from the Council. A full copy of the PAC report has been circulated.

**3.4** As further background reading, Members are referred to the agenda item to the February Planning Committee on the NI Audit Office report and the Departmental review of the implementation of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, see link below:

<https://minutes.belfastcity.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=167&MId=10643&Ver=4>

**Public Accounts Committee Report on Planning in NI**

**Overview**

- 3.1 Consistent with the findings of the NIAO report published in February 2022, the PAC report is extremely critical of the NI planning system. It concludes that the planning system in Northern Ireland is not working effectively or efficiently. The PAC calls for a fundamental review, led by someone independent from the Department for Infrastructure, to bring about the long-term, strategic changes needed to make the planning system fit for purpose.
- 3.2 In relation to performance, the PAC observes that since the transfer of functions in 2015, planning authorities have failed to deliver on many of their key targets, particularly on major and significant development. The PAC was ‘appalled’ by the performance statistics. It states that it is simply unacceptable that almost one-fifth of the most important planning applications aren’t processed within three years highlighting that such poor performance has an impact on applicants, developers and communities and is risking investment in Northern Ireland.
- 3.3 The PAC notes that progress on Local Development Plans (LDPs) has been equally poor – with none of the plans being able to progress to adoption in the seven years since transfer in 2015. The PAC heard of the potential for LDPs to shape communities and make decision-making processes easier, but noted that the process has been hindered by the complete underestimation of the complexity and volume of work required; a lack of key skills and resources available to councils. These challenges were considered to have been compounded by a series of unnecessary ‘checks and balances’ implemented by the Department. The PAC urges all those involved in plan-making to work together to streamline remaining LDP processes and produce these important plans as soon as possible.
- 3.4 The PAC goes onto to express concerns about the poor quality of planning application submissions (BCC is the only Planning Authority that has so far sought to directly address this through publication of its *Application Checklist* in 2018). The PAC is also concerned about a lack of transparency in decision making (officers advise that the Council follows good practice in this regard through clearly minuting the reason/s for the Committee’s decision where it overturns the officer recommendation. Committee reports also clearly explain where applications have been referred to the

Committee by an individual Elected Member and reasons why).

- 3.5 The PAC is critical of the role of the Department and its lack of action to address under performance in the system. It observes that the Department is not providing strong leadership in driving change and that it does not grasp the severity of the issues facing the NI planning system. In this regard, the PAC recommends that a commission is setup to oversee much needed change to the NI planning system, but that it should be chaired by someone independent of the Department.
- 3.6 The PAC is extremely concerned about the significant level of silo working within the planning system itself and comments that it one of the worst examples of silo working in the public sector that it has ever encountered. It notes the fragmentation between central and local government, statutory consultees and even within the Department itself highlighting that it will require a concerted effort from all those involved to work in a more productive way going forward.

#### PAC Recommendations

- 3.7 The PAC report makes 12 recommendations, some of which overlap with the recommendations of the NIAO report. The recommendations are reproduced below with additional context around each provided in the PAC report.
1. The planning system in Northern Ireland is not working. The Committee recommends that a Commission is established to undertake a fundamental review to ascertain the long-term, strategic changes that are needed to make the system fit for purpose. This should be led by someone independent from the Department.
  2. The Committee has heard that there are a number of opportunities to make immediate improvements to the planning system. We recommend that a commission is established to identify tangible improvements that can be achieved in the short term. This must focus on problem solving, delivery and achieving outcomes within a fixed time frame.
  3. The Committee expects action to be taken to improve the planning system. In lieu of any accountability for performance within the system, the Department will provide the Committee with a radical action plan and provide the successor Committee with an update on the improvements made in six months' time.

