

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 23rd February, 2024

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor Black (Chairperson);
Alderman McCoubrey; and
Councillors Beattie, Bunting, Cobain, de Faoite,
M. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Ferguson, Garrett,
Harvey, Long, Maghie, Maskey, I. McLaughlin,
R. McLaughlin, Nelson, Nic Bhranair, Smyth
and Whyte.

In attendance: Mr. J. Walsh, Chief Executive;
Ms. S. McNicholl, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of
Corporate Services;
Ms. N. Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Ms. C. Reynolds, Director of City Regeneration and
Development;
Mr. D. Sales, Strategic Director of City Operations;
Ms. C. Sheridan, Director of Human Resources;
Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Mr. T. Wallace, Director of Finance;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 19th and 26th January were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 1st February, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Beattie, RM Donnelly, Ferguson, Garrett and Nic Bhranair declared an interest in respect of Item 2(l) Discretionary Payments in that they worked for or were associated with one of the applicants and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Nic Bhranair declared an interest in respect of Item 2(n) Oireachtas Festival Update in that she was associated with the organisers and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Councillor Smyth declared an interest in respect of Item 5(g) Response by NILGA in that his wife worked for the organisation and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Several members sought clarification in relation to the items on Discretionary Payments and the Appointment of Members to the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and were advised that, as Council appointees to those organisations, they would not be required to declare an interest and leave the meeting.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following 14 items is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following fourteen items as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 3 2023/24

The Director of Finance submitted for the Committee’s consideration a report providing information on the financial position for Quarter 3 2023/24.

He reported that, at the end of Quarter 3, the financial position for the Council had shown an underspend of £2.6m, representing 2% of the net expenditure budget, which could be attributed to employee underspends and savings from retendered contracts. The Quarter 3 Departmental forecast was an underspend of £2m, representing 1.2% of the net expenditure budget. He pointed out that this forecast had fallen short of the targeted £3m of in-year savings required as part of the Finance Strategy to deliver a balanced budget.

The Director went on to provide an update on the commitments to be funded, rate setting 2024/25, the medium-term financial planning, forecast reserves balance, rates finalisation and capital projects.

The Committee:

- noted the report and the continued adoption of the Finance Strategy throughout 2023/24.
- agreed to set aside £1.6m from any in-year underspends and/or reallocation of reserves to fund the non-consolidated element of the pay and grading review if not agreed by TU's before end of March.
- agreed that reallocations of year end underspends will be considered as part of year end reporting.

Organisational Reviews and Change Programme

The Committee noted the progress on the work programme for the Organisational Reviews and Change portfolio and timescales going forward.

Community and Neighbourhood Services Establishment Update – Resources and Fleet

The Committee considered a report providing recommendations to support the stabilisation of general operative resources in waste collection and to request authority to increase the driver and general operative establishment to implement a pilot solution for the difficult to access streets using smaller vehicles.

The Members were advised that the report formed part of a wider piece of work, focused on stabilising resources in Waste Collection and planning for the future. The first activity undertaken in March 2023 was to stabilise the driver numbers. The Committee had agreed to regularise temporary posts that had been in the structure for a number of years. Following that decision, work had continued to establish the issues impacting driver and operative resourcing requirements. This included confirming establishment numbers, recruitment, managing planned and unplanned absence, and longer-term workforce planning.

The Committee noted the content of the report and agreed to increase the Resources and Fleet Establishment as follows:

- 14 permanent posts General Operatives for Waste Collection operations
- 1 permanent post Waste Transfer Station Operative
- 4 permanent posts General Operatives and 2 permanent HGV drivers for the pilot on difficult to access streets using smaller vehicles.

Regeneration (Place Based Growth Proposition)
Advocacy and Lobbying Report and Regeneration
Framework Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on work underway in relation to a Regeneration (Place Based Growth Proposition) Advocacy and Lobbying Report and a Regeneration Framework and to seek approval to advance a Lobbying and Engagement exercise.

During discussion, several Members expressed the view that a special meeting was required to consider issues such as the regeneration frameworks, city centre development and heritage assets. A Member also requested that the issue of the Tribeca site, which had been considered by the Committee at its previous meeting, should be included on the agenda as a standing item. In response to this the Chief Executive suggested that it might be more appropriate to include a broader city centre development update report as a regular item. A further Member also requested that an update report on the possible purchase of the Assembly Rooms, which had previously been agreed by the Committee, be submitted to a future meeting.

The Committee:

- i Noted the update on the Regeneration (Place Based Growth Proposition) Advocacy and Lobbying Report, including the Briefing Summary Paper as attached and as reported to the City Growth and Regeneration Committee on 7th February 2024 and presented to Party Group Leaders Consultative Forum on 11th January 2024;
- ii Agreed to advance the Advocacy and Lobby proposition, to include a direct advocacy with both the UK Government in Westminster, the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government and informed by a detailed stakeholder mapping, engagement plan and proposed lobbying strategy as referenced in the report;
- iii Noted the update on the Regeneration Framework and its interdependencies with the Regeneration (Place Based Growth Proposition) Advocacy and Lobby work and that further Member engagement will be undertaken on the Regeneration Framework over the coming weeks;
- iv Noted the decision of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 7th February to write to the new Minister for Communities to welcome him to his position and call on him to work with all relevant stakeholders to achieve the conferring of regeneration powers to councils with the appropriate budgets within this Assembly mandate;
- v Agreed that a special meeting be held to consider the regeneration frameworks, city centre development and heritage assets;
- vi Agreed that an update report on the purchase of the Assembly Rooms be submitted to a future meeting; and
- vii Agreed that a regular update on city centre developments be included as an item on the agenda.

Update on 2 Royal Avenue

The Committee considered a report which provide Members with an update in respect of 2 Royal Avenue, including an overview of activity of the current Meanwhile Use; the outworking of the Operator and Feasibility Study into future sustainable use; LGBTQIA+ Hub and PEACEPLUS Funding for space on the upper floor; and Department for Communities funded capital works to the rear of the building, including a new entrance and activation onto Bank Square.

The report provided details also of the pending Expression of Interest exercise to be undertaken in respect of the future use of the ground floor of the building and alignment to previously agreed Council objectives and the need for diversification of uses in the city centre and to ensure consideration was given to the sustainable future long term use of the building and, in light of the financial implications for the Council, details of that would be brought back to Members for consideration.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director undertook to work with the Rainbow Project to discuss the development of a governance model.

The Committee:

- Noted the update on 2 Royal Avenue, including:
 - the background on principles for acquisition,
 - update on the current meanwhile use and the options and work undertaken to consider future uses including the need to consider the longer-term sustainability of the building and financial implications for Council,
 - update on the LGBTQIA+ hub application to PEACEPLUS for space on the First Floor (under Investment Area 1.1: Co-design Community Peace Action Plan);
- Agreed to commence a without prejudice market wide Expressions of Interest (EOI) exercise for the ground floor at 2 Royal Avenue for both small occupiers to support and complement the current meanwhile use (until Dec 2024) and a ground floor occupier(s) for longer term post 2024, cognisant of the proposed first floor PEACEPLUS Funding application.
- Noted the outcomes of the EOI on the longer-term use will be reported to a future meeting of Committee.
- Noted the ongoing DfC funded capital works to the rear of the building including opening up of the space at the rear with a new entrance and activation onto Bank Square, improving the connectivity to and from Royal Avenue to Bank Square.

Belfast Agenda Refresh (2024-2028)

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the final draft of the Belfast Agenda strategic framework and supporting action plans for the period 2024-2028 and:

- i. endorsed the refreshed Belfast Agenda and supporting Action Plans (2024-2028);
- ii. noted that community planning partners have been asked to consider and confirm their organisational endorsement no later than 3 March 2024;

- iii. agreed that Party Group briefings on the Belfast Agenda will be offered to Members;
- iv. agreed that the key priorities emerging from the Belfast Agenda be discussed with relevant Northern Ireland Executive Ministers as part of the proposed all-party meetings to be sought (NB. separate report on the Committee agenda);
- v. noted the planned formal launch of the Belfast Agenda on 20 March 2024 and
- vi. agreed to provide organisational support in promoting the launch; and
- vii. noted the work underway to refresh the governance and programme management arrangements to align with new refreshed Belfast Agenda.

Outstanding Accounts

The Committee authorised that the outstanding account of £3,701.61 (net of VAT) be written off, in accordance with Section M12 of the Council's Financial Regulations.

Update on Cost-of-Living Hardship Programme 23/24

The Committee noted a report which provided an update on the implementation of the Hardship Programme for 2023/24, which sought to help alleviate the impact of the cost of living on vulnerable people across the city.

City Centre Byelaws Consultation – Update on process

The Interim City Solicitor advised the Members that, at its meeting on 26th June 2023, the Committee had agreed to authorise officers to begin the formal public consultation process on the draft Amenity Bye Laws. The consultation was launched on 27 November 2023 on the Council's online engagement platform for a period of 14 weeks and was scheduled to end on 4 March 2024.

At the Council meeting on 4 December 2023 a Member had requested that the City Solicitor bring an update to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the process for submitting responses using the Council's online engagement platform.

The Interim City Solicitor advised that the Council used an online digital engagement platform "Engagement HQ" (which was branded "Your Say Belfast") to carry out a range of public consultations.

This online engagement platform provided the Council with a number of tools to support early, transparent and ongoing dialogue when undertaking consultation and engagement exercises and for reporting back on evidence received both in terms of quantitative and qualitative information.

A number of queries have been raised in relation to the process around the submission of responses and the potential for respondents to submit multiple or duplicate responses to the same survey and these were addressed in the report.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Minutes of the Shared City Partnership Meeting

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 5th February 2024 including:

Shared City Partnership Membership (Verbal Update)

- That members note the verbal update and agree the approach provided by the Good Relations Manager.

Good Relations Shared Learning Forum (Verbal Update)

- The Partnership recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it note the verbal update.

