

**Democratic Services Section  
Legal and Civic Services Department  
Belfast City Council  
City Hall  
Belfast  
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast  
City Council**

13th December, 2022

**MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the **Lavery Room and via Microsoft Teams** on Friday, 16th December, 2022 at 9.30 a.m., for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

**AGENDA:**

**1. Routine Matters**

- (a) Apologies
- (b) Minutes
- (c) Declarations of Interest

**2. Restricted Items**

- (a) Revenue Estimates and District Rate 2023/24 (Pages 1 - 16)
- (b) Update on Contracts (Pages 17 - 24)

**3. Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues**

- (a) Response to SONI Consultation on Energising Belfast Project (Pages 25 - 28)

4. **Physical Programme and Asset Management**

5. **Equality and Good Relations**

6. **Operational Issues**

- (a) Minutes of the Meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum  
(Pages 29 - 32)
- (b) Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel (Pages 33 - 76)
- (c) Requests for Use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality  
(Pages 77 - 82)

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank



By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 6  
of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Response to SONI Consultation on Energising Belfast Project</b>
<b>Date:</b>	16th December, 2022
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Debbie Caldwell, Belfast Climate Commissioner

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	To update the Committee on SONI’s consultation on Energising Belfast Project and present an officer submission for approval.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is requested to review the following officer submission to the SONI Energising Belfast Project, which has been forwarded to SONI on the understanding that Committee approval and Council ratification is required:
2.2	“Belfast City Council broadly welcomes the approach being taken by SONI within the Energising Belfast Project. The Council appreciates the efforts to minimise disruption to residents and businesses in Belfast.

2.3	In relation to the benefits of the project, as set out in SONI plans, these align with both the Council's and the city ambitions to enhance resilience, to become net zero, while supporting economic development, as set out in the Belfast Agenda, the Belfast Resilience Strategy, the Belfast Net Zero Carbon Roadmap, Belfast Region City Deal and the Draft Belfast Economic Strategy.
2.4	The Council will develop a Belfast Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) by the end of 2023. It would welcome SONI involvement in the LAEP process and alignment between SONI plans and those of the Council and city partners. The Council would welcome regular updates and meetings with SONI in relation to the Energising Belfast project so that officers and Elected Members can support local engagement and enhanced communication around this initiative and others.”
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	SONI is the electricity transmission system operator for Northern Ireland. SONI plans for the future of the electricity grid and operate it. This includes interconnecting to neighbouring grids and running the wholesale electricity market. The grid brings power from generators and sends it to NIE Networks. NIE then supplies electricity to every home, farm, community and business in Northern Ireland via its distribution network.
3.2	The Energising Belfast Project documentation describes the ambition to ensure that Belfast City Centre, its people and its businesses have the clean energy needed to grow. SONI states that ‘a thriving City centre is vital to the prosperity of the entire city and region and this project will deliver a grid ready to power the clean energy transition. This scheme will support the aspirations of the Council’s ‘Belfast Agenda’ to increase the employment and residential population in the city.’
3.3	The project aims to future proof the transmission system in Belfast to ensure businesses have capacity and the power they need to expand in the near-term and into the future, supporting the economic and societal vision of the Belfast Region City Deal and all partner councils in the Greater Belfast area. SONI is responsible for the design and securing planning consent and NIE Networks will lead on the construction phase of the project.
3.4	The project will deliver a new high-capacity underground cable in Belfast City Centre, as well as a new transformer at Castlereagh Main substation. SONI is also assessing the potential to build new substations at or next to existing sites in the city, or at new sites close by. This would mean that SONI can remove older overhead lines in the future and prepare the transmission system in the Greater Belfast area for future population and economic growth, as well as the electrification of heating and transport.

3.5	SONI has recently held consultation sessions in Belfast, more information on which can be found by clicking <a href="#">here</a> . This included a meeting on 14th September with the Council's Party Group Leaders to update them on the project. Feedback from that session has informed the Council's response.
	<b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b>
3.6	None
	<b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications</u></b>
3.7	None
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	None

This page is intentionally left blank



## Minutes of Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2022

### Attendance

#### Members:

Councillor Matt Garrett (*for Councillor Ciaran Beattie*)  
Councillor Christine Bower (*for Councillor Michael Long*)  
Councillor Billy Hutchinson  
Alderman George Dorrian  
Councillor Mal O'Hara  
Councillor Carl Whyte (*for Councillor Donal Lyons*)  
Alderman Sonia Copeland

**Apologies:** Councillor Fiona Ferguson, Councillor Emmet McDonough-Brown, Councillor Ciaran Beattie, Councillor Michael Long, Councillor Donal Lyons

#### Officers:

John Walsh, Chief Executive  
Trevor Wallace, Director of Finance (for Item 1)  
John Tully Director of City and Organisational Strategy (for Item 2)  
Christine Sheridan, Director of Human Resources (for Item 2)  
Sinead Grimes Director of Physical Programmes (for Item 3)  
Cathy Reynolds Director City Regeneration & Development (for Item 4)  
Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services (for Item 5)

### 1. Finance Update

The Director of Finance presented a summary of the current position for the 2023/24 revenue estimates, he outlined the uncontrollable costs and highlighted an increase in the projections for utility costs since the last update to Members. The Director outlined the subsequent impact on the District Rate and the specified reserves both for 2023/24 and future years for some of the options being considered. He advised that it was imperative that Members agree a Baseline Rate at the December SP and R Committee in order that work can progress to be able to set the District Rate by the legally required deadline of 15th February 2023. Members noted the significant challenges involved in setting the 2023/24 budget in these unprecedented times. Officers are continuing to challenge budget submissions and identify funding sources for the uncontrollable costs.

A query was raised by a Member in relation to recent legislation in the model for the setting of the District Rate and some Members stressed that this is considered going forward. It was also agreed that the Director follow up with the Department for Communities on current rate exemption policies and provide an update for Members at a future meeting.

The Director outlined the current proposals being considered in the other 10 Councils and a query was raised by a Member in relation to the status of rate support for some of the other Councils and what level this may be for 2023/24. The Director provided clarity as far as he could on this and it was agreed the Director of Finance will follow up and try to ascertain if there is any further update available.

The Director advised a detailed report on the current position and the proposals outlined would be presented to December's SP and R Committee.

## **2. Pay and Grading Review**

The Director of City and Organisational Strategy updated the Forum on the progress being made on the Pay and Grading review proposals. He outlined for Members the detail of the proposals put forward including current position and advised that engagement with the Trade Union Group is ongoing. The projected costs and the subsequent impact on the district rate is still to be identified and an update on this will be included in the Revenue Estimates and District Rate report to December's SP and R Committee. A query was raised by a Member in relation to the current NJC framework for Local Government Services which the Director of Human Resources provided clarity on.

## **3. North Foreshore Update**

The Director of City Regeneration and Development provided an update on the North Foreshore site and outlined the background to the Expression of Interest for Giant's Park for the commercial, leisure development brief. She provided an overview of the development brief process, the outcome of the process and the final approval made by SP&R Committee. The Director of Physical Programmes advised that given the unforeseen circumstances in the market since the original approval was granted the developer had since submitted revised proposals for the site. She advised that these revised proposals had recently been considered by the Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Steering Group. Detailed discussion followed and a number of queries were raised by Members in relation to accessibility to the site, sustainable transport and local community engagement which were

all noted by the Director of Physical Programmes to consider in the next stages. As recommended by the Castle, Cavehill, Zoo and North Foreshore Steering Group a report on the next steps in order to progress the stie options agreement will be brought to December's SP and R Committee for consideration.

The Director of Physical Programmes advised that a request had been made for a meanwhile use on part of the North Foreshore site, initially on a short term lease basis. It was agreed, in principle, that discussions on this meanwhile use could proceed with an update to be brought back to Members in due course.

#### **4. Cathedral Quarter**

The Director City of Regeneration and Development provided an update for Members on the Cathedral Buildings fire response which occurred on the 3rd October, causing the immediate displacement of 14 business and cultural organisations. The Director outlined the immediate response that took place managed by the Council, emergency responders, and statutory partners. Members also noted the subsequent support and advice that has been provided since and it was agreed a detailed briefing outlining the support and advice provided to date would be circulated to Party Group Leaders following the meeting.

#### **5. Planning Update**

The City Solicitor updated the Forum on the live planning applications and informed the Forum of applications that were being presented to the Planning Committee in the coming months.

Members also noted that the Replacement Planning Portal (new Planning IT system) had gone live as planned on 5th December and as previously advised was experiencing some initial issues. Officers continue to put in place internal contingences in order to mitigate any risks where possible.

#### **6. AOB**

#### **Dates of Meeting 2023**

Members noted the scheduled dates of the Forum meetings for 2023. The Chief Executive advised that, as previously agreed by Party Group Leaders, meetings will be held in person

commencing in January, 2023. A remote option will still be offered to those unable to attend in person, if required.



