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BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

4th April, 2024

SUMMONS TO ATTEND THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

TO: THE LORD MAYOR, ALDERMEN AND THE COUNCILLORS OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Notice is hereby given that the monthly meeting of the Council will be held in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Belfast on Monday, 8th April, 2024 at 6.00 pm, for the transaction of the following business:

1. Summons
2. Apologies
3. Declarations of Interest
4. Minutes of the Council (Pages 1 - 6)
5. Official Announcements
6. Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee (Pages 7 - 60)
7. Minutes of People and Communities Committee (Pages 61 - 92)
8. Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee (Pages 93 - 110)
9. Minutes of Licensing Committee (Pages 111 - 124)
10. Minutes of Planning Committee (Pages 125 - 146)
11. Minutes of Climate and City Resilience Committee (Pages 147 - 150)
12. Minutes of Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee (Pages 151 - 152)
13. Minutes of Standards and Business Committee (Pages 153 - 156)

The Members of Belfast City Council are hereby summoned to attend.

John Walsh

Chief Executive

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Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and remotely, via Microsoft Teams, on Monday, 4th March, 2024 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy) (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan);
The High Sheriff (Councillor S. Douglas); and
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; and
Councillors Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R. M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Hanvey, Kelly, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, F. McAteer, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay, McKeown, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill, Smyth, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Long and McCusker.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Beattie, Canavan, R.M. Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett, Nic Bhranair and Verner, declared an interest in relation to the minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd February, under the heading “Discretionary Payments” in that they worked for or were associated with one of the applicants. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Members were not required to leave the Chamber.

Councillor Nic Bhranair declared an interest in respect of the minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee under the heading “Oireachtas Festival Update” in that she was associated with the organisers and left the meeting whilst the item was being discussed.

Councillor Smyth declared an interest in relation to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes under the heading “Response by NILGA” in that his wife worked for the organisation. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the Chamber.

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The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Groogan and Councillor M. Donnelly declared an interest regarding the minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee under the heading "Update on Cost-of-Living Hardship Programme 23/24" in that the organisations they work for operate Social Supermarkets. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Members were not required to leave the Chamber.

Councillor Canavan declared an interest in relation to the People and Communities Committee minutes under the headings "Presentation – Belfast Advice Group" and "Funding Request from Belfast Advice Group" as she was associated with an organisation which was in receipt of funding from the Advice Service. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the Chamber.

In relation to the City Growth and Regeneration Minutes, under the heading "Belfast 2024 Music Heritage Programme", Councillor McCabe declared an interest, in that she was employed by Féile an Phobail who were in receipt of funding. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the Chamber.

Councillor Ferguson declared an interest in relation to the Strategic Policy and Resources Minutes under the heading "Northern Ireland Executive Ministerial Meeting" in that a family Member worked for Forge Integrated Primary School, which came under discussion, and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy),
Seconded by Councillor Beattie and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the Council of 1st and 12th February, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor, welcomed to the meeting Councillor McKay, who had replaced the former Member, Councillor Gormley. The Lord Mayor, along with a number of other Members, paid tribute to former Councillor Gormley and the contribution which he had made over the years to the Council and the constituents of Botanic.

Councillor Beattie reminded the Council that sculptures of Mary Ann McCracken and Winifred Carney would be unveiled in the grounds of the City Hall on Friday, 8th March 2024.

The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Groogan, advised that she had been working with DKMS, an international charity dedicated to fighting blood cancer and blood disorders, and invited Members to attend the events on 15th and 16th March, to register in person as a potential stem cell donor.

Councillor Bunting expressed her deepest sympathy to the family of former Councillor Aileen Graham and highlighted the significant contribution which she had made to the Council and the citizens of Belfast.

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Alderman Lawlor gave thanks to the RNLI on its 200th anniversary, 200 years of lifesaving that had seen over 1500 lives being saved in Northern Ireland. He commended the volunteers past and present for their efforts.

The Lord Mayor, at the request of Councillor Maghie, agreed to write a letter of congratulations and best wishes to the Irish Men's Hockey Team who qualified recently for the Olympics this Summer.