The Executive Office Asylum Dispersal Funding Update

- The Partnership recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it notes the contents of this report and the risk to services to asylum seekers, if further Executive Office / Dispersal Funding is not provided and if there is a continued reduction in the Good Relations District Council Fund provided by TEO.

Peace IV - Secretariat Update

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

PEACEPLUS – Theme 1.1 - Local Action Plan Update

- The Partnership recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it note the contents of the report and appendices.

Draft Irish Language Policy

The Committee considered a report which provided an update in to developing a corporate Irish Language Policy and seeking Members views on the current draft.

During discussion, a Member submitted a number of additional comments which she requested to be included within the draft policy. A further Member indicated that her Party would require a briefing on the draft before the final Policy was submitted. The Committee acceded to both requests and accordingly it:

- Noted the informal consultation responses which have been received;
- Approved the suggested amendments to the draft Policy;
- Agreed that the further amendments circulated by a Member at the meeting be included in the draft;
- Noted that a final draft would be presented to a subsequent meeting of the Committee for the purposes of public consultation once the Section 75 screening has been undertaken; and
- Agreed that briefings be held on the draft policy for those Parties who so wished.

Discretionary Payments

The Director of Finance submitted a report providing details of the assessment of Discretionary payment applications received during January and February 2024, which sought agreement in relation to the award of the grant.

The Committee:

- 1) Noted the number of applications received and the total funding requested;
- 2) Agreed the payment of grant to those who scored 50% and over; and
- 3) Agreed that a further open call for funding take place in June and that groups which have already been awarded funding would not be eligible to submit an application for a further payment.

Waste Management – Purpose Build Managed Student Accommodation

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 19th January, it had agreed that the Council would begin charging for collection of waste from Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation commencing on 1st April 2024; and noted that a further report would be brought to this month's meeting setting out the charging details.

Accordingly, the Committee considered a report in this regard and agreed to the charging mechanism as detailed in the report to be effective from 1st April 2024.

Oireachtas Festival Update

The Members were reminded that the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meetings in August 2023 and October 2023, had approved proceeding with the BID for Belfast to host the Oireachtas Festival and consideration of any subsequent financial commitments.

The Oireachtas na Samhna festival had advised officers that, subject to final committee and council approval, the BID to host the event in 2025 has been reviewed and considered by its organising committee and board with a positive outcome to appoint Belfast as host city.

The Committee noted the contents of the report and approved the proposed budget requirements as set out in section 3.8 of the report.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Motion Transparency by Default Belfast City Council

The Members were informed that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 23rd January, had considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 1st February:

“This council believes that maintaining public trust in the democratic process is essential. A key part of this is ensuring that decisions are made openly and can be subject to public scrutiny. Council recognises the concern that there is about the degree to which council, committee and working group discussions and decisions are being conducted in restricted session, and the wholesale redaction of documentation that accompanies these matters.

To help maintain public trust and ensure that the people of this city can be fully informed about how decisions that affect them have been reached, this council is committed to a policy of 'transparency by default' by which all meetings and documentation will be placed in the public domain as standard, with information or discussions only being redacted or restricted very specifically in relation to those issues which fall within the exemptions in the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. To that end, committee reports will, in addition to identifying the relevant exemption in the 2014 Act, also set out a rationale as to why information or discussions are to be restricted, when this is the case.

Officers will also bring forward guidelines in relation to all council, committee and working group discussions and decisions which will enable this approach, to ensure maximum transparency while adhering to legislative requirements, ultimately making this organisation an exemplar public body in terms of transparency and openness.”

The motion had been proposed by Councillor McKeown and seconded by Councillor Lyons.

The Committee noted, in accordance with Standing Order 13(i), that Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.

The Committee noted also that the Notice of Motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report would be brought to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Motion and the potential costs implications.

Motion Rights-based Ethical Procurement Policy

The Members were informed that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 23rd January, had considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 1st February:

“This Council deplores those corporations that profit from protracted armed conflict and systematic violations of human rights, particularly in the context of Israel’s continuing brutal assault on the people of Gaza and escalating settler terrorism in the West Bank, Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, and other conflicts around the world. With this motion, the Council encourages companies to meet their obligations to avoid contributing to adverse human rights impacts through their own activities, and to prevent or mitigate human rights abuses linked to their operations.

The Council is aware of the crucial role of local authorities and their public procurement procedures in ensuring respect for human rights by companies, as well as their obligations under widely accepted business and human rights norms – as laid down in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the Global Sullivan Principles (1999) – to promote respect for human rights by companies with which they do business.

The Council affirms that every endeavour is made to ensure that councils tender processes are consistent with the above principles, including under the Fourth Geneva convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and under customary international humanitarian law, prohibiting the importation or sale of goods or services originating in occupied territories.

This Council resolves to adopt a rights-based Ethical Procurement Policy (EPP) that takes fully into account existing obligations and standards. The EPP will incorporate widely accepted and precisely formulated international standards and explain clearly how the policy will be implemented. The primary aim of the EPP is to ensure that human rights obligations are properly acknowledged, observed and respected at all stages of the procurement process.”

The motion had been proposed by Councillor Anglin and seconded by Councillor McCabe.

The Committee noted, in accordance with Standing Order 13(i), that Notices of Motion which commit the Council to expenditure must be referred to the appropriate committee for consideration and report.

The Committee also noted that the Notice of Motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report would be brought to the Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Motion and the potential costs implications.

Quarterly Update on Notices of Motion

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Committee on the progress of all Notices of Motion for which SP&R Committee is responsible for.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that SP&R Committee:

- **Note the updates to all Notices of Motion that SP&R Committee is responsible for and**
- **Agree to the closure of Notice of Motion 266, 269, 302, 320, 327, 331, 332, 336, 346 and 350 as referenced in Appendix 1 and paragraph 3.4 below.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Background

At SP&R Committee on 25th October 2019, the following Notice of Motion was agreed:

‘That this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting, detailing the following:

1. Date received
2. Notice of motion title
3. Submitted by which Councillor
4. Council meeting date
5. Committee motion is referred to
6. Outcome of committee where Notice of Motion will be debated
7. Month it will be reported back to committee
8. Other action to be taken.’

3.2 Following a review exercise, a new database containing all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance at Committee was created and quarterly reporting to Committee commenced in March 2021. Appendix 1 is the latest quarterly update showing all active Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance which SP&R Committee is responsible for.

3.3 Closure of Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance

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

- Notices of Motion which contained an action(s) that has been completed; and
- Notices of Motion have become Council policy.

3.4 SP&R Committee are asked to agree that the following 10 Notices of Motion are now closed:

Category 1 Recommended Closures:

- **Support for Striking Communication Workers Union (Ref 269)** – This NOM called on the Council to support the decision by communication workers to engage in strike action to lift pay. It asked the Council to write to

senior management of Royal Mail, BT and Openreach encouraging them to present a fair, above inflation pay offer to workers and host an all-party meeting of Councillors, officers and representatives from CWU engaging in strike action. A response was received on 15th September 2023 and an all-party meeting is being arranged. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.

- Department for Infrastructure – Standards of Repairs to Roads and Footpaths (Ref 320) – This NOM called on the Council to write to DfI to raise the issue regarding the standard of repairs to roads and footpaths. A response has now been received and is being taken forward as part of ongoing engagement with the Department for Infrastructure. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.
- Save West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness (Ref 331) – This NOM called on the Council to explore all options to fund the West Well Being Suicide Prevention Centre, including using reserve funds, if necessary, to source up to £50,000 so the organisation could continue to deliver its full range of services for the remainder of 2023. Following discussion it was agreed that all requests for funding would be dealt with via the revised discretionary payments policy. Further information was provided to the organisation but no application has been made. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.
- Future Management Structures of Lough Neagh (Ref 332) – This NOM calls for the public acquisition of Lough Neagh from Lord Shaftesbury, an exploration of a right of nature for Lough Neagh and the future participation of communities in any future decision making. This call was passed at Committee. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.
- National Famine Memorial Day (Ref 336) – This NOM called on the Council to write to the Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media to request that Belfast host, in 2024, the National Famine Memorial Day, which takes place every May. A response was received and reported to SP&R in January 2024. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.

- **Request for Update on Motion on Overdose Prevention Facility in Belfast (Ref 346)** – This Issue Raised in Advance called for a report to be submitted providing an update on the above-mentioned motion, which had been passed by the Council at its meeting on 1st March, with specific reference to meetings held, legal advice sought and partners engaged with. An update was provided to SP&R in Jan 2024. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.
- **Removal of the Maximum Value Cap on Domestic Rates (Ref 350)** – This NOM called for a fully restored Executive so that collective decisions could be made on important devolved matters. In addition, it asked that in light of consultation that will take place on this issue, the Council would also make this motion a collective submission to the consultation. The consultation response was agreed at SP&R in January 24 and ratified at Council in Feb 24 and has been submitted. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.

Category 2 Recommended Closures:

- **GLL and Trade Unions (Ref 266)** – This NOM called on GLL to officially recognise trade unions in Belfast City Council leisure centres and for the Chief Executive of the Council to convene a meeting with the relevant trade unions to hear directly about the issues facing workers. The Chief Executive convened a meeting with the Trade Unions on 5th April 2023 and GLL now formally recognise the Trade Unions. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.
- **Winter Outdoor Preparedness Strategy (Ref 302)** – This NOM called on the Council to work with key stakeholders to develop a funded winter outdoor preparedness strategy and action plan for the city, to be operational by Quarter 3 of the 2023/2024 financial year. An update report on Winter Preparedness was presented to the People and Communities Committee in November 2023. Therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.
- **Corporate Communications – Language Policy (Ref 327)** – This Issue Raised in Advance called on the Council to issue a social media tweet in Irish marking the 130th anniversary of the founding of Conradh na Gaeilge and grant approval, in advance of the Language Strategy Action Plan being approved, for

social media tweets marking similar illuminations to be issued in both English and the minority language. The social media tweet was issued on 18 August 23 and the draft Language Policy Action Plan was issued for public consultation in Oct 2023 and contain actions about social media tweets in all languages. Therefore it is recommended that this Issue Raised in Advance is now closed.