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel</b>
<b>Date:</b>	16th December, 2022
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Claire O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<i>After Committee Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>After Council Decision</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Sometime in the future</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Never</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the key issues which were considered by the Audit and Risk Panel on 6th December and present the minutes of that meeting for approval, including the updated Raising Concerns Policy,
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to note the key issues arising at the meeting on 6th December and approve the minutes at <b>Appendix 1</b> , including the updated Raising Concerns policy at <b>Appendix 2</b> .
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
	<u>Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO)</u>
3.1.1	The NIAO Director presented the Panel with the Annual Audit Letter and Report to those Charged with Governance, explaining that the audit of the 2021/22 financial statements is

	<p>complete and that the Local Government Auditor (LGA) is providing an <b>unqualified audit opinion</b>. These accounts are a fundamental part of the Councils overall corporate governance framework and provides assurance to Members and ratepayers on the stewardship of the Council's finances and its financial position.</p>
3.1.2	<p>Regarding the Councils compliance with the performance improvement duty, <b>the LGA has certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion</b> and believes that the council has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties.</p>
	<p><u>Key Reports</u></p>
3.1.3	<p>The Panel noted the <b>progress being made against the annual internal audit plan</b> and that six audits were finalised in the period, with two audits on Absence Management and Information Governance receiving an assurance opinion of major improvement required. The Panel underlined the importance of management implementing the agreed action plans for these areas. Regarding a recent <b>internal audit of Police and Community Safety Partnerships</b>, the Panel received an update from management on the progress being made to implement the recommendations arising.</p>
3.1.4	<p>The Panel also received an update on the progress being made by management to implement agreed actions from previous internal audits. The Panel noted that <b>management had implemented 25% of open actions in the period</b>. Almost a third of the actions that remain open are classed as high priority and the Panel highlighted the importance of management agreeing realistic dates for implementation and ensuring that these dates are adhered to.</p>
3.1.5	<p>The Panel considered the <b>corporate risk dashboard</b> which provided an analysis and update on the progress being made to manage the 23 risks that are considered to present the greatest threat to the delivery corporate priorities and / or compliance with key statutory requirements. The Panel was updated on how the ownership of risks had been reallocated following changes at Chief Officer level and on the themes emerging from the horizon scanning exercise. The Panel noted the <b>quarterly assurances provided by senior management</b> regarding compliance with risk management and internal control processes. The Panel was also provided with an update on the review of the <b>business continuity plans</b> for a cyber-attack scenario for the critical services.</p>
3.1.6	<p>The Panel also considered the report on the recent external review of the Councils risk management arrangements, which concludes that the arrangements are well developed and</p>

	made seven recommendations for improvement. <b>This provides Members with valuable independent assurance on the Council’s risk management arrangements.</b>
3.1.7	The Panel agreed the <b>updated Raising Concerns policy</b> , which had been updated in line with the NIAO Good Practice Guide and is designed to encourage people who have serious concerns in the public interest to come forward. The draft policy was agreed by the Council’s Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee in October 2022.
3.1.8	The Panel also agreed the initial self-assessment of compliance with the updated CIPFA publication “Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police” (October 2022) and agreed for this to be considered in more depth at their next training session.
3.1.9	The Panel was also provided with a <b>progress update</b> on the agreed actions to be taken in relation to the recommendations contained within the report from Peter Coll QC of his independent investigation relating to events at Roselawn Cemetery on 30th June 2020, noting that the remaining actions are due to be completed by March 2023.
3.1.10	The Panel also received <b>Quarter 2 reports on corporate health and safety, absence management and performance improvement.</b>
	<b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b>
3.2	None
	<b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></b>
3.3	None known at this time.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	Appendix 1 - Minutes of the meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel of 6th December  Appendix 2 - Raising Concerns Policy

This page is intentionally left blank



# Audit and Risk Panel

Tuesday, 6th December, 2022

## MEETING OF THE AUDIT AND RISK PANEL

### HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Alderman Rodgers (Chairperson);  
Councillors Carson, Matt Collins and Hutchinson; and  
Ms. G. Fahy (Independent Non-Executive Member).

In attendance: Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;  
Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal  
and Civic Services;  
Ms. C. O'Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services;  
Mr. L. Mulholland, Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services Manager;  
Mr. M. Whitmore, Audit, Governance and Risk  
Services Manager;  
Ms. H. Lyons, Corporate Finance Manager;  
Ms. S. Williams, Governance and Compliance  
Manager; and  
Mr. H. Downey, Democratic Services Officer.

Also attended: Ms. C. Kane, Director, Northern Ireland Audit Office.

### **Apologies**

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor M. Kelly).

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 21st September were taken as read and signed as correct.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were reported.

### **Schedule of Meetings 2023**

The Panel approved the following schedule of meetings for 2023, with a commencement time of 12.30 p.m.:

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

- Tuesday, 7th March
- Tuesday, 6th June
- Tuesday, 12th September and
- Tuesday, 5th December.

**Absence Rates - Quarter 2 2022/23**

(Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources, attended in connection with this item.)

The Panel considered the following report:

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

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform the Audit and Risk Panel of the Council’s performance in managing absence in quarter 2 - April to September 2022.**

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Audit Panel is asked to note the contents of this report.**

**3.0 Main Report**

**Key Corporate Indicators:**

**At the end of quarter 2:**

- **The Council’s average sickness absence rate stands at 8.21 days per FTE, an increase of 1.03 days compared to absence for the same period last year (7.18).**
- **A total of 16551.84 working days was lost due to sickness absence. This accounted for 7.3% of the total working days available.**
- **The table below provides a summary of how departments are performing against the target. As indicated below, 4 Departments did not meet the Corporate target for quarter 2 (6.5 days).**

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

End of year target	12.99					
End of Q2 target	6.5					
		Total lost	Actual		% of	% of
Department	Number of Staff (FTE)	days (FTE)	Absence per FTE	Variance	workforce	absence
City and Neighbourhood Services	1126.92	9849.73	8.74	2.24	55.92%	59.51%
City and Organisational Strategy	118.25	630.85	5.33	-1.17	5.87%	3.81%
Finance and Resources	189.08	813.75	4.30	-2.20	9.38%	4.92%
Legal and Civic Services	149.53	1611.78	10.78	4.28	7.42%	9.74%
Place and Economy	308.94	2356.33	7.63	1.13	15.33%	14.24%
Physical Programmes	122.67	1289.4	10.51	4.01	6.09%	7.79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2015.39</b>	<b>16551.84</b>	<b>8.21</b>	<b>1.71</b>		

**Additional Absence information:**

- There has been a decrease in the number of staff with no recorded absence in this period (56.63%) compared to the same time last year (66.86%). The decrease can be mainly attributed to an increase in short-term absence (1-5 days) and medium-term absence (6 – 19 days) in 22/23 when compared to 21/22.
- There has been an increase in absence classified as long term (20+ days) this year (11136.85 days) compared to the same time last year (10773.00 days).
- Council's average sickness absence rate further reduces to 6.98 days per FTE when COVID-19 related absences are deducted.
- The number of days lost per full time equivalent increased in quarter two (4.26 days) when compared to quarter one (3.96 days). This increase is illustrated in figure 1.
- Depression/anxiety/stress (36% of total days lost) and musculo-skeletal (23% of total days lost) continue to be the top two reasons for absence - Refer to figure 2 for further information).
- 652 employees were off between July and September 2022. Discretion was applied to 122 of these employees (18.7%) and their absence accounted for 3313.64 days (approximately 39% of the total absence for quarter two –

July to September) - Refer to figure 3 for further information.

- A total of 117 cases were identified as having compliance related issues (80 in CNS) - Refer to figure 4 for further information.
- Approximately 34% of absence (5642.42 days) is recorded as disability related, of which, 58% of was managed as long term. Depression and Anxiety related absence accounted for over a third (38.47%) of disability related absence - Refer to figure 5 for further information.
- A total of 388 employees were recorded as absent due to COVID19 and this accounted for a total of 2491.54 days / 15.05% of the total absence in quarter 2.
- 20 employees met the trigger for a Stage 4 / FAH in quarter 2.
  - One employee availed of a career break before Stage4/FAH being scheduled.
  - Discretion not to proceed to a stage 4 / FAH was applied to 9 of these cases The reasons for discretion include, 4 employees returned to work between month 6 and 7, two employees were medically redeployed, 2 cases did not proceed due to disability related absence and one case is awaiting a recruitment exercise to facilitate a flexible retirement request.
  - 6 employees were ill health retired prior to Stage4/FAH being scheduled.
  - 1 employee was dismissed at Stage 4 / FAH.
  - 1 employee attended a Stage 4 / FAH however, the outcome is not yet known as additional information was requested of management.
  - 2 cases did not proceed to Stage 4 / FAH due to non-compliance reasons (delay organising case review and delay organising Stage 4 hearing).
- Corporate HR has developed guidance documentation and templates to assist departments with development of Attendance Improvement Plans and DMT reporting.

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

- **Departments are currently reviewing the guidance documentation and templates. The documentation and templates have been designed to ensure that departments are addressing potential risks that may have an impact on how absence is monitored, managed and reported.**
- **It is envisaged the guidance documents will be agreed and implemented by January 2023 (Quarter 4).**

**4.0 Resource Implications**

**4.1 Directors are asked to ensure that:**

- **attendance management continues to be a priority item on DMT agendas and related matters discussed and appropriate actions taken forward and**
- **resources are in place to ensure that adequate monitoring and review is in place at department level.**

**5.0 Equality and Good Relations Implications**

**5.1 Approximately 34.09% of absence (5642.42 days) is recorded as disability related.**

**The use of discretion and reasonable adjustments is considered in such cases.”**

The Panel noted the contents of the report.

**Update on Corporate Health and Safety Performance**

(Ms. E. Eaton, Corporate Health and Safety Manager, attended in connection with this item.)

The Corporate Health and Safety Manager reminded the Panel that it was responsible for overseeing the Council’s risk, control and governance arrangements for health and safety. In undertaking this function, the Panel provided independent scrutiny of the Council’s health and safety performance, with reports being presented to it on a quarterly basis.

Accordingly, she submitted for the Panel’s consideration a report on corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending on 30th September, 2022.

She provided, on a Departmental basis, information on the implementation of actions associated with the key performance indicators of health and safety and fire safety

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

and pointed out that, at a corporate level, compliance rates had been 48% and 73% respectively.

In terms of accident/incident reporting, there had, in quarter two, been 12 employee accidents, 9 non-employee accidents, 8 RIDDOR accidents and 15 incidents of work-related violence.

She concluded by providing details of the information which had, during quarter two, been forwarded to the Health and Safety Executive Northern Ireland in response to enquiries/correspondence.

The Panel noted the corporate health and safety performance and activities for the quarter ending on 30th September, 2022.