4. The Committee recommends that the Department considers ways to streamline the remaining LDP processes and works with councils to learn lessons from those that have been through the independent examination process with a view to taking a more pragmatic approach to the remaining plans. The Department and councils need to work collaboratively to produce these important plans as soon as possible.
5. The Committee recommends that all those involved in decision-making ensure that processes are open and transparent, particularly where a high degree of interpretation has been exercised. The Department and councils should consider how checks on good record keeping, to ensure transparency, could be carried out effectively.
6. The Committee recommends that the Department should ensure that there is suitable and proportionate means of engaging with the planning system. This should include a deeper consideration of the appropriateness of limited third-party rights of appeal.
7. The operation of the planning system for rural housing is at best inconsistent and at worst fundamentally broken. The Committee believes that it is essential that policy in the area is agreed and implemented equally and consistently across Northern Ireland. The Department should ensure this is the case.
8. The Committee recommends that the Department urgently considers how it exercises its oversight of the planning system. In the Committee's view, this must be accompanied with a cultural change. Intervention should be to support delivery and to make improvements. The current minimal approach is no longer sustainable.
9. The Committee recommends that the Department and local government should implement immediate changes to improve the quality of applications entering the system. Whilst this may require legislative change, we do not believe that this should be an excuse for delay.

10. The Committee recommends that planning authorities regularly review past decisions to understand their real-world outcomes, impact on communities and the quality of the completed development.
11. The planning system must be financially sustainable and this requires an appropriate, long-term funding model. The Committee recommends that all those involved in delivering planning work together to achieve this. In the short term the Department should take the lead on bringing forward legislation on planning fees as a matter of urgency.
12. There is a fundamental need for a cultural change in the way local and central government interact around planning. Whilst cultural change will take time, this should be reflected immediately in a more inclusive planning forum which includes representation from developers and communities.

#### Next Steps

- 3.8 As reported to the Planning Committee in February 2022, this is a pivotal time for the NI planning system. Publication of the NIAO and Public Accounts Committee reports represents a significant opportunity for much needed change and improvement.
- 3.9 The Department for Infrastructure must provide a formal response to the PAC report within 8 weeks of its publication (i.e. by 19 May 2022). The recommendations also require an update be given to the successor Public Accounts Committee on the improvements made in six months' time.
- 3.10 SOLACE (Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in NI) is expected to provide a response on behalf of the 11 councils. It is recommended that Belfast City Council also formally responds. A recommended response to the PAC report is set out below for approval by the Committee.
- 3.11 The PAC's recommendation to establish a commission to oversee the fundamental change necessary for the NI planning system is welcome along with the proposal to include representatives of the development industry and communities. It is only through the participation of all key stakeholders that appropriate solutions can be developed and the necessary improvements delivered. The Council has a very important leadership role in this change process and will be seeking representation on the commission and any structures that feed into the proposed processes.

- 3.12 The Department is organising an all-day workshop with local government officers on 29th April to formulate the beginning of a potential plan or approach to addressing the issues identified. In order to achieve the stated objectives the discussions will need to resolve a number of aspects including: the overall purpose and scope of the review, governance including representation, assurance, monitoring and reporting arrangements, potential for outside support and expertise, resourcing and approach to implementation.
- 3.13 It is hoped that these various reviews will establish a momentum and commitment to addressing the structural and operational challenges. It is therefore proposed that progress and any emerging proposals will be brought back to Committee as updates going forward.

3.14 Financial and Resource Implications

The existing NI planning system is inefficient and underperforming and the PAC report correctly identifies the need to address its longer-term financial sustainability. In January 2021, the Council reported to NIAO that the net cost of its Planning Service is nearly £1.2m after fee income which demonstrated the Council commitment to the effective resourcing of this function. However, the Planning function is far from the cost neutral model suggested at the time of Transfer and the PAC's recommendation that the longer-term financial sustainability of the NI planning system should be addressed is therefore welcomed.

3.15 Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

No adverse impacts identified."

COUNCIL RESPONSE

"Belfast City Council was extremely keen to engage with the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on first hearing of its review of the NI planning system. Council officials met NIAO at the outset, in December 2020, then followed this up with detailed written representations in January 2021 calling for fundamental change.

The Council notes the tonality of the Public Accounts Committee report and shares its high degree of frustration about how the NI planning system was designed and currently operates.

Both Belfast and wider region have enormous potential – economically, socially and environmentally. Belfast is the *First City*, economic driver for the region and of huge importance socially and culturally. If our City is to truly realise its tremendous potential, and to deliver on the Belfast Agenda, its Community Plan, then it must be supported by an efficient, effective and fit for purpose planning system.

To deliver on this, it is our firm opinion that further devolution must take place and that Belfast should enjoy the same autonomy and powers as other regional cities in these Islands, if it is to truly compete with them. Therefore, the Council must have responsibility for transport, regeneration, technical advice on most heritage assets and a much greater say on city wide infrastructure.