3.5 Financial and Resource Implications

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

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

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Governance

Change of Date Council Meeting in May

The Committee was reminded that the Council had previously approved the visit of the Lord Mayor and the Chief Executive to Sejong, South Korea in connection with joint innovation initiatives with Belfast.

The visit was set to take place from 25th April to 2nd May and would therefore clash with the May meeting of the Council.

In order to accommodate the attendance of the Lord Mayor and the Chief Executive at both events, the Committee was being asked to consider the change of date of the Council meeting in May from Wednesday 1st May to Tuesday 7th May.

This would in turn have a knock-on effect of the meeting of the People and Communities Committee and it was suggested that meeting be brought forward from Tuesday 7th to Thursday 2nd May.

The Committee agreed that:

- I. The Council meeting in May be moved from Wednesday 1st to Tuesday 7th May; and
- II. The meeting of the People and Communities Committee be brought forward from Tuesday 7th to Thursday 2nd May.

Consultation on Standing Orders Regulations

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Department for Communities are seeking the views of Councils on the future contents of any proposed legislation dealing with Standing Orders, and in particular on the operation of call-in and what if any mandatory Standing Orders should be included in future legislation.

The purpose of this report is to seek SP&R approval on the Council position which will then be issued to the Department for Communities pending ratification by Council.

2.0 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- i. note the background in relation to Standing Order Regulations
- ii. agree the Council position outlined at paragraph 3.5
- iii. note the list of decisions called-in since April 2015 and the status of each (Appendix 3)

3.0 Main Report

Background

The Department for Communities issued a letter on 31 October seeking the views of Councils on the future contents of any proposed legislation dealing with Standing Orders (Appendix 1). The Department is, in particular, seeking information related to the operation of the ‘call-in’ procedure, which provides a mechanism by which councils may reconsider decisions already taken. The Council have been asked to identify and provide details of:

- any issues with the current ‘call-in’ process;
- how many decisions have been called-in since 1 April 2015;
- what type of decisions were called-in;
- on what grounds were they called-in; and
- what the outcome was – decision upheld or overturned.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer has collated the information on the numbers and status of all decisions called in since April 2015 which is presented at Appendix 3.

An extension to the deadline has been provided until February 2024.

3.2 Background to Standing Order Regulations

It was always the intention of the Department that they would introduce Standing Order Regulations in the Assembly which would include 'mandatory' standing orders which must be included in the standing orders of each of the 11 Councils.

In the interim period before the establishment of the new Councils, the Department issued a set of Model Standing Orders which were adopted by all of the new Councils and remain the basis for the existing standing orders within each of the 11 Councils.

The Department previously tried in 2015 and again in 2016 to bring forward Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (NI) but both sets of draft regulations were negated by the Assembly. This was mainly due to a disagreement on the 'merit principle' in relation to decisions called in on 'community impact' grounds.

3.3 Current arrangements in relation to Call In and Qualified Majority Voting

The procedures in relation to the 'reconsideration of a decision' (also referred to as 'call-in') are provided for by Section 41 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 and are outlined in more detail in the Councils Standing Orders (see Standing Order 48).

2014 Act

Section 41(1) of the 2014 Act indicates that the Council must make provision requiring reconsideration (or 'call-in') of a decision if 15 per cent of members of the council (which for Belfast City Council means at least 9 Members) present to the clerk of the council a requisition on either or both of the following grounds –

- a) that the decision was not arrived at after a proper consideration of the relevant facts and issues (i.e. 'procedural' grounds);
- b) that the decision would disproportionately affect adversely any section of the inhabitants of the district (i.e. 'community impact' grounds).

With regards to a decision called in on 'community impact' grounds, our current Standing Orders indicate that if the legal opinion deems the 'call in' to have merit, then the decision must be tabled at the next available meeting of the Council where it will be taken by a Qualified Majority Vote (i.e. where 80% of Members present and voting must be in favour of the decision).

If the legal opinion deems the 'call in' on community impact grounds not to have merit, then the original decision stands and should be implemented at the next available opportunity.

3.4 Proposals under Standing Order Regulations

The most recent Draft Standing Order Regulations 2016 were presented to the Assembly in 2016 but no agreement could be reached. (Appendix 2)

These would have made important changes to the Model Standing Orders adopted by each of the Councils, not least in relation to the operation of call-in and the list of those decisions which must be taken by a Qualified Majority Vote.

The Department received legal advice which indicated that the 'opinion' of the solicitor or barrister can only be on 'a point of law' and cannot be on the 'merit' principle as originally proposed – as this power was not provided by the primary legislation. According to the Department's legal advice, to assume this power would be 'ultra vires'.

The draft regulations provided that a call in made under 'community impact' grounds would only be taken by a qualified majority vote where a barrister has found that the decision is outside the powers of the council, is incompatible with EU law or convention rights, or is not in compliance with the council's equality scheme. In all other cases the decision would be implemented or tabled for ratification by the council.

3.5 The following proposed response is provided for Members consideration:

- **Belfast City Council have operated the call-in process consistently since April 2015. Details on the number of decisions called in, including the types of decisions, the grounds and the outcomes are included in Appendix 3.**
- **The Council would be broadly supportive of the proposals set out in the draft Standing Order Regulations 2016 which included a revision to the**

decisions which would be subject to Qualified Majority Vote.

- The Council supports the proposal that decisions called in under Section 41(1)(b) (i.e. on ‘community impact’ grounds) would only be subject to a Qualified Majority Vote where a solicitor or barrister has *opined under section 41(2) of that Act that there is a risk that the decision is:*
 - outside the powers of the council,
 - or is incompatible with EU law or Convention Rights (within the meaning of the Human Rights Act 1998),
 - or is not in compliance with the council’s equality scheme in so far as it relates to equality of opportunity (within the meaning of section 75(1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998).
- The Council would also take this opportunity to raise a further related issue which arises out of Section 41 of the 2014 Act (Power to require decisions to be reconsidered).
- Section 41(1) requires Council’s to make provision for reconsideration of decisions. Section 41(4) states that a ‘decision’ means a decision of the council or a committee of the council (and includes a decision to make a recommendation).
- In practice, this means that a decision taken by a Committee and which is not called, may nevertheless be called in following ratification at full Council (being a decision of the Council). This has the effect of prolonging the period following Council ratification before a decision can be implemented. In most cases any issue which arises as a result of a Committee decision before it reaches Council can either be resolved informally or the decision referred back to Committee for reconsideration. If that does not resolve the issue then the ultimate decision at Council could be subject to call-in.
- The Council would respectfully suggest that only one opportunity to avail of call-in is sufficient to address the issue which the legislation sought to address and avoids adding unnecessary bureaucracy to the decision-making process.

3.7 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no financial or resource implications connected to this report.

3.8 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality or good relations implications connected to this report.”

In response to a question from a Member in relation to the call-in of quasi-judicial decisions taken by the Planning and Licensing Committees which was now a requirement following the Harlands ruling, the Committee was advised that it was not the opinion of officers that this be reversed to the position outlined previously in The Local Government (Standing Orders) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 where these decisions were not subject to call-in but were of the view that such Committee decisions should remain as current following the legal ruling and be subject to the call-in process.

The Committee:

- i noted the background in relation to Standing Order Regulations;
- ii agreed the Council position outlined at paragraph 3.5 of the report; and
- iii noted the list of decisions called-in since April 2015 and the status of each as set out in Appendix 3 to the report.

Appointment of Members to the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners

The Committee considered correspondence dated 30 January which had been received from the Public Appointments Unit regarding the submission of Council nominees to be considered by the Permanent Secretary for the Department for appointment to the Board of the Belfast Harbor Commissioners.

The letter indicated that there was currently three Councillors in post with one vacancy. One Councillor had served two terms of appointment and could not be reappointed after 31 March 2024. The remaining two Councillors were due to complete their first term on 31 March 2024 and the DfI Permanent Secretary had decided that he was minded reappointing them for a further term to ensure continuity on the Board. If both eligible Councillors accepted the reappointments, then the DfI would be recruiting for two vacancies with the terms due to commence from 1 April 2024.

Accordingly, the Council had been asked to nominate at least six Councillors for appointment for the remaining two places.

In discussing the matter, a Member expressed the view that this was a step change from previous years when Councillors currently serving on the Board had to submit an application and be subject to an open and transparent recruitment process and this should apply to all nominees for the current term.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to defer consideration of the matter on the appointment of Members to the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and requested that a letter be forwarded to the Minister for Infrastructure stating that it was the Council's view that all 4 positions on the Board should be subject to an open recruitment/selection process as in previous years.

Governance update – restricted reports

The Interim City Solicitor submitted for the Committee's consideration the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 Following a number of recent issues which have arisen in relation to restricted reports and uncertainty about when information can be discussed publicly, it was considered that a report setting out the following be brought to Committee:

- **The grounds under which information may be exempt from disclosure under The Local Government Act 2014; and**
- **When information provided as part of a restricted report and discussion may be made public after a decision by a Working Group, Committee and Council.**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **note the contents of this report; and**
- **agree that a reminder is issued to councillors and senior management in relation to the contents of this report.**

3.0 Main Report

Background

3.1 Members will be aware that a Notice of Motion has been received in relation to transparency and a subsequent report will be brought to Committee in respect of same. This paper is intended to provide clarity for members and officers in relation to the present processes in relation to restricted reports and information.

3.2 The Local Government Act 2014 ('the 2014 Act') introduced provisions aimed at ensuring local government is more accessible, transparent and accountable. The 2014 Act formalises the grounds upon which information can be restricted and the basis upon which press and public can be excluded during its consideration.