**Report to those charged with Governance 2021/22**

The Panel considered the following report:

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

**1.1 The Local Government Auditor has issued her Report to those charged with Governance for 2021/22. This summarises the system/control issues arising during the Northern Ireland Audit Office’s (NIAO) 2021/22 audit and includes recommendations for management action. The purpose of this report is to appraise the Audit and Risk Panel of the issues raised in the Local Government Auditor’s Report for 2021/22 in relation to the Accounts of Belfast City Council.**

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Audit Panel is requested to note the Report to those charged with Governance Audit results for 2021/22 and agree the management responses.**

**3.0 Main Report**

**Key Issues**

**3.1 The Local Government Auditor has certified the 2021-22 statements for Belfast City Council with an unqualified opinion.**

**3.2 The Local Government Auditor had identified in the Audit Strategy for 2021-22, the risk of fraud in revenue recognition and management override of controls as having an impact on the audit approach.**

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

During audit fieldwork, no significant issues were identified in these areas.

**3.3 The Local Government Auditor has identified 3 areas where she has made prioritised recommendations. The NIAO definition of the priority levels are:**

- 1) significant issues for the attention of senior management which may have the potential to result in material weaknesses in internal control;**
- 2) important issues to be addressed by management in their areas of responsibility, and**
- 3) issues of a more minor nature which represents best practice.**

**3.4 In summarising the letter there are:**

- 0 priority 1 area,**
- 0 priority 2 area, and**
- 3 priority 3 areas**

**3.5 The 3 priority 3 areas are:**

- Special Responsibility Allowance- recommendation that the Special Responsibility Allowance report published on the Council's website be revised to include the Councillor that has been omitted, so that this report agrees to the figure included in the statement of accounts.**
- Income cut off issue – recommendation that management should review all income invoices at year end to ensure they are correctly captured in the statement of accounts.**
- Timeliness of assurance from component auditor - recommendation that management liaise with the Directors and Auditors of BWUH Ltd and Beltel LLP to ensure group audit assurances to NIAO are provided on a timely basis.**

**3.6 A detailed response to the management letter has been circulated, identifying timescales.**

**In accordance with the process adopted in previous years, management will monitor the progress made in implementing recommendations and will report back to the Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel on the progress.**

**Financial and Resource Implications**

3.7 None

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

3.8 None.”

After discussion, the Panel noted the contents of the Report to those Charged with Governance for 2021/22 and approved the management responses.

**Annual Audit Letter 2021/22**

The Panel considered the following report:

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

1.1 As an independent auditor of the Council, the Local Government Auditor seeks to examine that the Council has managed its affairs having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and that public money is properly spent or in the case of income properly accounted for. The Annual Audit Letter is issued under Regulation 17 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015. The Regulations require the Council to publish this Annual Audit Letter as soon as reasonably possible.

**2.0 Recommendation**

2.1 The Audit and Risk Panel is asked to note the comments and review the Annual Audit Letter.

**3.0 Main Report**

**1. Financial Statements**

The Local Government Auditor has noted no financial adjustment to the draft accounts as a result of her audit work. The accounts for the 2021/22 year were given an unqualified opinion.

**2. Proper Arrangements**

The Local Government Auditor is required to satisfy herself that proper arrangements have been made for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources.



The Local Government Auditor has confirmed that she is satisfied that the council has proper arrangements in place.

**3. Annual Governance Statement**

The Local Government Auditor has indicated that the Annual Governance Statement reflects compliance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom 2021-22, it also complies with proper practices as specified by the Department for Communities, and it is not misleading or inconsistent with other information from the audit.

**4. Absenteeism**

The annual rate of absenteeism has shown an increase of 5.47 days from 2020/21. Covid related absences had a significant impact in 2021/22. If Covid related absences were excluded, the year end figure of 16.33 days for 2021/22, would reduce to 12.99 days. The main causes of long-term absence are due to stress/depression/anxiety and musculo-skeletal related conditions.

Average number of days sickness absence per full time employee						
2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
10.3	12.44	13.72	13.71	13.58	10.86	16.33

The robust, fair and consistent management of attendance continues to be a key priority for Belfast City Council.

**5. Performance Improvement**

Due to the pandemic, the requirement to publish an improvement plan for 2020-21 was set aside. As a result, the audit of the 2020-21 self-assessment report did not include a review of performance of improvement objectives for that year. The Local Government Auditor's Annual Improvement Report for 2021-22 was published on 31 March 2022 and concludes that the Council met its statutory duties in relation to publication of the 2020-21 self-assessment report and 2021-22 Annual Improvement Plan. Given the impact of the pandemic on council services, however, the Local Government Auditor was unable to conclude on an assessment of whether the council was likely to meet their performance improvement responsibilities under legislation for the 2021-22 year.

**6. Outlook**

**The Local Government Auditor has highlighted the ongoing impact of the Covid 19 pandemic.**

**Financial and Resource Implications**

**None**

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

**None.”**

The Panel noted the contents of the Annual Audit Letter for the Council for 2021/22.

**Audit, Governance and Risk Services  
Progress Report – September to December, 2022**

The Panel considered a report providing an update on the work which had been completed by Audit, Governance and Risk Services from September to December, 2022.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager reported that six assurance audits/reviews had been completed during that period and drew the Panel’s attention to two in particular, namely, Absence Management and Information Governance, which had received an audit opinion of ‘Major Improvement Needed’.

In terms of Absence Management, significant issues had been identified in relation to the management of the Employee Counselling and Occupational Health contracts, ongoing non-compliance with the Attendance Policy and a lack of an up-to-date Health and Wellbeing Strategy and related action plan. Three high priority and three medium priority actions had been agreed in order to address these issues.

In relation to Information Governance, management had explained that a lack of staff resources had been the main cause of delays in the implementation of actions to manage this risk. The Unit had been required to concentrate on reactive work, such as supporting management in responding to requests for information under the Freedom of Information, Data Protection, and Environmental Information Regulations, as well as providing ad hoc advice, rather than taking forward proactive policy development and communications, oversight, compliance audits and training which would be required to reduce the level of risk. It was pointed out that a member of staff had since agreed to return to the Unit on a temporary basis.

Ms. Fahy stressed the importance of ensuring that the audit recommendations relating to Information Governance were implemented as soon as possible.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager then updated the Panel on three areas which had received an audit opinion of ‘Some Improvement Needed’, namely Fuel, Waste Management (Operations) and Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall and pointed

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

out that, in terms of progress against the 2022/23 Internal Audit Plan, 68% of assignments had been completed or were in progress.

He went on to inform the Panel that management in the City and Neighbourhood Services Department had, during the course of the quarterly meeting with Audit, Governance and Risk Services, highlighted delays to the development of a Waste Management Strategy by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and its impact upon the review and update of the Councils Strategy. Consequently, in order to derive value from the internal audit process, management had requested that the planned audit of the Waste Management Strategy, which had been included in the 2022/23 internal audit plan, be deferred until a future year.

The Panel was then provided with an update on the assurance and advisory work which Audit, Governance and Risk Services had undertaken around the new Advanced Accounting System, the Planning Portal and HR Payroll System. Information was provided also on audits which were currently in progress, investigations/fraud risk awareness and on the National Fraud Initiative.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager then provided details of the advisory and other work which had been undertaken in support of management and confirmed that reports on an updated Raising Concerns (formerly Whistleblowing) Policy and on the outcome of the bi-annual recommendations monitoring exercise, which had been undertaken in October/November, would be presented to the Panel later in the meeting.

Finally, he drew the Panel's attention to the action plan which had been formulated to address the recommendations made by On Board Training and Consultancy Limited following its External Quality Assessment of the Service, in line with Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, and review of Risk Management in the Council. It was the intention that the recommendations would be implemented by June, 2023.

After discussion, the Panel:

- i. noted the contents of the report;
- ii. approved the proposal to postpone the internal audit of Strategic Waste Management to a future audit plan; and
- iii. approved the action plan to address the recommendations made by On Board Training and Consultancy Limited in response to its review of compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

**Update on Recommendations Monitor**

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager reminded the Panel that it required assurance on a regular basis that agreed audit recommendations were being implemented.

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

Accordingly, he submitted for its consideration a report providing an update on the implementation of agreed audit actions, following the most recent recommendations monitoring exercise, which had included a review of all audit recommendations open as at the end of September.

He explained that previous recommendations monitor exercises had tended to focus only on those actions which had passed their original implementation date. In the most recent exercise, Audit Governance and Risk Services had examined all actions, regardless of priority or due status, in order to provide management and Members with a more holistic representation of all open audit actions across the Council. It also enabled the Service to present a more complete analysis of actions which had been implemented, as well as those which remained outstanding at the completion of this exercise.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager informed the Panel that 89 agreed actions could now be closed, representing an implementation rate of 25%. Whilst there had been a slight decrease on the previous period, this was broadly in line with the average implementation rates witnessed over a period of time.

He went on to point out that Audit, Governance and Risk Services had seen evidence of strong implementation of open actions in a number of areas across the Council, but in particular:

- SAP Replacement Project – 9 implemented actions
- HR Payroll Project – 10 implemented actions
- Income / Accounts Receivable – 5 implemented actions
- Gifts, Hospitality and Conflicts of Interest – 16 implemented actions
- Estates Management – 4 implemented actions.

In terms of the implementation of audit actions Council-wide:

- four Departments, namely, City and Organisational Strategy, Finance, Legal and Civic Services and Place and Economy had achieved implementation rates above the Council average;
- the majority of implemented actions (76%) related to actions which had been finalised in the last three years (2020-2022);
- of the actions which remained open, 29% were high priority. Most of the high priority actions which remained open (55%) had been agreed in audit reports which were more than three years old; and
- 83% of actions which remained open were overdue for implementation.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager confirmed that the implementation of audit recommendations continued to be impacted by wider events within the Council, with the implementation of major IT projects, some of which were experiencing delays, ongoing Service and Departmental reviews, resourcing issues and competing priorities being frequently cited as issues causing delays to implementation.

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

Despite this, management continued to express its commitment to implementing outstanding audit actions and had provided revised implementation dates for their implementation. Following briefings with Departmental Management Teams across the Council over the summer period, management had asked to be provided with more frequent information on the current position of open audit actions within their Department.

In terms of the timing of the next Recommendations Monitor, many of the outstanding audit actions were due to be fully implemented during 2023 and Audit, Governance and Risk Services would put in place a new process to provide each Department with quarterly information on open actions. In order to allow this process to fully embed and to ensure that management was given sufficient time to demonstrate improvement in implementation rates as a result, it was proposed that the next full validation exercise be undertaken in summer 2023, with the outcome being reported to the Panel in September, 2023.