Consequently, Belfast City Council welcomes the Public Accounts Committee report, its recommendations and requirement for fundamental change.

The Council's Planning Service has been able to innovate to an extent, for example, through publication of its Application Checklist in 2018, as a means to improve the quality of planning applications on submission, but this like many other things is essentially a work around of the existing legislative process. There is no doubt that significant reform and change to planning legislation is required to address both the slow Local Development Plan process and underperformance in Development Management. This legislative change must be a key priority for the NI Assembly following the upcoming election.

The NI planning system must be about delivery and outcomes, rather than focusing on process and red tape.

In our view, it is necessary to have a much deeper understanding of how planning operates in NI in a systems context. In this regard, there are four main pillars for us to collectively focus on, namely, Culture, Systems, Delivery and Quality Outcomes.

We recognise that the only way to address the significant challenges with the current system is through collaboration and by truly working together. The Council recognises that it has an important leadership role in this journey of change and it very much looks forward to working with the Department for Infrastructure, the other ten councils, development industry, communities and other key stakeholders to bring about the fundamental reform that is needed. To this end, we have already been engaging with the Department and fellow councils on how to move forward.

We are also expecting the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in NI (SOLACE) to provide a response to the Public Accounts Committee report on behalf of the eleven councils.

**As sovereign local authorities, the other ten councils may also wish to make separate representations to the Committee.”**

The Committee approved the foregoing response for submission to the Public Accounts Committee.

**Advancing Community Wealth Building in Belfast –  
CLEs Spend Analysis of Belfast Procurement and  
Commissioning Working Group**

The Committee considered the following report:

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

1.1 To update the Committee on the emerging high-level spend analysis of the Belfast Anchors Procurement and Commissioning working group, which was established to explore how procurement and commissioning can embed community wealth building across the city to support inclusive and sustainable growth. This information was presented to the Social Policy Working Group in February, 2022.

**2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

i note the initial high level spend analysis in the attached appendix and next steps, as outlined at paragraph 3.7; and

ii note that CLES will present the completed analysis to a future meeting of Party Group Leaders and provide party briefings if required, to allow further consideration of the next steps for this project and how procurement and commissioning can be used to build and create local community wealth.

**3.0 Main Report**

**Key Issues**

3.1 The purpose of the Belfast Procurement and Commissioning working group is to carry out a spend analysis within their organisation, as part of commissioned work on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership. It includes representatives from the city’s anchor institutions, the VCSE Panel as well as interested representatives from the city’s large private sector organisations (AllState and BT).

- 3.2** Four anchor organisations formed the first tranche for the analysis that the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) carried out working with the respective procurement teams: Belfast City Council, South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, Queen’s University and Ulster University. This analysis includes consideration of the Belfast and NI business base to explore strengths and weaknesses in the region to identify good practice and opportunities for development.
- 3.3** Following initial consideration by the Belfast Procurement and Commissioning Working Group, the high-level analysis was presented to the Social Policy Working Group (SPWG) on 28th February. The SPWG has asked that this be shared more widely with Party Group Leaders and the SP and R Committee to raise awareness of this work and to help inform the action plan and next steps.
- 3.4** The following summarises the key points in the initial high-level analysis attached to this report. This will be enhanced as the data from the second tranche of anchors is added, strengthening the city’s evidence base on the role of procurement in the local economy.
- The four Belfast Anchors annual spend amounts to £443m, with 72% of this being spent with suppliers in Belfast and the rest of NI;
  - 28% of spend from the 4 Belfast Anchors is with Belfast based SMEs;
  - Belfast anchor institutions procure from relatively large local firms (of those available), but their largest suppliers are based outside NI;
  - A sectoral analysis of the spend outside of NI shows that this tends to be on administrative and support services and manufacturing;
  - There are few current suppliers which are ‘socially owned’ (7 out of 900).
- 3.5** Spend data has now been provided directly to CLES by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust with Belfast Metropolitan College also agreeing to participate in this second tranche spend analysis. The NI Housing Executive and Belfast Harbour Commissioners have agreed to participate, in principle, subject to further discussion with CLES.
- 3.6** Supported by CLES, this will inform the development of a shared action plan focused on the intelligence gathered of the local supply chain and local business environment. Some of the key questions being considered through this are:

- How can we use this information about public sector supply chains to better support the local economy?
- How does market intelligence flow into the procurement life cycle and how does it influence how we develop tender specifications?
- How do we understand our local and social economy better through procurement?
- Are there opportunities to improve organisational processes by sharing practices and develop a procurement toolkit?
- Social Value Procurement is a key tool but is there scope for Anchor organisations to connect/signpost resources to better support small local enterprises/social economy.