- 3.3 There is always a public interest in transparency and accountability, to promote public understanding of certain Belfast City Council matters. However the public interest is not necessarily the same as what interests the public.
- 3.4 Whilst the categories of information that may be restricted under the 2014 Act appear broad, an assessment of whether the public interest in disclosure outweighs the reason for restricting the information may need to be made in individual cases. This assessment is undertaken by the senior manager, usually a Director, who is responsible for authorising the reports being sent to Democratic Services for publication. Reports will also be screened by officers from Democratic Services to ascertain if a report or associated documents should be restricted.

The following points list the information and personal data that may be exempt from disclosure and provide examples covered by each.

1. Information relating to any individual

This includes information that will identify and will obviously be about a person. Data which identifies an individual, even without a name associated with it, may be personal data where it is processed to learn or record something about that individual, or where the processing of that information has an impact upon that individual in a personal, family, business or professional capacity.

2. Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual

Information on its own may not reveal an individual's personal data; however, when linked to other information, it may reveal details about an individual. In most cases an individual's name together with some other information will be sufficient to identify them. Simply because the name of an individual is not known does not mean that individual cannot be identified.

3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)

This can be information that will firstly identify an individual at points 1 & 2 above and can contain information such as income, cashflow and details

about business transactions. Financial or business affairs includes contemplated, as well as past or current activities. However financial information is not exempt from release if it has to be registered with the certain organisations such as Credit Unions, Companies House etc.

4. Information relating to any labour relations matter

This can involve the information gathered by the Council including personal data and includes information in relation to departmental restructuring; movement of staff to address particular council need; planned redundancies; Union balloted strikes etc.

5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

This includes information that protects confidential communications (and evidence of those communications) between a lawyer and client provided that the communications are for the purpose of seeking and receiving legal advice in a relevant legal context. The client can include Councillors who are specifically seeking and obtaining legal advice from Legal Services.

6. Information which reveals that the council proposes to serve a notice or make an order under any statutory provision

This can include information surrounding and relating to notices issued pursuant to enforcement powers and this will include the details of the individuals and / or organisations involved.

7. Information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

This involves information gathered and used by for the investigation of criminal behaviour.

3.7 Disclosure of information post Committee/Working Group

The rules in relation to the discussion of restricted reports are set out below:

The information which is contained within a restricted report remains restricted until it is formally unrestricted post decision. This is determined by the relevant Director in consultation with Democratic Services. Therefore the contents of the report and any detail about the discussion which took place on foot of the report remains confidential.

- 3.8 Some of the information which is contained within a restricted report may become publicly available as part of the minutes which are presented to Council for ratification. This will depend upon the type of restricted information which is contained within the report and must still comply with the Council's obligations under the 2014 Act and under GDPR.
- 3.9 The minute must however be sufficiently clear for the public to understand the decision which has been taken. The minute book is usually published 3 days prior to the Council meeting and is publicly available in its entirety. If members wish to discuss those items at Council, it may be necessary to move into restricted session so as to ensure that the Council complies with its legal obligations as set out above. The Chief Executive will provide advice to the Council in this regard.
- 3.10 Should a member have a concern about a report being restricted they should contact the reporting officer to discuss this prior to Committee. In the event that agreement cannot be reached the City Solicitor will provide advice on how to proceed.

Members are reminded about the report which was presented to Committee at its November meeting setting out internal measures which could be taken in respect of Members posting restricted information on social media - [Agenda for Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on Friday, 24th November, 2023, 9.30 am - Belfast City Council \(www.internalminutes\)](#). This set out the general duty of confidence and reminds members that disclosure of confidential information is a breach of paragraph 4.15 of the Councillor's Code of Conduct.

Financial and Resource Implications

None

Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

The Committee:

- noted the contents of the report; and
- agreed that a reminder be issued to Councillors and senior management in relation to the contents of this report.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Belfast Agenda Statement of Progress

The Committee was advised that The Local Government Act (NI) 2014 required the Council and its community planning partners to make arrangements to monitor progress against meeting the objectives of the Belfast Agenda and the effectiveness of the actions taken in aiming to achieve those objectives. The legislation also required the Council to publish a report (Statement of Progress) assessing progress towards the outcomes and actions taken every two years.

The third statement of progress was due to be published covering the period end of 2021-2023. In recognition of the significant pressures which local Councils, and community planning partners, had faced over recent months in recovering from a worldwide pandemic, responding to the cost-of-living crisis and managing significant fiscal and budgetary pressures, a light touch approach had been adopted to producing the statement of progress. It was also important to recognise the intensive focus over the past 16 months to co-designing the refreshed Belfast Agenda and underpinning actions plans for the period 2024-2028.

Nevertheless, the statement of progress provided an opportunity for partners to update the public on the actions that had been undertaken or are ongoing through the community planning process. In addition, it demonstrated the impact of such actions on communities and local people as well as their contribution to the achievement of the ambitions and outcomes outlined in the Belfast Agenda.

The draft statement of progress had been developed in association with and input from community planning partners and highlighted a number of case studies and noteworthy achievements showcasing the work of partners over the last 24 months. The final draft statement of progress had been shared with community planning partners for final consideration and endorsement with feedback sought by 16 February 2024.

The Committee:

- i noted the statutory requirement for the Community Planning Partnership to publish a Statement of Progress (SoP) for the period 2021-2023;
- ii noted the engagement undertaken with and input from community planning partners in developing the draft SoP; and
- iii agreed that the final SoP be submitted to the Department for Communities.

Northern Ireland Executive Ministerial Meetings

The Committee was advised that, following the recent restoration of the NI Executive and appointments made to the respective ministerial portfolios, there were a number of key issues which it was hoped would now be taken forward by the NI Executive and NICS Departments which would impact, and possibly benefit, Belfast (for example, Poverty Strategy, Childcare Strategy, Climate Action Plan, infrastructure investment plans etc).

It was important that urgent engagement takes place with the incoming new Ministers on the key priorities, challenges and opportunities facing Belfast as well as encouraging greater collaboration with the Council in designing and delivering key programmes and informing future investment decisions. Real opportunity for Belfast to be seen as a test bed to accelerate delivery of key NI Executive ambitions around, for example creating jobs, supporting vulnerable people, creating shared communities, supporting children and families, maximising the potential of innovation to support growth and helping mitigate the impact of climate change whilst supporting green growth.

It was therefore proposed that a series of Ministerial meetings be sought with an All-Party delegation from the Council to discuss the strategic issues for the city. It was proposed that the All-Party delegation would consist of Party Group Leaders (or their nominees) as well as the Chief Executive / Deputy Chief Executive and relevant Chief Officers. Officers would develop supporting briefings which would set out the strategic issues, opportunities and considerations for these meetings.

The Committee agreed that:

- i. meetings be sought with the incoming new NI Executive Ministers; and
- ii. Party Group Leaders (or their nominees) and appropriate officers would attend such meetings.

Correspondence from Invest NI

The Members were reminded that, at the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 23 November, it was requested that officers write to Invest NI seeking clarification on its future plans for the former Mackie's site within the context of housing led regeneration.

A response had been received from Invest NI which advised:

"The lands that comprise Invest NI's Forthriver Business Park were acquired and developed with the intent they would be used for industrial purposes. The land has been developed as a business park and is held in support of economic growth. Invest NI continues to actively promote it to investors for this purpose. The consideration, development and/or promotion of housing sits outside our remit, and we would oppose the release of current industrial zoned land given the shortage of the same in

the immediate vicinity. Invest NI has consistently reiterated this position and will continue to do so.”

The Committee noted receipt of the correspondence.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The Director of Human Resources submitted the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To present the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and 3 year Action Plan to elected members.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of this report.

3.0 Main report

A cross departmental Health and Wellbeing Working Group which included trade union representation was established to refresh the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and develop a 3-year action plan. The strategy has been fully consulted on through the Joint Negotiating and Consultative Committee (JNCC).

3.2 Health and Wellbeing Strategy Goals

The Strategy defines the type of organisation that the Council wants to be to support the health and wellbeing of our employees. That is, an organisation:

- Where individuals feel valued and recognised for their contribution
- With increased employee engagement/motivation
- Where employees feel that they have the opportunity to develop
- With reduced absenteeism
- With good employee retention
- Where employees are clear about their role
- Where employees feel supported by their line manager
- Where employees improve their physical and mental health

3.3 It is based on the four strands of Business in the Community’s Workwell Model. These are:

- **Better Work – Create good work and working conditions that enhance employee wellbeing.**
- **Better Health & Wellbeing – Take a whole-person approach to wellbeing. The four pillars of wellbeing are physical, mental, financial and social health and wellbeing. All of which are inextricably linked.**
- **Better Management – Make employee mental health ‘business as usual’ for all leaders and people managers.**
- **Better Specialist Support – Take an inclusive and employee-led approach to providing support.**

3.4 Implementation and communication

Whilst the refresh of the strategy was ongoing, a programme of health and wellbeing activity was delivered and covered a range of topics including active travel, positive mental health, stress management, suicide awareness, finance, caring for carers and nutrition.

The revised strategy builds on our existing policies and initiatives and provides a series of actions aimed at producing a more cohesive, structured and corporate approach to health and wellbeing across the council with activity meets the needs of the organisation and our employees. Corporate HR will work closely with Marcomms and departments to ensure that employees are made fully aware of the health & wellbeing initiatives that are available and provided with the opportunity to attend/engage in planned activities where possible.

3.5 A Health and Wellbeing Champions Network

To help influence, drive and champion the programme of work, a network of health and wellbeing champions will be established. While the number of champions and role may vary across departments, roles and responsibilities will include:

- acting as a role model for promoting positive health and wellbeing practice within your organisation, team and department
- linking in with the health and wellbeing leads or the person responsible for delivering the health and wellbeing strategy in the organisation
- engaging with colleagues on health and wellbeing ideas/initiatives
- signposting staff to the wellbeing support that is available providing support to health and wellbeing leads

- encouraging colleagues to take breaks and to look after themselves, for example: drinking plenty of fluids, lunchtime walks, taking up hobbies
- making sure that colleagues are taking time to reflect and be aware of their physical and mental health.