Ms. Fahy highlighted the importance of management agreeing realistic dates for the implementation of audit recommendations and ensuring that those dates were adhered to.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided and requested that Audit, Governance and Risk Services continue to emphasise the importance of the timely implementation of agreed audit actions.

**Update on Corporate Risk  
Management – Quarter 2 2022/23**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services submitted for the Panel's consideration a report on the Corporate Risk Dashboard, which summarised the key updates from the risk review for the quarter ending 30th September, 2022. The report provided also an update on compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on assurance statements completed by senior management for the quarter and on business continuity management arrangements.

The Panel:

- i. noted the corporate risk management dashboard and update for the quarter ending on 30th September and approved the proposal to close the corporate risk on Organisational and Operational Recovery, given the current operational status of the Council;
- ii. noted the assurances from senior management regarding compliance with the Risk Strategy, based on the assurance statements for quarter-end September 2022;
- iii. adopted the proposal that the Directors of Finance, Human Resources and Marketing and Corporate Communications complete assurance statements in future;

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

- iv. agreed that the Head of Digital Services and the Head of Commercial and Procurement Services also complete assurance statements from the quarter ending 31st December 2022, pending the recruitment of a Director of Corporate Services; and
- v. noted the current position regarding the review and update on business continuity plans for the critical services.

**External Review of Risk Management Arrangements**

The Panel was reminded that On Board Training and Consultancy Limited had, following a quotation exercise in March, been appointed to undertake an assessment of the extent to which Audit, Governance and Risk Services complied with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards.

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services explained that the company had, as part of this assessment, undertaken a high-level review of the Council's risk management arrangements, which had found that the arrangements for the management of risks were well developed, noting that:

- the form and content of the Risk Management Strategy was excellent;
- gap analysis and the report to the Audit and Risk Panel provided good evidence of the level of the Council's compliance with the requirements of the revised Orange Book and commitment to adopting best practice;
- the Corporate Risk Dashboard was an excellent development; and
- Corporate Risk Reviews undertaken by Audit, Governance and Risk Services were of a very high standard and provided the Council with good quality assurance on the management of corporate risks.

Seven recommendations for improvement had been made, which centred around:

- developing clearer guidance on the risk management process;
- implementing the areas for improvement identified in the gap analysis, along with three other areas, namely, undertaking a formal review of risk culture, formally incorporating horizon scanning into the risks identification and review process and undertaking an annual review of the risk management framework;
- developing of the risk appetite statement further; and

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

- determining the most appropriate way to widen out assurance on the Councils risk management framework from solely corporate risks to also include risks facing Departments and Services.

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services confirmed that Audit, Governance and Risk Services would consider each of these recommendations and submit a worked-up action plan to the meeting of the Audit Assurance Board and the Audit and Risk Panel in March, 2023.

Given the time which it would take to determine the best approach to implementing these areas for improvement, Audit, Governance and Risk Services would defer the annual review and update of the Risk Management Strategy and the Business Continuity Management Strategy until after the action plan to implement the areas for improvement had been agreed in March.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided.

**Policing and Community Safety Partnerships  
Assurance Review – August 2022**

(Mr. D. Sales, Director of Neighbourhood Services and Mr. J. Girvan, Lead Officer – Community Provision: Community Safety, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Neighbourhood Services reminded the Panel that Audit, Governance and Risk Services had, in August, 2022, completed an internal audit of the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships. The audit had provided an opinion of 'Major Improvement Needed' and had made five recommendations, of which two were high priority and three medium priority.

He explained that the issues which had been identified in year 2021/22 had been due to significant resourcing difficulties in the Policing and Community Safety Partnerships Team, with approximately 60% of the Unit's staffing complement having been vacant throughout parts of the financial year, due to either long-term absence or vacant posts.

The Lead Officer – Community Provision: Community Safety confirmed that all agreed audit actions had now been fully implemented and provided a high-level update of the work which had been completed. He advised the Panel that documentation on completed projects would not be added to the 2021/2022 Project files, as this would entail a disproportionate level of resources. That decision had been approved by the Joint Committee.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided.

**Raising Concerns Policy**

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager reminded the Panel that Raising a Concern occurred when an individual disclosed information about suspected danger, wrongdoing or illegality which was in the public interest. The individual raising the concern was usually not personally affected by the danger, wrongdoing or illegality.

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

He explained that the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services was responsible for the Council's Raising Concerns Policy, previously known as Whistleblowing, until such time as a Director of Corporate Services had been recruited. Audit, Governance and Risk Services was responsible for the maintenance of the Policy and its associated arrangements and reviewed it annually to ensure that it reflected current legislation and best practice.

During 2021/22, the Service had undertaken a comprehensive review of the Council's whistleblowing arrangements, following a self-assessment exercise against the Northern Ireland Audit Office's Raising Concerns Good Practice Guide. Whilst the existing arrangements had been found to be generally in line with that Guide, several areas in the Policy needed to be reviewed and updated. A number of changes had been made, including:

- amending the terminology from whistleblowing to raising concerns;
- ensuring that the new policy considered other policies, such as Safeguarding and Modern Slavery;
- highlighting how raising concerns was of benefit to the Council;
- setting out how data would be managed, in line with the Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations;
- introducing a timeframe of seven days for formally responding to concerns raised;
- providing guidance for members of the public on raising concerns;
- providing a dedicated raising concerns e-mail address and contact details for two Raising Concerns Champions within Audit, Governance and Risk Services; and
- improvements in the way in which Audit, Governance and Risk Services oversaw how concerns are handled and addressed.

He drew the Panel's attention to the revised policy and confirmed that it had been approved by both the full Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee and the Corporate Management Team. Officers from Audit, Governance and Risk Services had, over the summer months, attended various Departmental Management Team meetings to raise awareness of the Policy and had highlighted key changes and roles and responsibilities for Departments. The Service had since drafted an implementation plan to ensure that the revised policy was communicated to all relevant stakeholders, which included:

- updating current process documents for logging, tracking, monitoring and reporting on cases;



**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

- developing of a new case register;
- agreement on key messages to be communicated to all internal stakeholders including:
  - clarification of the nature of the issues that should be raised under the policy;
  - roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders; and
  - the introduction of the new templates to better streamline the process;
- agreement, in consultation with the Marketing and Corporate Communications Unit, on the approach to external communications and how / where best to deliver the message;
- the creation of a new generic email address to where concerns can be directed; and
- the identification of any training or support requirements.

The Audit, Governance and Risk Services Manager concluded by pointing out that the Service was working currently with the Marketing and Corporate Communications Unit to develop the appropriate internal and external communications to support the roll out of the Policy. Once the policy had been communicated internally, the focus would turn to communicating it externally, via the council's website.

In response to suggestions made by Ms. Fahy, he confirmed that consideration would be given to ensuring that the communications and implementation plan would take account of the phrase "good faith reporting" and how the Council would take reasonable steps rather than "fulfil its responsibility" to ensure that staff were not harassed, victimised or otherwise disadvantaged when raising a concern.

The Panel approved the revised Raising Concerns Policy and the arrangements for implementing and communicating the Policy across the Council.

**Audit and Risk Panel Self-Assessment against  
Good Practice and Effectiveness**

The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services informed the Panel that an updated version of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's 2018 publication on "Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police" had been issued in October.

The publication set out guidance on the function and operation of audit committees and represented best practice. The guidance had been updated to reflect recent legislative changes in Wales and new expectations in England, following the Redmond Review of the effectiveness of external audit and transparency of financial reporting in

**Audit and Risk Panel,  
Tuesday, 6th December, 2022**

local authorities, as well as professional developments. It included also additional guidance and resources to support audit committee members, emphasised the importance of audit committees and recognised that they were a key component of governance.

She explained that Audit, Governance and Risk Services had completed an initial assessment of:

- the Audit and Risk Panel's effectiveness against the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's best practice; and
- the impact and effectiveness of the Audit and Risk Panel.

In line with previous years, this initial assessment had found the Panel to be broadly in compliance with best practice. Audit, Governance and Risk Services would, she confirmed, ensure that the next training session for the Audit and Risk Panel would promote consideration and discussion on the effectiveness of the Panel against the good practice questions contained within the updated Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Guidance.

The Panel noted the information which had been provided.

**Peter Coll KC Report – Update on  
Progress of Action Plan**

The Panel noted the contents of a report providing a quarterly update on the progress of the agreed actions arising from the recommendations contained within Section 6 of Mr. Peter Coll KC's independent investigation into events at Roselawn Cemetery on 30th June, 2020, of which six had yet to be completed.

(Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy, attended in connection with the following two items.)

**Performance Assessment Quarter 2 2022/23**

The Panel considered the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report**

**1.1 This purpose of this report is to present the Quarter 2 status update on progress made against activities contributing to the Improvement Objectives contained within the 2022-23 Improvement Plan.**

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Panel is asked to note the Q2 status update on the 2022-23 Improvement objectives.**

**3.0 Main Report**

**3.1 Background**

Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act requires councils to agree improvement objectives on an annual basis and publish these in the form of an Improvement Plan. BCC's Improvement Plan 2022-23 was agreed by the Council in June 2022 and contained the Council's commitment to securing continuous improvement as well as delivery of 5 Improvement Objectives.

- 3.2 The Act also requires that progress be monitored and reported in an annual assessment of performance. For this, we produced a 2021-22 year-end performance assessment report which was submitted to the September meeting of the Audit and Risk Panel. This assessment was later published [online](#) ahead of the September 30<sup>th</sup>, as required by legislation.