**3.7 The next steps for this project are:**

- CLES to provide individual organisational feedback on the spend/market analysis for each participating organisation
- Completion of the data supply and analysis for the second tranche of participating Anchors in the spend analysis to deepen our understanding of the potential to use procurement and commissioning to support community/local wealth building
- Co-design and develop a draft action plan with the Network
- Inform and raise awareness amongst the Community Planning Partnership of progress and the role that procurement can play to build local wealth in delivering inclusive growth.

**3.8 Financial and Resource Implications**

This work has been commissioned by the City and Organisational Strategy Department on behalf of the Community Planning Partnership and is covered within 2021/22 departmental estimates and is aligned to the Council's bespoke membership of CLES held by the Place and Economy Department.

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

There are no equality, good relations, or rural needs implications at this stage."

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

## **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

### **Asset Management**

The Director of Physical Programmes submitted for Committee's consideration a report seeking approval in relation to the following asset related disposal, acquisition and estate matters:

#### **Shankill Shared Women's Centre - Permission to Enter Agreement**

- The Committee approved the completion of a Permission to Enter Agreement with the Education Authority to complete boundary realignment and subsequent construction works.

#### **Land at Grampian Avenue Playground**

- The Committee noted an update on two land acquisitions which it had approved at its meeting on 22nd June, 2018.

#### **2 Royal Avenue – Extension of the Meanwhile Use**

- The Committee approved retrospectively an Addendum to the existing Contract with Small World Music Limited, thereby extending its services to 19th April, 2022.

#### **2 Royal Avenue – Lease for Bins Stores and Electricity Cabinet**

- The Committee granted approval to enter into a lease with the Department for Communities to regularise the arrangement for bins stores and an electricity cabinet which encroach onto Council owned lands.

#### **Ballysillan Playing Fields - Deed of Partial Surrender of Land**

- The Committee approved the surrender of a 1.56-acre plot of land, which was currently part of lands leased to Iceland Foods Limited, to facilitate the redevelopment of the Playing Fields.

#### **Site 10, Union Street – Renewal of Short-Term Licence**

- The Committee approved the renewal of a short-term licence to Sunflower Belfast Limited to use a small area of land at Site 10 for bin storage for a period of nine months from 4th May, 2022.

**Update on Area Working Groups**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the North Belfast Area Working Group of 30th March, including the following recommendations:

**BIF34 - Basement/Elim Project**

- to agree a new option, involving a scaled back version of the project with a new build on an existing asset owned by Elim Church at Gainsborough Drive and to note that, on this basis, approximately £600,000 out of the approved BIF budget would be available for reallocation, leaving a BIF allocation of £900,000.

**BIF45 - Midland Boxing Club**

- to agree to allocate an additional £150,000 to the Midland Boxing Club project from the £600,000 reallocation from the Basement/Elim project.

**BIF20 - Malgrove**

- to agree to allocate an additional £450,000 to the Malgrove project from the £600,000 reallocation from the Basement/Elim project and to progress a planning application for the wider sporting hub proposal.

**BIF41 - Marrowbone**

- to note the movement of this project to Stage 3 – Committed.

**Finance, Procurement and Performance**

**Update on Contracts**

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders, as per Standing Order 37a, as detailed in Table 1 below;
- approved the award of Single Tender Actions, in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions, as detailed in Table 2 below; and
- noted the award of retrospective Single Tender Actions, in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions, as detailed in Table 3 below.