Councillor R.M. Donnelly highlighted Seachtain na Gaeilge, the international Irish language festival celebrating Irish language and culture, with more than 80 events taking place from 1st – 17th March across the city.

Councillor T. Brooks wished the Council a happy International Women's Day on 8th March.

Cessation of Council and Committee Remote/Hybrid Meetings

The Chief Executive confirmed that notification had been received from the Department for Communities which advised that the ability for the Council to hold remote/hybrid meetings would cease from Wednesday, 7th March, 2024, therefore, Members would be required to attend meetings in-person from this date onwards.

Change of Position of Responsibility

The Chief Executive reported that notification had been received from Sinn Fein of the following change in Position of Responsibility:

- Councillor Duffy to replace former Councillor Gormley as the Deputy Chairperson on the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Limited Shareholders' Committee;

The Council noted the change.

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Black,
Seconded by Councillor Nic Bhranair,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd February, 2024, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

**City Centre Byelaws Consultation –
Update on process**

At the request of Councillor Beattie, the Council agreed to invite The Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ) to a future meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to discuss the issues, together with representatives from the Department of Justice and Police Service of Northern Ireland, at the request of Councillor De Faoite.

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Belfast Agenda Refresh (2024-2028)

At the request of Councillor Beattie, the Council agreed to undertake neighbourhood strategy documents for each area of the city linking to the Belfast Agenda, to include local key priorities for each quarter of the city, and to explore working with stakeholders and the development of plans to help alleviate poverty and deprivation.

Quarterly Update on Notices of Motion

At the request of Councillor R.M. Donnelly, the Council, in relation to the Motion on Environmentally Sustainable Event Spaces (Ref 209) previously raised by Councillor Garrett, agreed that a report be submitted to the next Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to outline the next steps on delivering environmentally sustainable event spaces.

At the request of Councillor Collins, the Council agreed that the Motion on Save West Wellbeing Suicide Awareness (Ref 331) which had been recommended for closure, remained open and be brought back to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for further discussion.

Contracts

At the request of Councillor Nic Bhranair, in relation to the Single Tender Action “City Matters Distribution - Royal Mail”, the Council agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to outline readership statistics, together with value for money analysis.

Northern Ireland Executive Ministerial Meetings

At the request of Councillor De Faoite, the Council agreed that an area meeting was also requested with the Minister of Education to discuss the withdrawal of funding to Forge Integrated Primary School for its new building and how this information was communicated to the schools impacted by the decision.

Illumination Request

Amendment

Moved by Councillor McDowell,
Seconded by Councillor Bunting

That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd February, under the heading “Illumination Request”, to approve the request for the illumination of the City Hall to mark the birthday of the President of Ireland, Michael Higgins on 18th April, 2024, be amended to also mark the closing of the gates of Derry 335 years ago, and that the City Hall be lit up in white to acknowledge both events.

On a vote, sixteen Members voted for the amendment and thirty-nine against with one no vote and it was declared lost.

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In reference to the colour of the illumination, the Chief Executive advised that the City Solicitor had contacted the Presidents' office to confirm the correct protocol.

Physical Programme Update

At the request of Councillor T. Brooks, the Council agreed that, in relation to Appendix 3 - Fleet Replacement Programme 2024/25, an update be submitted to a future People and Communities Committee in relation to the power sources of the proposed vehicle replacements.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd February were thereupon approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor R. Brooks and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 6th February, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Nic Bhranair,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 31st January and 7th February, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor McKeown,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 21st February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Garrett,
Seconded by Councillor Bradley and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 13th February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

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Minutes of Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor R.M. Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor M. Donnelly and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 8th February, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Alderman Rodger,
Seconded by Alderman Lawlor and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 22nd February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Friday, 22nd March, 2024

MEETING OF THE STRATEGIC POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

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

In attendance: 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

Apologies were received from Alderman McCoubrey and Councillor Whyte.

Minutes

The minutes of the meetings of 9th and 23rd February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 4th March, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were recorded.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following four 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 four 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.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund Update

The Members were reminded that the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 8th February, had agreed to reallocate £280,000 of funding which had previously been ringfenced for the Belfast 2024 Programme to the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund and agreed to refer the decision of the funding reallocation to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. That decision was ratified by Council at its meeting on 4th March.