3.6 A programme of training and support including Mental Health First Aid, will be put in place for the champions. It should be noted that champions are not expected to provide advice to colleagues. Wellbeing champions are there to listen and signpost colleagues to further support and information, including if they require mental health support.

3.7 Governance, measurement and reporting.

Progress on delivery of the actions will be reported to CMT on a six-monthly basis. These reports will measure progress on actual delivery against proposed timeframes. To measure the impact of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy the following qualitative and quantitative people performance indicators will be used:

- % staff agree that that they have opportunities to discuss their personal development
- % staff agree that there are opportunities for career growth
- % staff agree that they receive feedback and that their contribution is valued and recognised
- Continued retention of and improvement in external diversity accreditations and benchmarks
- Attendance at and evaluation of events and training; both office based and frontline staff
- Number of health checks carried out
- Attendance management statistics and reasons for absence
- Staff turnover
- Demand for counselling service
- Active travel surveys

3.8 Progress reports will also be included in quarterly absence reports to the Audit and Risk Panel.

3.9 Financial and Resource Implications

Costs associated with delivery of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy will be met from the existing Corporate OD budget. Indicative costs for Years 1, 2 and 3 of the Strategy are £9770, £8000, and £7000 respectively. Any specific departmental requirements will be met from departmental learning and development budgets.

A full communication and awareness raising exercise for staff and managers will be implemented and directors will be required to ensure that the Strategy is fully communicated within their departments.

3.10 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

The draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy has undergone equality and rural needs screening and has been screened out.”

Noted.

Employability Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To provide the Committee with an update on the employability activity to promote inclusive growth through our role as an employer.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to

- note the contents of this report

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 The Inclusive Growth Strategy recognises that as a civic leader and large employer in Belfast we can and should set a strong example for others in driving best practice around employment and that the Council can make real progress towards the achievement of the council’s inclusive growth ambitions by looking at our own employment practices and the job opportunities we create. This report provides a summary of activity this year to date aimed at delivering on these ambitions.

Ring fencing and programme of support for the long term unemployed.

3.2 In the Inclusive Growth Strategy, the council has committed to ring fencing entry level posts, where there is a high volume of posts to be filled, and support this through the provision of appropriate pre recruitment training

programmes to benefit those furthest removed from the labour market.

- 3.3** As part of the current recruitment campaign to fill a number of General Operative vacancies and create a list of reserve candidates, 9 posts (25% of the permanent vacancies) have been ring fenced to candidates eligible to complete a pre recruitment training programme. Corporate HR has worked with the Employability and Skills team in the Place and Economy Department to deliver the programme to participants nominated by the Council's employability partner, Workforce.
- 3.4** The eligibility criteria of the programme are as follows:
- must live in Belfast (except the four nominations ringfenced to disability organisations)
 - must meet the employee specification for the job they'll be applying for:
 - must have been unemployed or economically inactive for at least 6 months or work less than 16 hours a week.
- 3.5** The programme ran from 19 January to 24 January, comprised of classroom-based learning which included guidance on how to complete the application form and two days of work experience on the job. Nine out of 19 nominated participants completed the programme. All 9 participants were invited to mock interviews on 13 February, but only 7 attended. All 9 participants were interviewed on 14 February and 5 have been recommended for appointment.

Support for agency workers

- 3.6** In addition, job application and interview skills training has been offered to all agency workers currently engaged in the General Operative role. A total of 73 attended the full training course with 2 attending the mock interview element only.

Participation in the JobStart Scheme

- 3.7** Following the success of the JobStart Scheme delivered in 2021/22, funding has been made available to the DfC through the Northern Ireland Office's New Deal Funding Initiative for a new JobStart Scheme.

3.8 To engage in the programme, the Council must ensure that:

- opportunities offered must not replace existing or planned vacancies or cause existing employees, apprentices or contractors to lose or reduce their employment
- job opportunities must last for six months, with a possible extension to 9 months for those who meet certain criteria
- job opportunities must offer at least 25 hours of employment per week
- jobs offered must pay at least the National Minimum Wage through PAYE
- Employers must develop a training plan to assist participants to gain new occupational and employability skills.

3.9 To participate in the programme the young person must be:

- 16-24 years old and on benefits
- be at risk of long-term unemployment or struggling to obtain employment
- be currently unemployed
- have been allocated a National Insurance number providing them with 'the right to work in NI'

3.10 The 9 JobStart vacancies were advertised the week commencing 12 February 2024 with a view to making appointments to the scheme to successful candidates in April.

Other employability support and outreach since 1 April 2023.

3.11 Job fairs and schools/universities support

- Attendance at 10 careers fairs (one targeted at people with disabilities),
- Delivery of 5 mock interview events at schools
- Delivery of an employability talk for a disability organisation,

3.12 Attendance at a further 3 careers fairs is scheduled for February and March 2024.

3.13 The Employability and Skills unit, Place and Economy Department organised a job fair in City Hall on 17 January to promote current vacancies across City & Neighbourhood Services and Property & Projects and promote the benefits of working for the Council. Corporate HR and departmental

operational staff were also in attendance. This event was very well attended, and it is hoped that it will have an impact on the number of applications received for difficult to fill posts.

Placements

- 3.14 Corporate HR is facilitating placements across the council on an ongoing basis in conjunction with disability organisations, Belfast Metropolitan College, schools and both universities.

Employability outreach for driver recruitment.

- 3.15 Over May/June 2023, as part of Combined HGV/LGV Driver recruitment, we delivered 2 information sessions at Duncrue for potential applicants which included the opportunity to register for mock interviews. In addition, in September 2023, Corporate HR engaged with participants at a Place and Economy Transport Academy information session regarding the Council's recruitment process and the benefits of working for Belfast City Council.
- 3.16 It should be noted that Marketing and Communications have played a key role in assisting with the promotion and advertising of recruitment opportunities and employability outreach opportunities using a variety of communication channels.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.17 There are no financial implications to this report.

Equality or Good Relations Implications

- 3.18 The Council's employability outreach activity is aimed at assisting those people who are furthest removed from the labour market and those who face most barriers to employment.
- 3.19 All recruitment is undertaken in accordance with the Local Government Staff Commission Code of Procedures for Recruitment and Selection and in accordance with Fair Employment legislation."

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Apprenticeship Programme

The Director of Human Resources submitted for the Committee's consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline options for a Belfast City Council apprenticeship programme including indicative costs.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to note the content of this report and determine next steps.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 The Inclusive Growth Strategy sets out the Council's commitment to addressing current and future recruitment needs through apprenticeships from entry-level through to higher-level technical and professional qualifications. Apprenticeships provide a sustainable route into employment across all levels of the workforce and as a council we are committed to embedding apprenticeships within our workforce planning strategy.

3.2 The Council has not undertaken an apprenticeship programme in recent years and in line with our commitment as set out in the Inclusive Growth Strategy, SP&R Committee at it's meeting of 20 October 2023, requested that a paper be brought to a future meeting on introducing a Belfast City Council apprenticeship programme and the potential cost implications.

Previous apprenticeship programmes

3.3 When the Council previously recruited apprenticeships, these were in traditional roles such as Electricians, Joiners, Fleet Technicians, Plumbers, Gardeners and Painters. Our records indicate that since 2005, 38 apprentices were appointed into apprenticeship roles, 26 of whom went on to secure permanent posts in the Council with 2 currently engaged in Fixed Term Contract posts.

3.4 At the end of an apprenticeship programme, if permanent vacancies existed and the number of qualified apprentices was equal to the number of permanent jobs, apprentices were appointed automatically to those posts. Where the number of vacancies was less than the number of

qualified apprentices, the posts were ringfenced to the qualified apprentices, a selection process undertaken, and appointments made in order of merit.

Current funding arrangements

- 3.5 Belfast City Council does not have a central budget to fund apprenticeship programmes and previous apprenticeships have been funded by departments through realigning existing staffing budgets. There is a desire across all departments to explore apprenticeships and address strategic workforce planning challenges. However, the absence of a corporate budget or funding to create new apprenticeship opportunities continues to be a barrier. Elected Members will be aware that as a public authority, the Council is not able to access government funding for associated apprenticeship training costs, and while this presents an additional challenge, the main issue to be addressed going forward is the direct salary costs.

Potential areas to consider for a future apprenticeship programme

- 3.6 Elected Members asked officers to identify potential areas for apprenticeship programmes. Like many organisations, the Council has experienced difficulties in recent years in attracting applicants to certain roles and in particular, within technical areas where the current supply is not meeting employer demand. Two potential areas identified are:
- CNS, Fleet & Resources ; auto electricians and technicians
 - Digital Services; cyber security, support and systems development.

3.7 Financial and Resource Implications

The indicative salary costs for an apprenticeship programme in the Fleet & Resources and Digital Services are set out below. Apprenticeship programmes can take between 1 and 4 years to complete and the average time to complete is usually 3 years.

Skill area	Level required	Approximate BCC Salary Grade	Approximate Annual Salary Costs per apprentice	Approximate Annual Training costs per apprentice
Auto Electrician / Auto Technician	Apprentice level 2 or 3	Scale 2	£30 000	£2000
Digital services	Higher level apprenticeship level 4 to 7	Scale 6	£40 000	£5000

In addition to the recurring salary costs for the period of the apprenticeships, there will be training costs which will vary depending on the specific course, approximate costs are set out in the table above,

3.8 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Recruitment for an apprenticeship programme will be carried out in accordance with the Local Government Staff Commission’s Code of Procedures on Recruitment and Selection.”

The Committee noted the content of the report and agreed that a further report be submitted on how such a programme could be financed.