**Table 1: Competitive Tenders**

<b>Title of Tender</b>	<b>Proposed Contract Duration</b>	<b>Estimated Total Contract Value</b>	<b>SRO</b>	<b>Short description of goods / services</b>
Provision of press and media photography services	Up to 3 years	£90,000	J Tully	The Council has an ongoing requirement for press and media photography as part of our marcomms delivery on behalf of the Council.
Patching (security installations and updates) of non-Microsoft packages	Up to 3 years	£34,000	R Cregan	To patch/install non-Microsoft packages. This keeps consistent support versions across our environment. DNS reputation checking helps prevent any malware calling back to control sites.
Laptops, docking stations and other peripherals	Up to 1 year	£500,000	R Cregan	New devices to facilitate hybrid working and replacement devices as per regular business as usual replacement cycle.
Purchase of new printers as old printers at various council sites become EOL and associated copy charges	Up to 1 year	£100,000	R Cregan	Approx. 80 printers are approaching end of life 'EOL' stage in 2022. If they break it may not be possible to get parts and they may need to be replaced. Replacement will be done on an ad-hoc basis.
Copy charges for existing multi-function printers	Up to 1 year	£100,000	R Cregan	Payment of copy charges for existing multi-function printers. Printers should be EOL but with limited used over the past 2 years

				should last longer and so a new contract is not being purchased yet.
Outdoor maintenance services	Up to 5 years	£1,250,000	S Toland	Delivery of de-icing and snow-clearance services during the winter months (Primary service) – includes C&NS sites (Parks, Leisure Centres, Waste sites, depots etc) and car parks (managed by Physical Programmes). Includes other outdoor maintenance activities to support in house operations i.e. power washing and street cleaning services, roof and guttering clearing and cleaning and any other specialist outdoor maintenance services required.
Consultancy Support for permanent recruitment of Business Support Clerks	Up to 1 year	£100,000	J Tully	Due to a recent significant increase in recruitment requirements within the Council. The external support will help clear the backlog of recruitment required.
Integrated Design Team to provide design development services to support the DfC Covid 19 Revitalisation Programme, – Supporting Vibrant Business Destinations	Up to 20 months	£60,000	J Greer	The Integrated Design Team will work with grant recipients to develop concept and technical designs, to provide advice regarding statutory approvals, procurement and delivery.

**Table 2: Single Tender Actions**

Title	Duration	Value	SRO	Supplier
Requirement for 1 x temporary Environmental Health Officer required for 24hr shift rota cover for essential service delivery within the Port Health service (fully funded)	Up to 6 months	£50,000	S Toland/ R Crozier	Hays Recruitment

**Table 3: Retrospective Single Tender Actions**

Title of Contract	Duration	Value	SRO	Supplier
Support for trade mission to SXSW for local creative businesses, support for music businesses and place positioning as outlined in the UNESCO City of Music designation (fully funded)	Up to 3 months	£57,000	J Greer	Score Draw Music Ltd
Supplier required to develop and deliver a Queens Jubilee fund to support constituted charitable organisations within the BCC local government boundary	Up to 7 months	£110,000	S Toland/ R Crozier	Community Foundation NI
Deliver a largescale outdoor event at Titanic Slipways called Cristal Palace - 2 Royal Ave (fully funded)	Up to 2 months	£60,000	J Greer	Belfast International Arts Festival

### **Equality and Good Relations**

#### **Race Champion and Race Action Plan**

The Committee considered the following report:

#### **“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues**

- 1.1 To update the Committee on proposals to develop a Race Equality and Diversity Action Plan and appoint a Race Champion.
- 1.2 The Belfast Agenda states that ‘In 2035, Belfast will be a City that is welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive.’ The Council’s Good Relations Strategy sets out our vision and values for a shared, peaceful and reconciled Belfast. It states that good community and race relations are essential for a healthy and safe City and that it will set the standard for Belfast to aspire

to be a place of welcome and diversity. The strategy outlines how we can play our part in building a better city for residents and visitors alike, where different identities can be strength and our diverse cultural traditions can all be part of collective cultural wealth; a City where everyone has an equal place and where no-one is left behind.

**1.3** A previous request from the Lord Mayor, Cllr. Kate Nicholl, for the appointment of a Race Champion and a Motion proposed by Councillor Canavan and seconded by Councillor Garrett, calling for the Council area to become a racism free zone, further highlight the importance of addressing race inequalities and racism. Two reports presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in June and December 2020, provided updates on existing work in this area. It was agreed that further consideration of how the Council could address the above proposals was required, and that recommendations should be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee at a later date.