**BCC Improvement Plan 2022 / 23**

- 3.3 The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee agreed in June to approve the Improvement Plan for 2022/23. The Improvement plan does not include everything that council plans to do that year, but instead focuses on a smaller set of key improvement priorities, as informed by resident priorities and evidenced by need. The Plan for 2022/23 includes five improvement objectives as set out below;

3.4

	<b>Our services</b>
	We will continue to adapt and improve our services
	<b>Our communities</b>
	We will work to support our communities, helping them to become stronger, healthier and more resilient
3.5	<b>Our economy</b>
	We will work collaboratively to support businesses, jobs and inclusive growth
	<b>Our environment</b>
	We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast
	<b>Our city</b>
	We will continue to support our city to recover and innovate in a safe, inclusive and sustainable way

The 2022/23 Improvement Plan was subsequently published on the Council website by 30th June in order to meet the statutory deadline.

- 3.6 The mid-year report on progress made against activities contributing to the Improvement Objectives contained within our 2022-23 Improvement Plan has been circulated. It sets out the key milestones and provides a summary of activity under each objective. The report also includes the most up to date position in relation to the performance indicators included within the plan.
- 3.7 Progress against all the objectives is in the most part on target with only a few milestones that have been slightly delayed, ragged amber or red, with the explanations for the delays contained within the report. A further report on progress will be presented to the panel at the end of quarter 3.
- 3.8 The Panel should note that the Guidance accompanying the legislation advises that what we learn about our performance in these reports should be used to:
- Help inform the content of our next Corporate Improvement Plan (due 30th June 2023) in terms both of ongoing activity and other actions that may address any shortfalls in the current Plan and;
  - Form the basis of our next *Year-End Performance Assessment Report* which must be made available to the Local Government Auditor by 30th September 2023.

#### **Arrangements for Performance Improvement 2022-23**

- 3.9 As the Panel is aware the 2022-23 NIAO audit and assessment of the Council's improvement activity is due to be completed by November 2022 and NIAO has advised that final reports would be received by November 2022. This will be presented to the Panel in the next report.

#### **Financial and Resource Implications**

- 3.10 Audit fees will be calculated on the basis of the time spent by the NIAO on Belfast's audit, the Panel will be updated once information has been received on this.

#### **Equality and Good Relations/ Rural Need Implications**

- 3.11 None associated with this report."

The Panel noted the contents of the report.

**Performance Improvement – Northern Ireland Audit Office**  
**Performance Audit and Assessment Report 2022/23**

The Panel considered the following report:

**“1.0 Purpose of Report**

**1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Panel on progress to comply with the performance improvement duty, as laid out in Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act 2014 in relation to the 2022-23 Audit.**

**2.0 Recommendation**

**2.1 The Panel is asked to approve the Belfast City Council Audit and Assessment report 2022-23**

**NIAO Audit and Assessment 2021 - 22**

**3.1 The Panel should note that the timeline for the Auditors fieldwork for 2022-23 has returned to the normal schedule since Covid and the NIAO audit and fieldwork has taken place from August to October 2022. The Performance Unit completed the Audit Self -Assessment report in September and have been working to supply the relevant information to the NIAO during September and October.**

**Audit Opinion**

**3.2 The Local Government Auditor (LGA) has certified the performance arrangements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification and certifies an improvement audit and improvement assessment has been conducted. The LGA also states that, as a result, she believes that the Belfast City Council (the Council) has discharged its performance improvement and reporting duties, including its assessment of performance for 2021-22 and its 2022-23 improvement plan, and has acted in accordance with the Guidance.**

**Proposal for Improvement**

**3.3 The LGA has made no formal recommendations and just one proposal for improvement (detailed in the attached appendix) which the Council will work towards addressing and the Panel will be updated at the next meeting. Proposals for improvement are matters that may assist the Council in meeting its performance improvement responsibilities.**

**3.4 The proposal for improvement recommended for BCC states that the ‘Council should ensure that the Self-Assessment**

report includes sufficient detail to provide the reader with a full understanding of Council's performance'. Further details are included along with the detailed observations within Annex B of the Appendix which had been circulated. The Council will work to respond accordingly to this proposal in its 2022-23 Performance Assessment.

**Financial and Resource Implications**

- 3.5 Audit fees will be calculated on the basis of the time spent by the NIAO on Belfast's audit, For the Council, it is estimated that this will cost £25,000 this year. As far as possible we will prepare all materials in advance to keep costs as low as possible.

**Equality and Good Relations Implications**

- 3.6 None associated with this report.”

23. The Panel approved the Belfast City Council Audit and Assessment report 2022-

**Date of Next Meeting**

The Panel noted that its next meeting would take place at 12.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 7th March.

Chairperson



## **RAISING CONCERNS POLICY<sup>1</sup>**

### **1. Contents**

This policy document includes the following sections:

- [Introduction \(section 2\)](#)
- [Aims of this policy \(section 3\)](#)
- [Types of concerns covered by this Policy \(section 4\)](#)
- [Raising Concerns: General \(section 5\)](#)
- [Raising Concerns: Our Workers \(section 6\)](#)
- [Raising Concerns: Others \(section 7\)](#)
- [Handling Concerns Raised \(section 8\)](#)
- [If you are the Subject of a Concern Raised \(section 9\)](#)
- [How to Contact Us \(section 10\)](#)
- [Outcomes \(section 11\)](#)
- [Summary of Roles and Responsibilities \(section 12\)](#)
- [Policy Control \(section 13\)](#)
- [Appendix 1: Raising Concerns Notification](#)
- [Appendix 2: Case Closure Summary](#)
- [Appendix 3: Routemap](#)

### **2. Introduction**

Raising a concern in the public interest is the action of telling someone in authority, either internally and/or externally, for example regulators, about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice.<sup>2</sup>

As regards terminology used 'whistleblowing', 'raising a concern' or 'speaking up' generally refer to the same thing. In line with NI Audit Office guidance, this policy refers to raising concerns.

Why is a policy for Raising Concerns needed? All organisations face the risk of things going wrong from time to time, or of unknowingly harbouring illegal or unethical conduct. A culture of openness and accountability is essential in order to prevent such situations occurring and to address them when they do occur.

The Northern Ireland Audit Office's (NIAO) 'Raising Concerns: A Good Practice Guide' sets out the benefits to an organisation of encouraging the raising of concerns, including:

---

<sup>1</sup> This policy does not form part of any contract of employment and BCC may amend it at any time.

<sup>2</sup> Raising Concerns: A good practice guide for the Northern Ireland public sector, NIAO June 2020

- Identifying wrongdoing as early as possible,
- Exposing weak or flawed processes and procedures which make the organisation vulnerable to loss, criticism or legal action,
- Ensuring critical information gets to the right people who can deal with the concerns,
- Avoiding financial loss and inefficiency,
- Maintaining a positive corporate reputation,
- Reducing risks to the environment or the health or safety of workers or the wider community,
- Improving accountability, and
- Deterring workers from engaging in improper conduct.

### Who can raise a concern?

A concern may be raised by someone internal to the council, such as a worker<sup>3</sup> or by someone external, such as a member of the public. In developing this policy, the council recognises the need for an open and honest culture where our workers and others have clear information on how to raise concerns that are in the wider public interest and are encouraged to do so in the knowledge that they will be listened to and treated with respect.

If an Elected Member has concerns regarding wrongdoing, risk or malpractice, they are advised to refer to the Northern Ireland Code of Conduct for Councillors, or to seek the advice of the council's Legal Services section.

## 3. Aims of this Policy

Belfast City Council is committed to the highest possible standards of openness, probity and accountability. In line with this commitment, we want our workers and others that we deal with who have serious concerns about any aspect of the council's work to come forward and voice those concerns. This policy aims to:

- Make you feel confident to raise concerns within the council, as soon as possible, rather than overlooking a problem or raising the concern externally,
- Give you avenues to raise concerns and receive feedback,
- Inform you how to take the matter further if you are dissatisfied with our response, and
- Reassure our workers that, in line with [legislation](#), you will be protected from reprisals or victimisation for raising concerns that you reasonably believe to be true and in the public interest.

## 4. Types of Concerns Covered by this Policy

The **nature of the issue being raised** will determine whether it is a concern, a grievance or a complaint, and subsequently the appropriate policy under which it should be addressed.

Raising a concern is where an individual discloses information about suspected danger, wrongdoing or illegality that is in the **public interest** (i.e. that affects others). The individual raising the concern is usually not personally affected by the danger, wrongdoing or illegality.

---

<sup>3</sup> Worker, as defined in legislation, includes staff and may also include agency assignees, volunteers, consultants, those on secondment and contractors.



Consequently, they rarely have a personal interest in the outcome of the enquiries or investigation into their concern – they are simply trying to alert others.

The types of concerns covered by this policy include those matters that we, as a council, are the ‘prescribed’<sup>4</sup> person for. Prescribed persons are responsible for the investigation of concerns that fall under their jurisdiction and protecting those raising concerns and their interests. For the council, these are:

- Matters which may affect the health or safety of any individual at work,
- Matters which may affect the health or safety of any member of the public, arising out of or in connection with the activities of persons at work,
- Compliance with the requirements of consumer protection legislation, and
- Compliance with the requirements of food safety legislation.

In addition, other types of concerns covered by this policy include, but are not restricted to:

- Risk to children and / or vulnerable adults,
- Conduct which is a criminal offence,
- Abuse of public funds,
- Potential fraud (see also the council’s fraud and bribery policy statement for more details),
- A breach of the employee **Code of Conduct**, and
- Conduct likely to damage the council’s reputation.

Personal grievances or dissatisfaction in respect of employment issues are not considered to be within the scope of this policy unless a particular case is in the public interest. These types of issues should be raised in line with our **Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure**. Examples of misconduct issues are set out under Appendix 2 of the procedure.

Complaints are not within the scope of this policy. Raising a concern is very different to making a complaint. Complaints should be made in line with our **Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy** which defines a complaint as ‘any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction by any person, however made, about the service, actions or inactions of the council or its officers which requires a response.’ It further sets out that, ‘A complaint is different from a whistleblowing concern, where an individual raises information as a witness about danger, wrongdoing or illegality that affects others.’

The routemap at [Appendix 3](#) shows the relationship between these policies. In addition, any concerns raised in relation to **safeguarding** or **modern slavery**, will be handled in line with the related council policy.