Response by NILGA to the Consultation on Non-domestic and Domestic rating measures to support budget sustainability by raising additional revenue

The Committee noted the correspondence received by the Council from NILGA in relation to the recent Department of Finance consultations on general revenue raising opportunities and the specific consultation on the revenue raising opportunities from the NI rates system.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Director of Property and Projects submitted for the Committee’s consideration the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 The Council’s Physical Programme currently includes over 400 capital projects via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council’s Capital Programme forms part of the overall Physical Programme

and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report includes a review of recently completed and underway physical projects, requests for approvals relating to the Capital Programme, and for approval to procure as required for the Physical Programme.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Physical Programme Half Year Update - note the overall update on projects that have been completed recently and projects currently under construction at 3.1 to 3.5 below and in Appendix 1; and that the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.
- Capital Programme Movements - to agree the following movements under the Capital Programme:
 - IT Programme – F5 Access Policy Manager / Web Application Firewall project – note that a satisfactory tender return has now been achieved and that it is recommended that a maximum £30,200 is now allocated to this project.
 - City Hall External Christmas Tree project – move the project to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to enable development of an outline business case.
 - Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter project – add the project to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* to allow a business case to be developed.
- Fleet Programme 2024/2025 – note the agreed Fleet Programme for 2024/25
- City Hall Statues – note the update on the programme of events to mark the installation of the two new statues in City Hall grounds of Winifred Carney and Mary Ann McCracken on Friday 8th March – International Women’s Day as outlined in 3.11 below.
- Procurement process for 2024/25 Non-Recurrent Programme, Fleet Programme and Externally Funded Projects - agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate ‘framework’ arrangements) be initiated for any Physical Programme projects in 2024/25 including Fleet Replacement Programme, non-recurrent programme and externally funded projects as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically

advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Physical Programme

Members will be aware that the Council runs a substantial Physical Programme. This includes the rolling Capital Programme – a multimillion regeneration programme of investment across the city which improves existing Council assets or provides new council facilities. The Council also delivers externally focused funding streams such as Belfast Investment Fund (BIF), Local Investment Fund (LIF), Social Outcomes Fund (SOF) and Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund (NRF), as well as numerous physical programmes and standalone projects that we deliver for central government. Our funding partners include National Lottery Heritage Fund, SEUPB Peace IV, the Executive Office, DfC, DfI including the Living with Water Programme, DAERA, Ulster Garden Villages, Levelling Up Fund (LUF) and others. When appropriate, the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange site visits to any projects that have been completed.

3.2 Physical Programme Half Year Update

Members are aware of the scale of the Council's Physical Programme via a range of internal and external funding streams. Below is a brief summary of projects completed over the last six months, as well as a sample of projects currently underway.

3.3 Recently completed projects:

- Templemore Baths – launch of the major £17m restoration of Templemore Baths with a focus on heritage and spa provision. The centre is open to the public and membership targets have been surpassed. This is the sixth of seven outstanding new leisure facilities to be launched in the last seven years as part of the £105 million Leisure Transformation Programme.
- Marrowbone Millennium Park – a significant £4.3m partnership project with DfC, Urban Villages, and NIHE. New facilities include an IFA intermediate standard 3G pitch; a pavilion with 128 spectator seats, a multi-use community space and accessible changing facilities; a new play park; a multi-use games area; an outdoor gym and a community events space.

- **Forth Meadow Community Greenway** - an ambitious and transformational £6.2m EU PEACE IV-funded scheme to connect existing open spaces in north and west Belfast along a 12km route from Clarendon Playing Fields to the new Transport Hub in the city centre. The signage package to be installed includes feature panels, narrative panels and beacon lights along all sections, subject to Council approval.
- **Belfast Zoo - Large Cats Enclosure and Sea Lion Pool** – the project eradicated immediate health and safety issues at Belfast Zoo in particular the lion enclosure and the water treatment plant at the Sea Lion pool. It also included a new viewing area and enhancement of zoo trails with greening and art.
- **Brown's Bridge** – bridge replacement works have been completed and the bridge is open to the public. The bridge in Lagan Meadows had been closed due to structural defects and associated health and safety risks to the public.
- **Frederick Douglass Statue** – installation of a figurative sculpture celebrating the abolitionist, social reformer and early champion of women's rights in Rosemary Street.
- **IT Security Log Manager Replacement** - replacement of the Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) log collector which is critical to protect the Council's IT infrastructure against cyber-attack.
- **Other projects completed in the last six months include** –
 - Strangford Avenue Playing Fields path and gate improvements
 - Loughside Park Trim Trail
 - New covered cycle stands at Avoniel and Lisnasharragh Leisure Centres
 - Boundary wall at Shankill Graveyard
 - Household Waste & Recycling Centres new skips and compactors
 - Cavehill Country Park playground embankment slide
 - Whiterock Leisure Centre pitch floodlight upgrade
- **Planned Maintenance** – repair and maintenance work at Belfast Zoo, Grove Wellbeing Centre, Shankill Leisure Centre, Victoria Park, Thomas Patton Memorial Park, and also enhancements to metering and installation of Solar Film to the Waterfront Hall as part of the Climate Programme.
- **BIF Programme: Midland Boxing Club** – completion of the boxing facility extension at Cultra Street.

- ***SOF Programme:*** Roddy McCorley Heritage Centre – development of a modern interpretative museum and works on the existing grounds now complete.
- ***LIF Programme: Cregagh Sports Club*** – phase 2 of works completed including ball-catch nets, car parking and hot water system; Lagan Village Youth & Community Association – community garden and outdoor urban space completed; and refurbishment of Star Neighbourhood Centre including outdoor improvements recently completed.
- ***ABC Trust Health and Leisure Hub*** – this £5.9m partnership project via DfC, DfI, Flax Trust, Urban Villages and LIF involves the transformation of a derelict building formerly St Gemma’s High School into a modern, purpose built health and leisure community facility. Phase 1 of the project has been completed which provides a modern, purpose-built sports hall, support space and accommodation for Building Change Trust (BCT NI).
- ***Colin Healthy Living Centre*** – this new community sports facility provides greater access to health and fitness facilities, supports mental health and wellbeing and promotes good relations for local residents. Delivered by the Council on behalf of the Executive Office as part of the Urban Villages Initiative.
- ***Social Investment Fund*** – over the last number of years, the Property & Projects Department has been assisting the Executive Office to deliver their SIF Programme across Belfast. All Council delivered projects are now complete and the programme is drawing to a close. A summary of the work the Council has delivered for the Executive Office under this fund is at Appendix 2.

3.4 **Physical projects underway:**

- ***Ballysillan Playing Fields*** - this is a £7.5m partnership project with DfI’s Living with Water Programme, DfC and Urban Villages. Design and engagement stages have been carried out and a Planning decision is awaited. It is anticipated that the contractor will be on site in Spring 2024 subject to planning approval.
- ***Pitt Park*** – the £1.7 million redevelopment of Dr Pitt Memorial Park is well underway on site, funded by Urban Villages. Its aim is to create an attractive, safe and accessible area where families, children, and people of all ages can get active, have fun and enjoy the rich heritage of the area.
- ***City Hall Statues*** – Winifred Carney and Mary Ann McCracken – sculptures of both women will be installed in the grounds of Belfast City Hall. Mary Ann McCracken was an abolitionist, social reformer and activist who fought for the rights of women and championed Belfast’s poor, and

Winifred Carney was a suffragist, trade unionist and Irish independence activist. Work is underway at the foundry and the aim is to hold the unveilings on International Women's Day on Friday 8 March 2024 (see 3.11 below).

- **Lagan Gateway Greenway Phase 2** – work continues on the next stages of this major investment of £5m in a new navigation lock, iconic foot and cycle bridge and new path connections.
- **Shankill Shared Women's Centre (Peace IV)** – this significant new building is nearing completion with an official opening anticipated in June 2024.
- **Black Mountain Shared Space Centre (Peace IV)** – Works due for completion. For the next phase, the design team has been appointed, a Planning submission has been submitted and procurement of the main contractor is underway.
- **The Lockhouse** - this £2.7m partnership project will reimagine a historic and culturally important residential building along the Lagan towpath into a community focal point for good relations activity and cross-community partnership working including minority ethnic communities. Funded by LIF, DfC, DfI and Urban Villages. Works underway on site.
- **ABC Trust Health and Leisure Hub** – Phase 2 of the project has commenced which comprises a community café, boxing club, minor halls, community gym and office space.
- **Playground Improvement Programme** – Loughside Park, North Link and New Lodge playgrounds.
- **Corporate projects** – range of IT projects to ensure business continuity and ongoing delivery of Fleet replacement programme.
- **LIF and BIF** - a total of 3 projects on site under the BIF Programme, 16 completed to date; and a total of 5 projects are on the ground under the LIF Programme, 126 projects completed to date.

3.5 **Physical projects in development:**

The remainder of the Physical Programme includes projects in the development stage (*Stage 2 – Uncommitted, Stage 1 – Emerging* or equivalent) including:

- **Capital Programme:** Cathedral Gardens, New Crematorium, Belfast Stories, Reservoir Safety Programme, Alleygates Phase 5, LTP Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility, Waste Plan, HWRCs & CAS Containers, Relocation of Dunbar Link Cleansing Depot, New Cemetery, Access to the Hills – connections from Cavehill to Black Mountain, Sydenham Greenway, Glencairn Park/Ligoniel Park Greenway, Black Mountain / Upper

Whiterock Greenway, Colin Greenway, City Hall – Installation of 2 Stained Glass Windows.

- **Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund** – 16 projects have recently moved to *Stage 3 – Delivery* and 7 projects are at *Stage 2 – Development* stage.
- **A range of other schemes** including the remaining LIF, BIF and SOF projects plus other externally funded projects such as Paisley Park.
- **Peace Plus** – Reconnected Belfast – the Waterworks and Alexandra Park upgrades and projects under the Local Action Plan.

Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

3.6 Members agreed that all capital projects must go through a three stage process where decisions on which capital projects progress are taken by the Committee. This provides assurance as to the level of financial control and will allow Members to properly consider the opportunity costs of approving one capital project over another capital project. Members are asked to note the following activity on the Capital Programme:

Project	Overview	Stage movement
IT Programme – F5 Access Policy Manager Project / Web Application Firewall	Procurement and commissioning of the F5 security suite consisting of Web Application Firewall and VPN modules. Maximum of £30,200 to be allocated	Stage 3 – Committed
City Hall Christmas Tree Provision	Consideration of options for replacement of the current Christmas Tree provision in front of the City Hall with an alternate solution.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter	The erection of dual language street signs en bloc with the Gaeltacht Quarter.	Add to Stage 1- Emerging

3.7 **IT Programme – F5 Access Policy Manager Project**

In October 2023, Members agreed to move the *IT programme - F5 Access Policy Manager/ Web Application Firewall project* to *Stage 3 – Committed* pending a satisfactory tender return. The tender return has now been received. The Director of Finance has confirmed that it is within the affordability limits of the Council. **Members are now asked to agree a budget for the F5 Access Policy Manager/ Web Application Firewall project of a maximum of £30,200.**

3.8 City Hall Christmas Tree Provision

In June 2023, the City Hall Christmas Tree Provision project was added to *Stage 1- Emerging* under the Capital Programme. The City Hall Christmas tree is a major focal point within the City Centre and can set the tone for the city's Christmas celebrations, both for visitors and the local economy. Issues with tree quality and supply are expected to increase in future years and Members may wish to consider exploring a suitable alternative. Options are now being explored in detail to replace the tree with an alternative sustainable option. As per the three stage approvals process, a Strategic Outline Case has been completed and the team can now progress to Outline Business Case stage.

Members are asked to agree that 'Christmas Tree Provision' be moved to the Capital Programme Stage 2 – Uncommitted project to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

3.9 Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter

In November 2023, the Council agreed that Dual Language Street signs in the Gaeltacht Quarter would be taken forward en bloc and that the project would be delivered as a capital project. Members are asked to note that the scheme is being progressed at pace, working closely with Building Control as client and that further stage movements are anticipated to come forward shortly.

Members are asked to agree that the Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter project is added to the Capital Programme at Stage 1 – Emerging to allow a business case to be developed.

3.10 Capital Programme - Fleet Programme 2024/25

Members will know that the Council needs to run and maintain a substantial fleet in order to deliver its services. There is a rolling allocation of £2.2m towards the Fleet Programme for 2024/25 with an additional budget allocation of £2m in year under the Capital Programme at Stage 3. The Fleet Programme has been developed in conjunction with Council departments and reflects the service needs of the organisation, and there are ongoing issues caused by the high age profile and condition of the fleet operating well

beyond its recommended operational life cycle. The purchase of these vehicles will also assist in the harmonisation of vehicle types as recommended in the AECOM report of 2021. It will also result in the replacement of Euro 5 engines with Euro 6 equivalents which have an improved emissions standard. The agreed Fleet Programme for 2024/25 is attached at Appendix 3.

Members are asked to note the agreed Fleet Programme for 2024/25.

- 3.11 **City Hall Statues** - Members will be aware that the installation of two new statues in City Hall Grounds of Mary Ann McCracken and Winifred Carney has been agreed. Committee was advised last month that these would be formally revealed on Friday 8th March which is fitting as it is International Women's Day. The inclusion of two women, whose contribution to the City, their values, beliefs, what they strived to achieved throughout their lives still very much resonates with today's society. The two new pieces in City Hall grounds will bring to the fore the issues still faced by our diverse society within the City, stimulating debate and discussion.

The proposed programme for the 8th March includes –

- Event to mark the installation – 2pm in the City Hall Grounds. Speakers to include the Lord Mayor, the artist and a representative from ICTU.
- Panel discussion/debate, to include some drama, poetry and music – evening event in the City Hall.

Plans include the publication of a booklet which will be given out at both events and available after, a shortened version of which will be published on Council's website and accessed through a QR code on the statue.

Members will note that there is likely to be significant media attention in the new statues and a full comms plan is being developed around this. Given the level of media interest and coverage generated by the Frederick Douglass statue it is anticipated that City Hall statues will supercede that. The last additions to City Hall grounds were the Titanic Memorial Gardens opened 15 April 2012 and Operation Banner Memorial in 2013. Members will be kept up to date and will receive invitations to both events.

3.12 Approval to Procure 2024/25

Members are asked to agree that any necessary procurement processes (including the invitation of tenders and/or the use of appropriate 'framework' arrangements) be initiated for any Physical Programme projects in 2024/25 including Fleet Replacement Programme, non-recurrent programme and externally funded projects as required with contracts to be awarded on the basis of most economically advantageous tenders received and full commitment to deliver.

3.13 Financial and Resource Implications

Financial Implications:

- IT Programme – F5 Access Policy Manager Project - Up to a maximum of £30,200.
- Fleet Programme - There is a rolling allocation of £2.2m towards the Fleet Programme for 2024/25 with an additional budget allocation of £2m in year under the Capital Programme.

The Director of Finance has confirmed that this is within the affordability limits of the Council.

Resource Implications – Officer time to deliver as required.

3.14 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Asset Management

The Committee:

- I. **Woodbourne Environmental Improvement Scheme – Asset Transfer** - approved the transfer of 5 no. green spaces from the Department for Communities (DfC) to the Council upon completion of the scheme. The asset would transfer at nil value and the Council would receive revenue funding from DfC for maintenance of the asset for the initial three years.

- II. **River Terrace – Deed of Dedication** - approved the completion of a Deed of Dedication to Urban Villages in respect of the works carried out as part of the redevelopment of the Lockhouse at River Terrace.
- III. **Boodles Dam, Ligoniel Park – Land acquisition and disposal** - approved the land acquisition and disposal of plots at Boodles Dam to facilitate the Ligoniel Park Environmental Improvement Scheme. Land and Property Services had assessed the transfer values and the result was a net consideration of £4,105 payable from the Council to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive,

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Contracts

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Table 1 below;
- approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Table 2 below;
- approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in Table 3 below; and
- noted the award of retrospective Single Tender Actions in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in Table 4 below:

Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Investigation Support for Security Incidents	Up to 3 years	£60,000	P Gribben	Break fix support on security appliances. Specialist support for security related projects.
Daisy Mitel Systems & Support	Up to 2 years	£196,500	S McNicholl	Corporate telephony solution to include Mitel Systems, Redbox Recording and CRM Connector + SMS functionality with ongoing maintenance, support and software assurance

Coach Hire Services	Up to 4 years	£400,000	D Sales	The service shall be used by various Council departments to provide a transport service including for seasonal activities within the Community such as Summer Schemes, Halloween, Christmas and Easter time.
Catering Services at Belfast Zoo.	Up to 5 years	£900,000	D Martin	Catering service provider to manage the catering outlets at Belfast Zoo
Framework for Goods For Resale at Belfast Zoo	Up to 4 years	£520,000	D Martin	Supply of a range of goods (i.e. toys, souvenirs etc) to sell in shops at Belfast Zoo.
Maintenance of Containers and Compactors	Up to 4 years	£330,000	D Sales	This service ensures that skip containers and compactors are maintained and working properly to enable recycling centres to manage the waste received from householders.
Supply of Park and Memorial Benches	Up to 5 years	£200,000	D Sales	Tender required for the supply of park and memorial seats/benches. Majority of seats/benches are re-sold to customers at the Crematorium/Cemeteries.
IT Technical Research and Guidance	Up to 2 years	£45,400	P Gribben	Gartner for IT Leaders provides in-depth technical research and guidance to help Digital Services advance the initiatives/projects that support execution of the IT strategy.

Electric City Centre Power Washer Vehicle	One off purchase	£50,000 (fully funded by DfC)	D Sales	Provision of electric vehicle fitted with hot & cold power washer to be used around the city centre as part of the Cleansing Fleet Enhancement Project.
Christmas Lights	Up to 5 years	£2m	D Martin	The Council wishes to refresh it's Christmas lighting display to animate the city over the festive period and attract additional visitors to the city. A Contractor will be procured to support the delivery.

Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason
Maintenance & Support for SAP, SRM & VIM	Up to 1 year	£77,700	P Gribben	Ongoing maintenance & support is required until a replacement Financial System project is complete. Go Live of new system is scheduled in Q1 of FY24/25.	HCL Technologies Ltd	11
City Matters Distribution - Royal Mail	Up to 2 years	£100,000	E McConville	Distribution of City Matters Magazine as required to all residents within the Belfast City Council electoral area. This requirement	Royal Mail Door to Door	1

				was recently tendered via open competition, but no bids were received.		
NIHE (Support and Maintenance) Licenses	Up to 3 years	£1,100,000	S McNicholl	Continued maintenance & support required for NI Housing Executive's 'NIHE' Housing Benefit system which is hosted by BCC but recharged to NIHE (fully funded). NEC are the only available service provider for maintenance and support services of this system.	NEC Software Solutions	3

Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration	Modification required	SRO	Description	Supplier
Provision of young tree maintenance, tree planting and minor horticultural works	Up to 5 years	Additional 3 months and £80,000	D Sales	A further 3-month extension is required to facilitate a re-tendering exercise. Tender documents being finalised and should be advertised to market in Feb 24. Delays experienced due to resourcing issues	Clive Richardson Ltd.