Accordingly, the Director of Property and Projects submitted a report outlining the proportional allocation of the funding for each area in line with the previously agreed funding allocation model.

The Committee:

- noted the reallocation of £280,000 into the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund; and
- approved the allocation of the funding in the context of the agreed funding allocation model and the agreed project pathway.

Belfast Stories Update

The Committee considered a report which provided an update on the programme and progress to date; an overview of the programme activities and milestones in 2024; an update on the visitor experience and content development and on programme governance, including the role of the Belfast Stories Contracts Manager. The report also sought approval for a study visit for the Members of the Belfast Stories Working Group

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and approval to ring fence/set aside up to £2m of the City Deal Reserve for mobilisation costs related to the programme.

The Committee:

- noted the revised programme and progress since June 2023;
- noted the programme activities and milestones for 2024;
- noted the update on the visitor experience and content development;
- noted the project governance update and agreed to commence the procurement of a Contracts Manager via SIB;
- agreed for a study visit to be arranged for Belfast Stories Members Working Group, proposed for August 2024; and
- agreed to ring fence/set aside up to £2m of the City Deal Reserve to allow for mobilisation costs, similar to the monies set aside for the Leisure Improvement Programme.

Notification of the appointment to Operational Director of CNS (2 posts)

The Committee noted the appointments of Mr Stephen Leonard and Mr Jim Girvan to the posts of Operational Director of Community and Neighbourhood Services.

Belfast 2024 Update March 2024

(Ms E. Clarke, Belfast 2024 Programme Director, attended in connection with this item.)

The Director of Development submitted for the Committee's consideration a report which provided a further update on the Belfast 2024 Programme.

The Committee:

- approved an uplift to The Walk's contract for Little Amal from £225k to £245k to deliver the Newry leg of the programme – and noted that this would be offset by Newry Mourne and Down's contribution towards costs;
- noted the developments for partnership programme with Oliver Jeffers Studio in collaboration with Nerve Centre; and
- granted delegated authority to the Strategic Director, in consultation with the Belfast 2024 Programme Board, to sign off budget reallocations within the approved budget lines for Belfast 2024.

Matters referred back from Council/Motions

Motion - Housing Crisis

The Members were informed that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 22nd February, had considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 1st March:

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“This Council recognises the need to bring forward significant quantities of high standard, affordable housing to meet the increasing demand and alleviate the current housing crisis facing people in Belfast.

This Council commits to supporting Cohousing Schemes as an innovative solution to meet the needs of people who are unable to buy within the current system or for whom traditional housing does not meet their needs. Cohousing schemes can create diverse and sustainable communities, providing high quality, affordable housing.

The Council will actively seek to identify suitable sites within its own land that could be used for Cohousing and include provision for Cohousing within any development site it brings forward that is appropriate for housing.”

The motion had been proposed by Councillor Groogan and seconded by Councillor Smyth.

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

The Committee noted that the Notice of Motion had been received and agreed that the request be included in any subsequent report which would be brought to Committee in relation to the Strategic Sites Assessment.

Motion - Gender Pay Gap Recording and Reporting

The Members were informed that the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 22nd February, had considered the following motion which had been received for submission to the Council on 1st March:

“That this Council will lead the way in Northern Ireland, adopting robust, transparent and accountable processes for gender pay gap recording and reporting.

The TUC calculated that in 2023 in the UK, the day when the average woman stops working for free compared to the average man is the 23rd of February. The average woman in paid employment effectively works for free for nearly two months of the year compared to the average man in paid employment. Average figures disguise wider disparities, for instance the gap tends to widen if a woman is a mum, or works in education, finance or insurance.

There is no legal obligation to record and report gender pay gap data in Northern Ireland. However, if we don't transparently measure pay by gender, how can we understand and address structural inequalities in our organisation?

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Therefore, this Council will record and report:

- *Its mean gender pay gap in hourly pay*
- *Its median gender pay gap in hourly pay*
- *The proportion of males and females in each pay quartile*
- *A statistical overview of progression/promotion rates for male and female staff*

And will use guidance such as the UK Government Equalities Office - What Works guidance to address the gap.