**1.4** In addition, at the Council meeting on 4th April 2022, the following motion was proposed by Cllr Kyle and seconded by Cllr McMullan:

- that the Council supports Belfast City Council becoming a ‘Council of Sanctuary’ and supports the initiative to have Belfast recognised as a ‘City of Sanctuary’, in order to provide a welcome and safe place for asylum seekers, refugees and migrants and
- that a Race Action Plan be developed to review how we deliver our services and take action as an employer to create a diverse workforce.’

**2.0** **Recommendations**

**2.1** The Committee is asked to agree:

- i that a Race Champion be appointed from within Corporate Management Team to lead a Race Equality and Diversity Action Group to oversee the development of a Race Action Plan; and
- ii that the Council signs up to the Business in the Community initiative ‘Race at Work Charter’ initiative to learn from best practice and for support in developing our approach, agreeing actions and setting achievable goals and targets.

**3.0 Main Report**

- 3.1** The Council's approach to promoting good relations and tackling issues such as racism stem from the Good Relations Strategy. The Council's Shared City Partnership (SCP) oversees the work of the Council's District Good Relations Programme and the PEACE IV Local Action Plan. Through these, the Council facilitates a number of projects such as the Migrant Forum, the Diversecity Programme and recently, the Council has signed up to a 3-year Inclusive Cities Programme.
- 3.2** Consultation with black and ethnic minority groups in the community and a good relations audit have indicated that groups and people from black and ethnic minority groups find it challenging to engage with official structures and difficult to play a full and equal part in civic life and this is reflected in the statistics/data. They report that while positive relationships have been developed at community level with groups and individuals through Council programmes or through relationships with particular officers, black and ethnic communities find it difficult to have their voices represented at decision making level.
- 3.3** A review of current arrangements and programmes of work is required to identify where improvements can be made to promote the inclusion and visibility of black and ethnic minority groups in our workforce; to improve access to council services and elected members and to encourage the participation of black and ethnic minority groups in civic life.
- 3.4** It is therefore proposed that Corporate Management Team nominate a chief officer to undertake the role of Race Champion to establish and chair a Race Equality and Diversity Action Group. This group will oversee the development of a Race Action Plan with three distinct strands of work:
- **Workforce:** attracting more ethnic minority applicants and supporting our existing ethnic minority staff in the workplace
  - **Accessibility to services:** promoting access to council services to ethnic minority customers and citizens and;
  - **Civic leadership:** championing ethnic minority inclusion in decision making, in communities and in public life
- 3.5** Subgroups will be established for each strand to develop appropriate action plans which will be incorporated into one Race Action Plan. The subgroups will involve a variety of

staff including officers from Corporate HR, the Equality and Diversity Unit, Good Relations, Employability and Skills, departmental policy officers, community safety, the Customer Hub, Marketing and Communications etc. to ensure necessary linkages with existing relevant service delivery, activity, and work plans.

**3.6 Business in the Community's Race at Work Charter**

The Council has been approached by Business in the Community to sign up to its national Race at Work Charter. This campaign requires employers to commit to the following actions:

- Appoint an Executive Sponsor for race
- Capture ethnicity data and publicise progress
- Commit at board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying
- Make it clear that supporting equality in the workforce is the responsibility of all leaders and managers
- Take action that supports ethnic minority career progression
- Support race inclusion allies in the workplace
- Include BAME and other ethnically diverse led enterprise owners in supply chains.

**3.7** Already well established with employers in all sectors across the UK, involvement with this campaign will enable us to learn from existing best practice to develop our approach and actions and set achievable goals and targets. Involvement in this initiative is available to the Council through our existing membership of Business in the Community at no additional cost. It is therefore proposed that the Council signs up to the Race at Work Charter as a visible commitment to addressing racial inequalities.

**3.8 Financial and Resource Implications**

There are no direct resource implications in terms of costs associated with this report at present. Further resource implications will be identified through the development of a race action plan and costed for future approval.

A Chief Officer/Director will be required to champion this work and all chief officers will be asked to nominate officers to the three sub-groups identified at paragraph 3.4 and ensure that officers are released to participate in the groups and deliver the work required.

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

**Actions, which promote the inclusion of black and other ethnic minority communities in employment and civic life, would have a positive impact on equality and good relations within the city.”**

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

**Minutes of Meeting of Shared City Partnership**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Shared City Partnership of 11th April, including the recommendations:

**PEACE IV**

**Secretariat**

- to agree the key elements of the business case, the anticipated level of achievement and the mitigations required across the programme.