### **False Allegations**

Although you are not expected to prove the truth of a disclosure, you will need to demonstrate that you have a reasonable belief that the concern is made in the public interest and that there is evidence of some malpractice.

If you raise a concern that you reasonably believe to be true which is subsequently not confirmed by initial enquiries or investigation, no action will be taken against you.

---

<sup>4</sup> As set out in the Public Interest Disclosure (Prescribed Persons) Order (Northern Ireland) 1999

However, to ensure the protection of all of our workers, those workers who raise a concern frivolously, maliciously or for personal gain and / or make an allegation that they do not reasonably believe to be true and not made in the public interest may be subject to disciplinary action.

## 5. Raising Concerns: General

Concerns can be raised in a number of ways, including in person or in writing, providing as much detail as possible. The background and history of the concern, giving names, dates and places where possible should be set out and the reason why you are particularly concerned about the situation. You should highlight if you wish to raise the matter under the council's Raising Concerns policy.

All concerns raised, regardless of their origin, will be subject to the same process as set out in [Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised](#).

### [Raising Concerns Champion](#)

The council's Raising Concerns Champion is available for advice and guidance, either prior to formally raising a concern or at any stage during the process. The Raising Concerns Champion has a detailed knowledge of raising concerns and can provide advice to management, our workers, or any individual external to the council. Contact details can be found [here](#).

### **Openness, confidentiality and anonymity**

In most cases the best way to raise a concern is to do so openly. By making their identity known, those raising concerns are more likely to secure a positive outcome. Openness makes it easier for us to address the issue, work out how to investigate the matter, understand the reasons for concern, get more information and report back on the outcome of preliminary enquiries / any investigation undertaken. This policy encourages you to put your name to your concern.

We recognise that there may be circumstances when you would prefer to speak to someone in confidence first. If this is the case, please state this at the outset. Confidentiality will only be breached if required by law and, where possible, we will gain your consent prior to undertaking any action that could identify you.

Concerns expressed anonymously are much less powerful as proper investigation may be impeded. Whilst we will accept anonymous concerns and commit to giving them due consideration, we would ask anyone thinking of making a disclosure to consider the following points:

- Detailed investigations may be more difficult, or even impossible, to progress if you choose to remain anonymous and cannot be contacted for further information,
- The information and documentation you provide may not be easily understood and may need clarification or further explanation,
- There is a chance the documents provided may reveal your identity,
- It may not be possible to remain anonymous throughout an in-depth investigation,

- It will not be possible to provide details of the outcome of any investigation to you if your disclosure is anonymous, and
- Statutory protection for a council worker is easier to obtain if a concern is raised openly. If a concern is raised anonymously it may not be possible to afford protection. Furthermore, it may be difficult to demonstrate to a tribunal that any detriment you have suffered is as a result of raising a concern.

We will make every effort to preserve your anonymity if you so wish. Please be aware that the investigation process may inadvertently reveal the source of the information and a statement from you may be required as part of the evidence.

### **Data Protection Act and General Data Protection Regulations**

Concerns raised will be treated in the strictest confidence and all personal data held securely in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Information obtained during initial enquiries or subsequent investigation will be maintained securely and confidentially so as not to prejudice future investigations.

## **6. Raising Concerns: Our Workers**

The importance of the Raising Concerns policy is explicitly covered in our ***Code of Conduct for Belfast City Council Employees***. Our workers are often best placed to identify deficiencies and problems before any damage is done, so the importance of their role as the ‘eyes and ears’ of organisations cannot be overstated. Our Raising Concerns policy provides our workers with an opportunity to raise serious, ***genuine*** concerns rather than overlooking the problem or raising the concern externally.

### **Safeguards**

The Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 (amended in October 2017) defines an individual raising a concern as a “worker”, that is, someone inside the organisation. This policy therefore applies to Belfast City Council staff and may also include agency assignees, volunteers, consultants, those on secondment and contractors while they are engaged in carrying out duties for the Council.

The Order offers protection to ‘workers’ who disclose serious concerns made in the public interest. In accordance with this legislation workers ***must not*** suffer any detrimental treatment as a result of raising a concern. Detrimental treatment includes dismissal, disciplinary action, threats, withholding a pay rise, objecting to a promotion, not giving training or any other unfavourable treatment connected with raising a concern.

The council will fulfil its responsibility to ensure that you are NOT harassed, victimised or otherwise disadvantaged when you raise a concern. We will take appropriate action including the application of the disciplinary and grievance procedure to protect a worker who raises a concern that they reasonably believe to be true and in the public interest. If you believe you have suffered any such treatment, you should inform one of the named officers in [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#) immediately. If it is not remedied, you should raise it formally using our ***Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure***.

If a worker is already the subject of disciplinary or redundancy procedures, these HR procedures will not be halted as a result of their raising a concern.

We trust that our workers will feel able to raise their concerns openly under this policy, however we recognise that some may want to raise their concerns confidentially (and anonymously). This policy document makes it clear that you can raise any concerns you have without fear of victimisation, subsequent discrimination or disadvantage.

### **How to raise a concern**

If you have a concern about a risk, malpractice or wrongdoing at work, we hope that you will feel able to raise the matter first with your immediate line manager, Director or Business Support Manager. [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#) sets out a number of alternative options to raise your concerns. Alternatively, you can raise concerns through your trade union.

We recognise that the decision to raise a concern can be a difficult one to make but in uncovering malpractice you will be doing a service to the council, our ratepayers and members of the public. The earlier you express the concern the easier it will be to take action.

### **Contractors**

As a first step, if you are a contractor, you should normally raise concerns with your manager, who should inform the most senior council officer who is dealing with the particular contract. If you do not have a manager, you should raise your concerns directly with the most senior council officer who is dealing with the contract. If you believe that your manager or the most senior council officer who is dealing with the contract is involved, you should approach one of the named officers set out in [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#).

All concerns are handled in the same way as set out in [Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised](#). If the concern relates to fraud, bribery or financial impropriety it will be referred to the Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services.

## **7. Raising Concerns: Others**

Anyone external to the council can raise the same types of concerns as a worker. As highlighted in the NIAO's good practice guide, **it is the issue being raised that is important, not the person raising it**. While the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 does **not** extend protection to members of the public who raise concerns, the council will endeavour, as far as possible, to apply the same principles to these concerns.

Information on how to raise a concern, whether that be in writing, verbally or in person, is available on our website. These options are also set out in this policy at [Section 10: How to Contact Us](#).

## 8. Handling Concerns Raised

### What should I expect from the Council when I raise a concern?

If you raise a concern the council will (so long as you have not submitted your concern anonymously):

- Formally respond to your concern within seven days of receipt. You will receive a written response acknowledging that the concern has been received and indicating how we propose to deal with the matter,
- Offer you the opportunity to meet to discuss the issue,
- Take steps to ensure that you have appropriate support and advice,
- Agree a timetable for feedback. If this cannot be adhered to, we will let you know,
- Provide you with feedback to demonstrate that the concern has been appropriately considered and addressed, and
- In the case of our workers, take appropriate and timely action against anyone who victimises you.

The council has arrangements in place around how concerns should be handled. This includes guidance and procedures for helping to preserve confidentiality and the integrity of evidence as well as undertaking preliminary enquiries, conducting investigations and reporting on the outcome of these investigations. We will respect your confidentiality where this has been requested. Confidentiality will not be breached unless required by law and we will consult with you prior to any action that could identify you.

### Receipt of concerns raised

It is essential that anyone who raises a concern is supported and, as such, **managers who receive disclosures** should:

- Have a positive and supportive attitude towards the individual raising a concern,
- Record as much detail as possible about the concern being raised and agree this record with the individual,
- Be aware of the process following the raising of the concern and explain this to the individual,
- Make sure the person raising the concern knows what to expect, for example feedback in relation to their concern,
- Assure the individual their confidentiality will be protected as far as possible,
- Make no promises and manage the expectations of the individual,
- In the case of one of our workers raising a concern, make clear that the organisation will not tolerate harassment of anyone raising a genuine concern and ask the individual to let you know if this happens,
- Refer the individual to available sources of support and advice, for example to Protect, a trade union or a professional association,
- Pass the information as quickly as possible to the council's Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) or the Raising Concerns Champion who will log the case and consider the best way in which to respond (see below). The individual who has received the disclosure should do this by completing the **Raising Concerns Notification** template attached at [Appendix 1](#).

Cases will be carefully logged by the Raising Concern Champion in Audit, Governance and Risk Services to enable the investigation's progress to be monitored in a way that, where requested, safeguards the identity of the individual raising the concern. The Raising Concerns champion will refer the concern to the appropriate person for initial enquiries.

### **Initial Enquiries**

In order to protect individuals and the council, initial enquiries will be made by the appropriate person(s) to decide whether an investigation is appropriate and, if so, what form it should take. Concerns or allegations which fall within the scope of other existing procedures will normally be referred for consideration under these procedures. It may not be necessary to carry out a formal investigation in every case. The action taken by the council will depend on the nature of the concern. There may be a range of possibilities, depending on the nature of each case, for example:

- Explaining the context of an issue to the person raising the concern may be enough to alleviate their concerns,
- Minor concerns may be dealt with straight away by line management,
- A review by Audit, Governance and Risk Services as part of planned audit work might be sufficient to address the issue, for example, through a change to the control environment,
- There may be a role for the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) in addressing the concerns raised and either providing assurance or recommending changes to working practices,
- The matters raised may require a detailed internal investigation, or
- In some instances, concerns raised will be referred directly to the police or other statutory agencies.

The course of action will normally be agreed by Audit, Governance and Risk Services, Corporate Human Resources and Legal Services in consultation with senior departmental management, as appropriate. Audit, Governance and Risk Services will, in consultation, with these services, agree the approach to be taken and the appointment of officers to undertake a detailed investigation where this is required.

### **Detailed investigation**

During any investigation, the amount of contact between you and the investigating officer considering the issues will depend on the nature of the matters raised, the potential difficulties involved and the clarity of the information provided. If necessary, the investigating officer will seek further information from you. Where any meeting is arranged, this can be off-site if you so wish and you can be accompanied by a trade union representative, a colleague or friend. We will take down a written summary of your concern and provide you with a copy after the meeting. We will also aim to give you an indication of how we propose to deal with the matter.