After the first gender pay gap report, the Council will move to include Disability and ethnicity pay reporting.”

The motion had been proposed by Councillor T. Brooks and seconded by Councillor F. McAteer.

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

The Committee noted that the Notice of Motion had been received and agreed that a subsequent report be brought to Committee outlining a detailed consideration of the Notice of Motion and the potential costs implications, with the report to include those measures which were already in place.

Belfast Agenda/Strategic Issues

Smart Belfast City Innovation programme

The Deputy Chief Executive/Strategic Director of Corporate Services submitted for the Committee’s consideration the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To update Members on a number of City Innovation projects and opportunities including details of the draft Belfast/Sejong ‘Innovation Twins’ roadmap and the associated visit by the Lord Mayor to South Korea in April.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- 1. Note the outline itinerary for the Lord Mayor’s Innovation Twins mission to South Korea in April which is fully funded by DSIT.**

2. Approve the signing of an 'Innovation Twins' roadmap as a basis for further direct and bi-lateral development work with the city of Sejong on a number of initiatives.
3. Approve the signing of a specific MoU with Sejong City Council to explore opportunities for net zero collaboration with the Belfast Climate Commissioner.
4. Approve a letter of support to Ulster University for its bid to establish £2.5 million Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator in Belfast including potential in-kind contribution.
5. Note that officers will work with Queen's University on a £5 million Systems Approaches to the Transition to Net Zero bid.
6. Approve Belfast City Council officer participation in the annual programme of the All Island Smart Cities Forum.
7. Note progress on the development of the City Hall immersive experience and that details on the proposed experience will be presented to Committee in the coming months.

3.0 Main report

3.1 The Smart Belfast urban innovation programme encourages collaborative innovation between government (both local and regional), industry, SMEs, academia and our communities. Evidence indicates that cities with strong collaborative innovation partnerships are more adept at attracting research funding and investment; and are much better equipped to develop solutions to complex urban policy challenges. The Smart Belfast programme relies primarily on third-party funding sources and in-kind contributions from participating partners. Below are details of the current significant initiatives, a number of which require Member approval.

3.2 Republic of Korea Innovation Twins programme

The Innovation Twins programme is fully funded by DSIT and facilitated by Connected Places Catapult. It's designed to build relationships between four cities with existing urban innovation programmes (Belfast, Glasgow, Birmingham and Liverpool) and their South Korean counterparts with the aim of fostering long term collaborations that can generate trade, FDI and knowledge exchange. South Korea has one of the most successful innovation economies in the world and has ambitions to build much stronger trade and exchange relationships with Europe and north America.

3.3 Belfast City Council and its Innovation City Belfast partners, including Invest NI's team in South Korea, have been working with Sejong city officials to agree a joint roadmap that would be of benefit to both cities. A long-list of proposals for the roadmap was developed with partners over the past eighteen months which has now been shortlisted to seven initiatives which both cities want to progress. Members should note that these are all still at a formative stage, and each will require further work and agreement between both cities before they are confirmed as projects. The shortlist includes:

1. Global Innovation Network – Belfast's SME accelerator 'Catalyst' will work with Sejong Technopark and the Korean Centre for Creative Economy and Innovation to provide a platform for companies from both cities to support global collaboration, increase R&D activity, increase innovation rates and help to scale high growth driven innovation enterprises.
2. Security in Space – Queen's University ECIT team will work with Korea University to investigate post-quantum cryptography systems that will secure next-generation satellite communication systems.
3. Green City Accelerator – An MoU between Belfast City Council and Sejong City Council to develop energy and net zero projects led by our Climate Commissioner.
4. Cyber-cities – Queen's will collaborate with Korea University on a cyber-security Hackathon for students and a global cyber conference in Sejong.
5. Invest NI's Smart Cities missions – A smart city mission will take place enabling Northern Ireland companies to visit Sejong (and elsewhere in South Korea) to promote bi-lateral trade, collaboration and strengthen innovation eco-systems. A mission for Sejong companies to Belfast will also be facilitated by Invest NI and Sejong Technopark.
6. Internet of Things – Ulster University and Digital Catapult will work with Sejong to develop urban testbeds enabled by 5G, with applications in the fintech and health-tech sectors.
7. Pathway to Net Zero – Translink and Sejong partners will explore innovative technologies to support ambitions to be carbon positive by 2040.
8. In addition to these proposals, Sejong also wish to explore tourism collaboration. The city plans to open a new national museum in 2025, and officials are keen for Belfast to be represented in the museum. Officials from Sejong are travelling to Belfast in June to engage with Titanic Belfast, Ulster Museum, Belfast Stories and