**Children and Young People**

- to endorse and promote the Share2BAware campaign.

**Building Positive Relations**

**BPR1 - Cross Community Area Networks**

- the modification, as approved by SEUPB, to permit a cross border residential visit to Dublin for the East Belfast Cross Community Area Network, as part of the place shaping stage.

**BPR5 - ROMA**

- to uplift the contract with FSP by 10%, approximately £16,900, subject to budget agreement with the Secretariat and approval by SEUPB.

**Shared Space and Services**

- to extend to September 2022 the contracts for volunteer delivery with Sustrans and Volunteer Now and also the narratives project with Mediation NI, within the current contract value to enable delivery and the achievement of targets.

### **PEACE PLUS**

- to approve the logistics for running future meetings of the Shared City Partnership; and
- that the SEUPB appointed consultants attend the next meeting of the Partnership to provide an overview of the role of the PEACEPLUS Partnership for the oversight of the 1.1. Co-Designed Local Community Peace Action Plan for Belfast.

### **GOOD RELATIONS**

- that the City Hall be illuminated on 5th July to mark the Memorial Week of the Srebrenica Genocide;
- that £8,000 be allocated towards a programme of activities for asylum seekers, led by Mears, subject to clarification being obtained on whether Mears could access the Mears Foundation to fund this work, given that its staff would be delivering the service and the need to ensure there was no duplication with what Mears had been contracted to currently undertake and that The Executive Office was content to support the project; and
- to note that, whilst no formal letter of offer had been received from The Executive Office towards the District Council Good Relations Action Plan, the Departmental Management Team was content to proceed using the Council's 2021/22 allocation figures.

### **Operational Issues**

#### **Minutes of Meeting of Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 8th April.

#### **Requests for the use of the City Hall Grounds**

The Committee approved the following requests for the use of the City Hall Grounds in 2022, with the organisers to submit an event management plan and risk assessment in advance of their event:

- 22nd July - Belfast Pride Family Fun Day; and
- 30th July - Féile Rocks Pride Concert.

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

The Committee agreed to adopt the recommendations made in respect of those applications received up to 1st April, as set out below, and agreed further to defer consideration of options for the future delivery of hospitality for functions to enable further information to be obtained:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
<b>2022 EVENTS</b>						
Law Society of Northern Ireland	18 May 2022	<b>Conference Welcome Reception</b> for guests attending their 2-day conference taking place in ICC Belfast.  Numbers attending - 100	A &B	No (waived as linked to Visit Belfast)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
Building Limes Forum	3 September 2022	<b>Annual Conference Reception and Dinner</b> for delegates attending a 3-day conference taking place in QUB.  Numbers attending - 100	A &B	No (waived as linked to Visit Belfast)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
The Pony Club	2 November 2022	<b>Annual Conference Reception and Dinner</b> for delegates attending a 3-day conference taking place in ICC Belfast.  Numbers attending - 100	A &B	No (waived as linked to Visit Belfast)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

*\*For all events noted above numbers and room layout will be reviewed and revised in line with Covid-19 social distancing guidelines at the time of each event.*

**Minutes of Meeting of  
Active Belfast Limited Board**

The Committee noted the minutes of the meeting of the Active Belfast Limited Board of 11th April.

**Issues Raised in Advance by Members**

**Illumination of the City Hall**

The Committee acceded to requests from:

- Councillor M. Kelly to illuminate the City Hall in red on Saturday, 28th May to mark Menstrual Hygiene Day;
- Councillor Walsh to illuminate the City Hall in red on Friday, 20th May, in support of An Dream Dearg's campaign for Irish language rights and the implementation of Irish language legislation, including the An Lá Dearg event being held at the City Hall on 21st May; and
- Councillor Garrett to illuminate the City Hall in rainbow colours later that evening to coincide with a vigil being held in memory of Aidan Moffitt and Michael Snee who had been killed in violent attacks in Sligo earlier in the week.

**Additional Item**

**Recruitment of City Solicitor and  
Director of Legal and Civic Services**

The Chief Executive sought and was granted approval to initiate an internal recruitment exercise to fill, on an interim basis, his former post of City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services, with political representation on the shortlisting and interview panel to consist of the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson (or their nominees) and Councillor Lyons.

Chairperson