### **After the Investigation**

The council accepts that you may wish to be assured that the concern you have raised has been properly considered and appropriately addressed. Feedback will be as set out in [Section 11: Outcomes](#).

As soon as possible following the completion of enquiries / investigation into any allegation made under this policy, the investigating officer should complete a **Case Closure Summary** template (attached at [Appendix 2](#)). This should be forwarded to the Raising Concerns Champion in AGRS to update the case log and, where applicable, ensure a response is issued to the individual who raised the concern.

## **9. If you are the Subject of a Concern Raised**

If you are the subject of a concern raised, we will endeavour to inform you as soon as is practically possible. There are occasions when it may be necessary for initial enquiries to be undertaken first. In addition, where the concern raised is potentially serious in nature, the council may initially seek to validate the concern raised through observation, enquiry and / or liaison with the Police. Following these initial enquiries, you will then be informed of the allegations made and you will be given an opportunity to provide an explanation. We will apply the same considerations of confidentiality to the worker at the centre of the concern raised, as far as appropriate.

If following explanation and, if necessary, further investigation, there is no evidence to suggest misconduct, the matter will not be referred for disciplinary action. However, if there is evidence of potential misconduct there is a possibility that the council's Disciplinary and Grievance Procedure may be invoked to further investigate the matter.

## **10. How to contact us**

There are several ways concerns can be communicated to the council. The options are set out below.

### **Option 1 – Raise your concern with management**

We hope that our workers will feel able to raise the matter first with their immediate line manager, Director or Business Support Manager. Concerns can be raised verbally or in writing.

### **Option 2- Raise your concern by email**

Concerns can be raised using the council's dedicated Raising Concerns mailbox, managed confidentially by the council's Audit, Governance & Risk Services.

*Email: [raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk)*

### **Option 3 – Raise your concern in writing or by telephone**

Concerns can be raised in writing, by telephone or in person with the following officers:

- Raising Concerns Champion - Liam Mulholland, AGRS Manager and Cathy Haughey, Principal Auditor

These officers can be contacted at:

Finance & Resources  
9-21 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8DJ

Tel. council switchboard on **028 90320202**.

#### **Option 4 - Raise your concern with senior, designated officers**

If you feel unable to raise the matter with management or the Raising Concerns Champions, you should raise it with one of the following people:

- Chief Executive
- Director of Corporate Services (to be recruited)
- Director of Human Resources
- City Solicitor - Director of Legal and Civic Services
- Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services

These senior, designated officers can be contacted via the council switchboard on **028 90320202**.

#### **Option 5 - Raise your concern with a regulator**

We hope that this policy gives you the reassurance to raise a concern internally. However, it is also recognised that there may be circumstances where you may wish to report a concern to an outside body, such as a regulator. You can seek independent advice from an experienced organisation before doing this. **Protect** is an independent, charitable organisation that runs a free, confidential whistleblowing advice line. The number is 020 3117 2520 or you can contact them online via their website [www.protect-advice.org.uk](http://www.protect-advice.org.uk)

In addition you may wish to report the concern to the Local Government Auditor (including the NIAO), who has been prescribed as a person to whom protected disclosures can be made under the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 in relation to the proper conduct of public business, value for money, fraud and corruption in relation to the provision of centrally funded public services and health service bodies. More information can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on **028 9025 1062** or **028 90251000** or email [raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk](mailto:raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk)

## **11. Outcomes**

The council accepts that you may wish to be assured that the concern you have raised has been properly considered and appropriately addressed. Subject to legal constraints, we will inform you of the outcome of any enquiries / investigation undertaken.

The response will be issued by AGRS, who will consult with the investigating officer(s), relevant Departmental Business Manager, Departmental Human Resources, Corporate Human Resources and Legal Services, where appropriate.

If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you can write to the Chief Executive and ask for the investigation and outcome to be reviewed. If you remain dissatisfied and you feel it is right to take the matter outside this process, the following are possible contact points:



- NI Commissioner for Complaints,
- Northern Ireland Audit Office (the Local Government Auditor),
- Relevant professional bodies or regulatory organisations,
- Your solicitor or
- The police.

Workers can rely on their rights under the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 (amended in October 2017). The Order gives you protection from victimisation if you make certain disclosures of information in the public interest. The provisions are quite complex and include a list of prescribed people outside of the council who can be contacted in certain circumstances. You should seek advice from your solicitor, your local Citizens Advice Bureau, the Ombudsman or Protect on the effect of the Order.

If you take the matter outside the council, you should make sure that you do not disclose confidential information. In order to make sure that you do not make any such disclosures you may want to check the position with the council's Legal Services section.

<b>12. Summary of Roles and Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Members</b>	Leadership, approve policy, receive and consider high level progress updates at the Audit & Risk Panel on concerns raised (as appropriate).
<b>Chief Executive, City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services, Director of Human Resources, Head of AGRS</b>	Potential contact points for those individuals raising concerns
<b>Head of AGRS</b>	<p>Allocated ownership of the following corporate policies on an interim basis pending the recruitment of the Director of Corporate Services.</p> <p>Potential contact point for those individuals raising concerns.</p>
<b>Departmental management</b>	<p>Management should ensure that their workers are aware of relevant council policies and procedures and ensure they are complied with.</p> <p>Management should be aware of what to do if someone raises a concern with them. (Refer to <a href="#">Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised</a>) This includes notifying AGRS / Raising Concern Champion as soon as a concern has been raised, <u>prior to</u> any initial enquiries being undertaken, via the <a href="#">Raising Concerns Notification form</a>.</p> <p>Managers may be asked, where appropriate, to undertake enquiries / investigations including liaising with the individual raising the concern, where possible.</p> <p>Business Support Managers will, where appropriate, be consulted on the investigation of concerns raised and will, where appropriate, keep senior departmental management and AGRS informed of the progress of investigations.</p>
<b>Our Workers</b>	<p>Worker, as defined in legislation, includes staff and may also include agency assignees, volunteers, consultants, those on secondment and contractors.</p> <p>Our workers should ensure they comply with relevant council policies and procedures.</p> <p>Our workers should be aware of what to do if someone raises a concern with them. (Refer to <a href="#">Section 8: Handling Concerns Raised</a>)</p>
<b>Audit, Governance and Risk Services</b>	<p>Nominated officers in AGRS will undertake the role of the <a href="#">Raising Concern Champion</a>.</p> <p>AGRS will undertake or provide advice and assistance to management in undertaking investigations.</p>

	<p>Provide the framework for the management of all concerns raised and the related investigations.</p> <p>Policy maintenance and communication. Ensuring staff awareness and training on the Raising Concerns policy is adequate for their specific needs, that is, workers, line managers, senior managers and Members.</p>
<b>Raising Concerns Champion</b>	<p>Potential contact point for those individuals raising concerns and available for advice and guidance, either prior to formally raising a concern or at any stage during the process.</p> <p>Will understand the types of public interest concerns the council can consider and redirect concerns where necessary to the appropriate body.</p> <p>Log concerns and ensure they are directed within the council to the most appropriate person for proper consideration and appropriate action, in liaison with Corporate Human Resources, Legal Services and senior departmental management, as appropriate.</p> <p>Liaise on an ongoing basis with those in the organisation handling concerns, to ensure progress is made and that appropriate feedback is provided to those raising the concerns.</p> <p>Where necessary, escalate concerns higher up the organisation.</p> <p>Raise awareness of the policy and the related roles and responsibilities across the organisation.</p>
<b>External Audit – NI Audit Office</b>	<p>Local government auditors have been prescribed as persons to whom protected disclosures can be made under the Public Interest Disclosure (NI) Order 1998 in relation to the proper conduct of public business, value for money, fraud and corruption in relation to the provision of centrally funded public services and health service bodies. More information can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) on <b>028 9025 1062 or 02890 251000</b> or email <a href="mailto:raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk">raisingconcerns@niauditoffice.gov.uk</a></p>
<b>Departmental HR, Corporate HR and Legal Services</b>	<p>Provision of specialist advice on investigations as well as potential disciplinary and or criminal matters.</p>

**13. Policy Control**

Policy or template title	Raising Concerns Policy (formerly Whistleblowing)
Document version	Updated November 2022
Departmental ownership	Corporate Services
Document owner	Claire O’Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) (interim)
Officer responsible or document authority	Claire O’Prey, Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS)
Date of approval –	(Audit & Risk Panel) TBC
Date of last review	May 2019
Date of last update	March 2019
Updated by	Liam Mulholland, AGRS Manager
Date of next review	Annual review – December 2023
Approval details	Audit Assurance Board / Audit & Risk Panel
Locations of where document is held and referenced	AGRS / Interlink / external webpage
<b>Intended audience</b>	<b>Communication process</b>
Workers	Intercom, Interlink, and departmental briefings.
Elected members	Audit & Risk Panel training and reports, Member briefings
Contractors	BCC website, contract documents
Members of the public	BCC website

## Appendix 1 Raising Concerns Notification

### Raising Concerns Notification

*NB: This form is to be completed, by the person receiving the concern, as soon as possible after the receipt of the concern. Please provide as much information as possible and e-mail the completed form to [raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk) and cc the Head of AGRS.*

Private and Confidential		
Case reference number (assigned by AGRS):		
1	Date concern received in the department:	
	How the concern was received e.g. telephone call / email / letter:	
2	Details of the concern: (Providing as much detail as possible for example; dates, times, names, places etc.)	
3	Name & contact details of person raising the concern (if known):	
4	Name & contact details of officer to whom concern was notified:	
5	Department / Service / to which concern relates:	
6	Details of the location at which the incident occurred:	
7	Details of any documents (electronic or hard copy) received with disclosure: NB Please forward all documentation with this notification, including any written record of a telephone call.	
8	Was confidentiality requested by the person raising the concern?	
9	Name & contact details of the manager of the relevant business area (contact point for ongoing correspondence / progress updates):	
10	Have you informed the individual that the concern would be passed to AGRS / Raising Concern Champion and that they would be in contact?	