Belfast 2024. While tourism as a theme sits outside of the roadmap, it is something that Sejong has placed great emphasis on, and is expected to form part of the content of the Lord Mayor's visit.

3.4 The Lord Mayor's mission to Sejong

The primary purpose of the mission is for the mayors of both cities to sign the Innovation Twins roadmap as a basis for further development. The mission, which is fully funded under the terms of the Innovation Twins programme, is planned for 25 April to 1 May. The Lord Mayor will be accompanied by the Chief Executive, the Climate Commissioner; and an Innovation Broker from the City Innovation Team.

3.5 Invitations have also been extended to Catalyst, Queen's University, Ulster University and the Digital Catapult. The visit will also be supported by Invest NI's South Korean office and officials from the Connected Places Catapult. Members should note that Connected Places Catapult funding may also be made available to accompanying organisations to support their travel to Sejong.

3.6 The official itinerary is still being finalised with Sejong officials but it will include a unique visit to the South Korea Demilitarised Zone (DMZ) and visits to a number of centres that have contributed to making South Korea a powerhouse of the global economy. These include the

Electronics and Telecommunications Research Institute, the Autonomous Vehicle Big Data Control Centre, the Smart City Centre, Korea University, the Hongik Maker Land, the Sejong Centre for Creative Economy & Innovation and Sejong Technopark which works directly with South Korean SMEs to commercialise research and innovation.

3.7 Members are asked to note the outline itinerary for the Lord Mayor's Innovation Twins mission. And Members are also asked to approve the signing by the Lord Mayor of the Innovation Twins roadmap as a basis for further direct and bi-lateral development work with Sejong.

3.8 Belfast's Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator

Ulster University is preparing a major bid to the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's 'Place-based Innovation Accelerator Account' to create a Belfast-based Digital Healthcare Technology Accelerator that aims to build innovation capacity amongst the local digital health care

cluster by encouraging more collaboration with university researchers, clinicians and directly with communities.

- 3.9 Ulster University is requesting a letter of support from Belfast City Council that would include making an in-principle commitment to the programme with in-kind staff time to the value of £100,000 over four years and to work with City Deal partners to develop a potential complementary challenge fund aimed at stimulating innovation amongst Belfast region health tech SMEs.
- 3.10 Members are asked to approve a letter of support from Belfast City Council, with any final decision in commitment being subject to the terms of the winning bid and approval by a future Committee.
- 3.11 Systems approaches to the transition to net zero
- Queen's University has been engaging with the City Innovation Office on a potential £5 million bid to UKRI for a five-year research programme that will focus on opportunities and barriers to achieving net zero across urban systems such as transport, health, housing, etc.
- 3.12 Surrey University is lead applicant with Queen's while other partners include Oxford University, University College London, Newcastle and Birmingham. The deadline for an outline application is 26 March. If successful, applicants will then be invited to develop their bid further for final submission (at which point an update will be brought back to committee on the bid and the potential role of Belfast City Council).
- 3.13 All-Island Smart Cities Network
- Belfast City Council was a founding member of a smart cities forum in 2017 that now includes most large town and cities on the island of Ireland. (Derry and Strabane and Newry Mourne and Down Councils are also members). The forum was set up to share and promote smart cities practice and to work on joint projects and funding bids. For example, the City Innovation Office worked with Smart Dublin on a successful €800,000 Last mile delivery challenge competition in 2019.
- 3.14 Membership of the Forum requires in-person attendance at a small number of workshops in Dublin usually on a quarterly basis. Members are asked to approve this travel.

3.15 City Hall immersive experience

Members should note that work continues with BT on the development of the City Hall immersive experience that will sensitively complement elements of the existing exhibition. This experimental project, which aims to open from mid-autumn as part of Belfast 2024's programme, is being developed with the City Innovation Office, Belfast 2024, and the Functions and Exhibitions team.