				in the Department and additional work required to review and re-draft tender documents to incorporate new service requirements. Note - a previous a contract modification for a 4-month extension was previously approved by Committee in October 23.	
Collection and Recycling of Scrap Metal	Up to 4 years	Additional 4 months. Income based contract. Projected £65k income over 4 months.	D Sales	A 4-month extension is required to facilitate a re-tendering exercise. Tender documents being finalised and should be advertised to market in March 24. Delays experienced due to heavy workload within the Department at this time.	Avenue Recycling Ltd
Procurement of Public Bike Share Scheme. LOT 1: Design supply maintenance & operation of the scheme	Up to 9 years	Additional 9 months and £391,000	J Greer	Extension of current operator contract for a maximum of nine months to allow further work to be undertaken to define specification for tender competition for new operator contract. Given the expansion of the network, the potential to have social enterprise/co-operative involvement in the	NSL Service Group

				operation and the potential for the inclusion of e-bikes and accessible bikes a significantly different specification is required. It has been agreed to hold a Members Workshop to inform this. Note - this was submitted to Committee in January 24 but was not approved at the time. Re-submitted for approval.	
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Table 4: Retrospective STAs

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason
Provision of an accurate digital 3D model of the Belfast City	Up to 3 years (Contract award date of 17th May 23)	Up to £33,600	P Gribben	There is no other supplier that can offer this solution without significant duplication of resources, costs and time to build the Belfast data layers. VU.CITY already has a significant portion of city mapped, including 262,835 trees, accurate to height & canopy as well as 55,594 buildings.	VU.CITY	3

STA/ Direct Award Reasons

Reason Code	Reasons in line with Public Contract Regulations
1	No response following advertised procurement exercise
2	Creation or acquisition of a unique work of art or artistic performance
3	Competition is absent for technical reasons (no reasonable substitute exists)
4	The protection of exclusive rights, including intellectual property rights
5	Extreme urgency brought about by events unforeseeable by BCC, the time limits for a procurement cannot be complied with.
6	Products manufactured purely for the purpose of research, experimentation, study or development
7	Additional deliveries which are intended either as a partial or extended replacement of supplies or installations where a change of supplier would result in supplies of different technical characteristics causing incompatibility or disproportionate technical difficulties in operation and maintenance
8	Supplies quoted and purchased on a commodity market
9	Supplies or services on particularly time-limited advantageous terms e.g. supplier winding up its business activities
10	New works and services consisting of the repetition of similar works or services, provided that the possibility of a direct award is disclosed during the original tender process
11	Other – Reason not in line with Public Contract Regulations (PCR 2015)

Commercial and Procurement Services
Social Value Working Group update

The Committee noted the contents of report which provided details of the delivery of the social value outcomes via the Council's tender competitions awarded in accordance with the Council's Social Procurement Policy.

Operational Issues

Minutes of the Party Group Leaders
Consultative Forum

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 15th February.

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

The Committee adopted the recommendations in respect of those applications received up to 9th February, as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2024 EVENTS						
Lagmore Youth Project	21 March 2024	Lagmore Youth Awards to recognise the achievements of local young people through qualifications and development of community in West Belfast Numbers attending – 150C &	C & D	No charge as charity	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
Roma Support Hub	9 April 2024	Living Library engagement event to celebrate International Roma Day	D	No charge as charity	No hospitality as Good Relations funding the event	Approve No Charge No hospitality

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
		Numbers attending - 40				
HERe NI	13 May 2024	Launch of LGBT Awareness Week 2024 showcasing events and projects Numbers attending – 150C &	C & D	No charge as charity	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
EALTA – European Association for Language Testing and Assessment	8 June 2024	Reception and dinner for the 2024 EALTA Conference 2024. for guests attending their 6-day conference taking place in Stranmillis University. Numbers attending - 120	A & B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
Queens University	15 August 2024	EPS Summer School 2024 Finale - Drinks Reception, Awards, Dinner and Entertainment for international students attending a 4-week summer school. Numbers attending - 120	B	Charge £300	No hospitality	Approve Charge £300 No hospitality

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
Swim Ulster / Swim Ireland / British Swimming	27 September 2024	European Aquatics Annual Congress 2024 Gala Dinner for guests attending 3-day seminar. Numbers attending - 300	B	Charge £825	No hospitality	Approve Charge £825 No hospitality
Ulster Journals Ltd	3 October 2024	Ulster Tatler Awards 2024 Drinks Reception, Awards, Dinner and entertainment. Numbers attending - 350 – 400	B	Charge £825	No hospitality	Approve Charge £825 No hospitality
Lanyon Group Event Management	24 October 2024	IFA McDonalds Community Football Awards – Celebrating the volunteers who help deliver their programs – reception, dinner, entertainment and awards. Numbers attending – 200	C	Charge £825	No Hospitality	Approve Charge £825 No Hospitality

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
Children's Kidney Fund NI	30 November 2024	Centenary of 74th Scout Group Anniversary Celebration- Drinks Reception, Dinner, Speeches and entertainment. Numbers attending – 200	C & D	No charge as charity	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No Charge Wine Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
Belfast Bible College	6 December 2024	Graduation and Reception – reception event to mark the graduation and achievements of the students at the college. Numbers attending – 150	C & D	No charge as charity	Yes, Tea and coffee reception.	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer.</i>
2025 EVENTS						
Cancer Fund for Children and Cash for Kids	1 March 2025	Cancer Fund Support Group Recognition event to celebrate volunteer's effort to raise £50,000 for Cancer Fund for Children and Cash for Kids Numbers attending – 300	C	No charge as charity and voluntary	Yes, Wine and Soft drinks reception.	Approve No Charge Wine and Soft drinks reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer.</i>

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2026 EVENTS						
Royal Belfast Academical Institution 74th Scout Group	28 March 2026	Centenary of 74th Scout Group Anniversary Celebration- Drinks Reception, Dinner, and entertainment. Numbers attending – 200	C & D	No Charge as charity	Yes, Wine and Soft drinks Reception as significant anniversary	Approve No Charge Wine and Soft drinks Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i>
Northern Ireland Prison Service	26 October 2026	Welcome Reception for Annual Conference of the International Corrections and Prisons Association for guests attending their 3-day conference taking place at ICC. Numbers attending – 500	A & B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

Requests for use of the Council Chamber for Northern Ireland Schools Debating Competition

The Committee was advised that a request had been received from the Belfast Building Trust for the use of the Council Chamber on 3rd May 2024 for the Grand Final of the Northern Ireland Schools Debating Competition.

The Members were reminded that Committee approval was required for the use of the Council Chamber by an outside body. Although such approval was rarely sought, the Committee has previously approved the use of the Council Chamber for similar events.

The Northern Ireland Schools Debating Competition was an annual event which been founded by the Lord Lieutenant, Fionnuala Jay-O’Boyle, in 1993 to encourage mature debate and civic engagement amongst young people. Thousands of students

had participated in the competition, with over 80 teams from across Northern Ireland entering annually. Topics ranged from foreign affairs to planning. It was organised as part of the civic charitable work of Belfast Buildings Trust.

The Committee approved the application by Belfast Building Trust to:

- use the chamber and function rooms, with no room charge applicable due to charity status; and
- agreed to offer a tea and coffee hospitality reception.

Request for use of City Hall grounds - Belfast Photo Festival Photographic Exhibition in June 2024

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

A request has recently received from the organiser of the Belfast Photo Festival (BPF) to have a photographic exhibition in the grounds of the City Hall from 8th – 28th June, 2024. The BPF was the visual arts festival of Northern Ireland and one of the leading photography festivals in the UK. In 2023 the festival had attracted 100,000 visitors across 24 city centre venues and was one of the city's major art events.

The Interim City Solicitor advise that, each year, the City-wide festival included the grounds of the City Hall as a primary location for both photographic exhibitions and other events and she provided details of previous events.

Belfast Photo Festival had provided two exhibition proposals for the 2024 Festival and was seeking Committee approval for both; however, only one proposal would be chosen, and BFF would confirm the proposal they wished to host in the City Hall grounds. The theme for 2024 was 'Divergence' and focused on photography's ability to capture and reflect the world around us. BPF 2024 would explore how contemporary photographers were responding to and offering reimagining to overcome the profound polarity and divisions prevalent in our globalised world.

The proposals were from two contemporary artists: *Photo with a teddy bear* by Polish artists Barbara Caillot and Aleksandra Karkowska; and *Walking Back to Happiness* by British Artist Maisie Cousins.

The exhibition would be installed on the West and East Lawn of City Hall grounds on 8th June and dismantled on 28th June 2024. It would be free for members of the public to view daily in line with the opening times of the grounds.

The Good Relations and Corporate Communications Units would review the exhibition images included in the proposal but presently no negative good relations implications have been identified which should stop the exhibition being hosted at the City Hall.

The Committee:

1. approved the request by Belfast Photo Festival to use City Hall grounds from 8 to 28 June 2024 to display a photographic exhibition as part of the Belfast Photo Festival; and
2. authorised the exhibition in line with similar events previously approved by Council.

Illumination Request

The Committee considered a report regarding a request from a member of the public to illuminate the City Hall to mark the birthday of the President of Ireland, Michael Higgins.

The Members were reminded that requests for the use of the City Hall LED illumination system were managed by the Functions Management team which reviewed requests in line with criteria approved by the Committee.

This request had been received from a member of the public who had noted that the City Hall was illuminated for HM King Charles' birthday. In recent years the Members had approved previous illuminations received from members of the public which did not meet the criteria, that is, 4 in 2021, 1 in 2022 and 1 in 2023.

The Committee approved a request for the illumination of the City Hall to mark the birthday of the President of Ireland, Michael Higgins on 18 April 2024.

Minutes of the Social Policy Working Group - 13 February

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Social Policy Working Group of 13th February.

Minutes of the City Hall/City Hall Grounds Installations Working Group - 8 and 14 February

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of the City Hall/City Hall Grounds Working Group of 8th and 14th February.

Minutes of the Language Strategy Working Group – 26 January and 9 February

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of the Language Strategy Working Group of 26th January and 9th February.

Minutes of the City Centre Working Group -17 January

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the City Centre Working Group of 17th January.

Minutes of the Disability Working Group 30 January

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Disability Working Group of 30th January.

Chairperson