**Appendix 2 Case Closure Summary**

**Case Closure Summary - Post Investigation Outcome & Action**

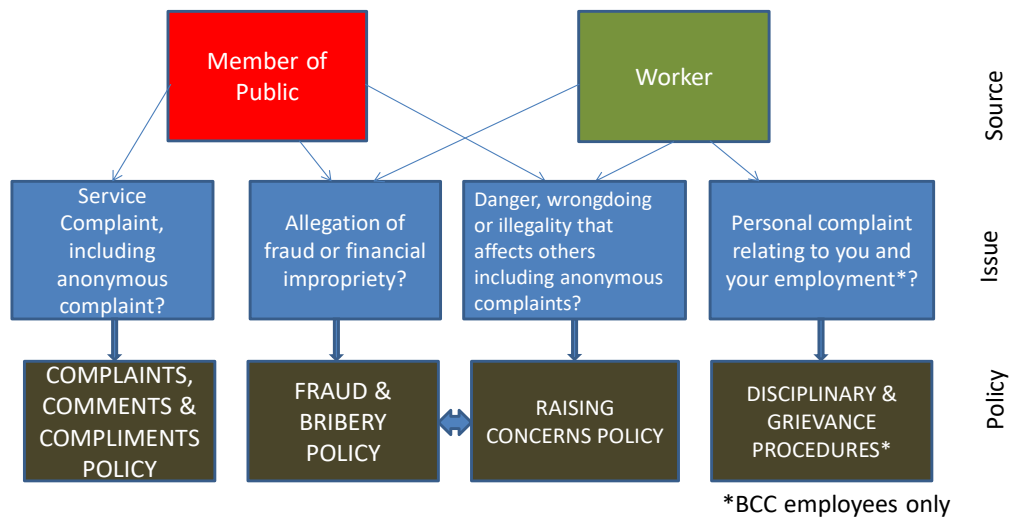
***NB: To be completed by the relevant business area as soon as possible after the completion of initial enquiries / investigation into any concern made under the Raising Concerns Policy. Please provide as much information as possible and e-mail the completed form to [raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:raisingconcerns@belfastcity.gov.uk) and cc the Head of AGRS.***

<b>Private and Confidential</b>		
<b>Case reference number (assigned by AGRS):</b>		
1	Date initial enquiries / Investigation completed (please attach a copy of the report):	
2	Outcome of initial enquiries / investigation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- irregularity found (other than fraud)</li> <li>- no irregularity</li> <li>- fraud</li> </ul>	
3	Summary of findings of the investigation:	
4	If an irregularity / fraud was found, who was responsible? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Worker</li> <li>- Contractor</li> <li>- Funded body / grant applicant</li> <li>- Other third party (please specify)</li> <li>- Collusion between internal and external parties</li> <li>- Unknown</li> </ul>	
5	Date and details of any contact with the person raising the concern:	
6	If appropriate, provide details of the financial implications of the concern raised / quantify any loss to the council:	
7	Type of action recommended as a result of the investigation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Control improvements</li> <li>- Too early to determine</li> <li>- No action necessary / possible</li> <li>- Referral for investigation under disciplinary procedure</li> <li>- Referral for police investigation</li> </ul>	
8	Name & contact details in case further information is required:	

9	Notes / further information:	
10	<p><b>To be completed by the Raising Concern Champion in AGRS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where appropriate, specific details of actions taken to address issues arising from the investigation:</li> <li>- Where appropriate, date and details of referral to other parties / organisations:</li> <li>- Date of final case closure:</li> </ul>	

**Appendix 3 Routemap**

The diagram below provides an overview of the relationship between the following council policies - Complaints, Comments & Compliments, Fraud and Bribery, Raising Concerns and the Disciplinary & Grievance procedures. Note that only workers are protected by legislation. More detail is provided in each policy.



In addition, any concerns raised in relation to **safeguarding** or **modern slavery**, will be handled in line with the related council policy.





<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Requests for Use of the City Hall and the Provision of Hospitality</b>
<b>Date:</b>	16 <sup>th</sup> December 2022
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor and Director of Legal and Civic Services
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Aisling Milliken, Functions and Exhibition Manager

<b>Restricted Reports</b>	
<b>Is this report restricted?</b>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</b>	
<b>After Committee Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>After Council Decision</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Sometime in the future</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Never</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Call-in</b>	
<b>Is the decision eligible for Call-in?</b>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report</b>
1.1	This report, together with the attached appendix, contains the recommended approach in respect of each of the requests by external organisations for access to the City Hall function rooms received up to 2nd December 2022.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	The Committee is asked to approve the recommendations as set out in the appendix.
<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
3.1	<p><u>Background Information</u></p> <p>The current criteria for use of the function rooms used to review external applications is Functions permitted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>functions which support other events in the city and which are of demonstrable economic benefit to Belfast whether organised by the council or not</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• functions which demonstrably enhance the city’s image nationally or internationally as a desirable commercial, business or tourist destination</li> <li>• functions designed to celebrate or commemorate a notable achievement or significant anniversary (25, 50, 100 years) by an organisation or body with close links to the city or province</li> <li>• functions organised by recognised local community or voluntary sector groups for non-profit and non-political purposes</li> </ul>
3.2	<p>Functions not permitted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conferences, meetings, seminars, performances, wedding receptions, private parties or receptions and similar booking requests in the prestige function rooms</li> <li>• functions, which have as their principal purpose the generation of commercial gain for the organisers. Charity-fundraising functions are managed by the Lord Mayor’s Office.</li> <li>• functions which have no compelling links to the council or the city specifically and which could instead use local private sector facilities</li> <li>• functions which have as their primary purpose the advancement of any political or religious cause or campaign or are otherwise potentially contentious or involve significant reputation risks for the council.</li> <li>• functions which involve exceptionally large or disruptive set-ups or pose a real and tangible risk to the fabric of the building or grounds</li> </ul> <p><u>Key Issues</u></p>
3.3	<p>The existing revised criteria and scale of charges have been applied to the various requests received and the recommendations herein are offered to the Committee on this basis for approval.</p> <p>The attached schedule covers 12 applications for functions, scheduled for 2023 and 2026.</p> <p><b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b></p>
3.4	<p>None.</p> <p><b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment</u></b></p>
3.5	<p>None.</p>
4.0	<p><b>Document Attached</b></p>
	<p>Schedule of function requests received up to 2nd December 2022.</p>

## DECEMBER 2022 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
<b>2023 EVENTS</b>						
European Youth Parliament	21 February 2023	<b>NI Regional Session of Youth Parliament</b> - teams of secondary students debate and present their ideas and solutions on current topics.  Numbers attending – 100	B & D	No (Charity)	No (they provide their own lunches for attendees)	Approve No charge No hospitality
Donegal Pass Community Forum	2 March 2023	<b>Launch of 'Language Matters' Research</b> – project linked to language provision delivered by community groups.  Numbers attending – 60	D	No charge as community group	Yes, tea and coffee reception as community group	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception  <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for tea and coffee</i>
John Hewitt Society	2 March 2023	<b>40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of John Hewitt Freedom of City of Belfast</b> - reception and celebration evening.  Numbers attending – 60 – 100 tbc	C	No charge as not for profit group	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No Charge Wine Reception  <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
Belfast Knights	3 March 2023	<b>Belfast Knights 30th Anniversary Celebration</b> - Drinks Reception, Awards, Dinner and entertainment.  Numbers attending – 250 - 300	C & D	No Charge as voluntary group	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No Charge Wine Reception  <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
Irish FA Foundation/ GAA and Ulster Rugby	21 March 2023	<b>Sports Inspire Awards Gala Dinner</b> to celebrate and reward volunteers in the Inspire Programme run by Irish FA, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby.  Numbers attending – 200	C and D	No charge as charity	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

## DECEMBER 2022 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	16 May 2023	<p><b>Involvement Recognition event to</b> acknowledge how service users and advisers have helped develop Trust Services.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 80</p>	C	Charge £115	No hospitality	Approve Charge £115 No hospitality
Public Health Agency	17 May 2023	<p><b>Cross-border Healthcare Intervention Trials In Ireland Network (CHITIN) Closure Event</b> – celebrating a cross-border partnership between the Public Health Agency (PHA) and the Health Research Board (HRB) in the Republic of Ireland, delivering 11 Healthcare Intervention Trials. PHA is community partner of Belfast Agenda.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 250</p>	A & C	Charge £300	No Hospitality	Approve Charge £300 No hospitality
Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry	23 June 2023	<p><b>Annual President's Lunch</b> – annual lunch for the NI Chamber of Commerce and Industry to mark economic benefits to the City.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 400</p>	B	Charge £300	No Hospitality	Approve Charge £300 No hospitality
Irish Football Association Foundation	2 November 2023	<p><b>IFA McDonalds Community Football Awards</b> – Celebrating the volunteers who help deliver their programs – reception, dinner,</p>	C & D	No (Charity)	No Hospitality	Approve No Charge No Hospitality

## DECEMBER 2022 CITY HALL FUNCTION APPLICATIONS

		entertainment and awards.  Numbers attending - 190				
EAPRIL (European Association for Practitioner Research on Improving Learning)	23 November 2023	<b>APRIL Conference 2023 Dinner</b> for guests attending their 3-day conference taking place in QUB.  Numbers attending – 150 - 250	A & B	No (Waivered as linked to Visit Belfast)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
St Brigid's GAC	25 November 2023	<b>St Brigid's GAC 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration</b> - Drinks Reception, Awards, Dinner and entertainment.  Numbers attending - 350 - 400	C & D	No Charge as voluntary group	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No Charge Wine Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
<b>2026 EVENTS</b>						
NAHT – National Association of Head Teachers	2 May 2026	<b>NAHT Conference 2026 Gala Dinner</b> for guests attending their 2-day conference taking place in ICC Belfast.  Numbers attending – 320	A & B	No (Waivered as linked to Visit Belfast)	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

This page is intentionally left blank