- 3.16** Under a collaborative agreement, BT are investing significant R&D resources into the experience while the Council is benefiting from working alongside of the UK's most creative multi-media companies specialising in heritage sectors. Members are asked to note progress on the development of the experience and that details on the proposed experience will be presented to Committee in the coming months.

Financial & Resource Implications

- 3.17** Unless otherwise noted below, budgets for the initiatives noted above are funded via third-party sources, with any Council contributions identified within the existing City Innovation Office and Belfast Region City Deal budgets.

- 3.18** Council travel costs for Sejong are covered by a grant received from Connected Places Catapult for the Innovation Twins programme.

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

- 3.19** None."

The Committee adopted the recommendations.

Apprenticeship Programme Funding

The Director of Finance reminded the Members that, in February 2024, the Director of Human Resources had presented a report to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on the introduction of an apprenticeship programme for the Council. That report had highlighted two potential areas where this could initially be introduced, namely, Fleet and Resources and Digital Services. The Committee had noted the content of the report and agreed that a further report be submitted on how such a programme could be financed.

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That report had also highlighted the full year costs of the initial programme would be approximately £77k per annum, including salary and training costs. That equated to an ask in 2024/25 of approximately £45k. These initial apprenticeships would last for 3 years at a total cost of approximately £231k, subject to nationally agreed pay awards.

The Director of Finance explained that, as referred to in the Director of Human Resources' report, there currently was no budget for the programme, either departmentally or centrally. Normally a review of the year-end financial position would take place and if there were funds available these would be set aside in a specified reserve to fund this for 2024/25. However, it was likely that the recruitment process would need to commence before the year end position was known. So to ensure the recruitment of the programme could go ahead in a timely manner, the Director of Finance proposed the following financial options:

- 1) Agree to realign £45k from specified reserves to this scheme for 24/25;
- 2) If funds were available at year end, replenish the specified reserve; and
- 3) Incorporate the future funding requirement into the medium-term financial plan currently being devised.

As part of the medium-term financial planning, further discussions would be held with the Director of Human Resources and relevant Directors regarding the expansion of the apprenticeship programme into other areas.

The Committee agreed to funding the 2024/25 apprenticeship programme from realignment of specified reserves, with the costs for future years being incorporated into the medium-term financial plan.

It agreed also that a further report be submitted to the Committee outlining how the apprentices would be recruited.

Performance Improvement Plan 2023/24 Updated KPIs

The Strategic Director of City and Organisation Strategy submitted the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide members with an update on the proposed amendments to the performance indicators to be included in the Council's 2023-24 Performance Improvement Plan following discussions and engagement with the NI Audit Office (NIAO) and Department for Communities (DfC).

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **agree to the recommended changes to the performance indicators to be included in the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24.**

- provide approval for officers to update and publish the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 following final agreement with DfC and NIAO.

3.0 Main Report

Background

- 3.1 Part 12 of the Local Government (NI) Act requires Councils to agree improvement objectives on an annual basis and publish these in the form of a Performance Improvement Plan. In August 2023, Members agreed the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24, which contains our commitment to securing continuous improvement as well as delivery of five improvement objectives. The Act also requires us to monitor and report on progress in an annual assessment of performance.

Improvement Plan 2023-24

- 3.2 In August 2023, the SP&R Committee approved the Performance Improvement Plan for 2023-24. It was then published on the council website as required by legislation. To date, Council has provided two quarterly delivery updates to the NIAO for 2023-24 and was in the process of compiling a Quarter 3 report. However, following recent feedback, engagement and discussions with senior officials within the NIAO and the DfC, officers have been working to revise and amend a number of our performance indicators to ensure that we can report on our progress and performance more effectively going forward.
- 3.3 The Improvement Plan 2023-24 sets out the following improvement objectives:

Our services and facilities
Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.
Our communities
Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.
Our economy

Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.

Our environment

Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.

Our city

Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.

- 3.4 Each improvement objective is supported by a range of actions and milestones that we are required to report on quarterly. Several KPIs and targets are also attributed to help us evidence the extent to which we have achieved our objectives.**

Officers have engaged with the CMT and brought a report to Audit and Risk Panel on the 5 March, to outline and agree the approach and next steps to revising the KPIs within the current Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24, subject to SP&R approval of the changes and final agreement with the DfC and NIAO.

- 3.5 A revised copy of the Improvement Objectives with the proposed new indicators is attached in Appendix 1 and the changes are summarised below:**

Please note:

- **Current KPIs that have been scored through are recommended to be removed.**
- **Current KPIs not scored through will remain.**
- **Proposed new / additional KPIs in green have been agreed by departments (data will be available for reporting and aligned to improvement objectives).**

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Improvement Objective 1: Our services and facilities	
Maintain and where appropriate improve resident satisfaction with the council and the services and facilities that we provide.	
Current KPIs	Proposed new / additional KPIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident satisfaction with Belfast City Council • Percentage of residents who agree that council provides good customer service • Percentage of residents who agree that is easy to contact the council or access council services • Percentage of residents who agree Council provides good value for money • Percentage of residents who agree their local area is clean and attractive • Resident satisfaction with sports and leisure facilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customer contact service level (people answered within 120 secs) • Percentage of corporate complaints resolved within timeframe. • Number of adult and junior leisure centre monthly prepaid memberships (including swim school). • Throughput / footfall – number of people using leisure centres (individual unique customer visits).

Improvement objective 2: Our communities	
Improve our local areas and enhance how we engage and support residents so everyone can enjoy good quality of life.	
Current KPIs	Proposed new / additional KPIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of residents who are satisfied with their local area a place to live. • Percentage of residents who agree council shows good leadership. • Percentage of residents who agree council consults and listens to the views of local residents. • Percentage of residents who agree that their local area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investment in new/ upgraded playgrounds. • Total BCC capital investment in neighbourhoods.

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<p>has good quality parks and green.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of residents using council parks at least monthly (resident survey data). • Number of parks and green spaces with green flag accreditation. • Number of responses to consultation surveys per annum (via Your Say Belfast). • Public participation levels in participatory budgeting (PB) decision making events. • Number of residents accessing online cost-of-living support and advice or 'warm and welcome spaces'. 	
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<p align="center">Improvement objective 3: Our economy</p>	
<p>Help small businesses, including social enterprises and co-operatives, to develop and grow, and by doing so, help create opportunities for local jobs and employment.</p>	
<p>Current KPIs</p>	<p>Proposed new / additional KPIs</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of jobs promoted through the 'Go For It' programme [Statutory performance indicator] • Business start-up and growth activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of business plans developed - Number of participants or businesses supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No additional indicators required / recommended

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Improvement objective 4: Our environment	
Help tackle climate change, protect our environment, and improve the sustainability of Belfast.	
Current KPIs	Proposed new / additional KPIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage of residents who agree that Belfast is an environmentally friendly city • One Million Trees Programme - number of trees planted per annum. • Carbon disclosure project (CDP) score • Northern Ireland environmental benchmarking survey rating. • Amount of (tonnage) of biodegradable council collected waste that is landfilled [Statutory performance indicator] • % of household waste collected that is sent for recycling (or prepared for re-use) [Statutory performance indicator] • Amount (tonnage) of council collected municipal waste arisings [Statutory performance indicator] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of the council's vehicle fleet switching fuel consumption to HVO

Improvement Objective 5: Our city	
Revitalise our city and help it to innovate in an inclusive and sustainable way.	
Current KPIs	Proposed new / additional KPIs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resident satisfaction with Belfast as a place to live • Percentage of residents who agree the city centre is 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The total number of previously vacant city centre properties that have been awarded the Vacant to Vibrant grant and will become

<p>vibrant and attractive, with lots going on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Percentage of residents who agree that Belfast:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– is easy to get about– has good infrastructure• Number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME) and companies directly engaged in the Smart District programme.	<p>occupied as a result of the intervention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The total amount of funding (£) awarded to city centre traders to address vacancy.• The total number of people engaged (traders, developers, business owners, landlords etc) in assisting with the completion of applications to the Vacant to Vibrant intervention.
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Current KPIs

Planning [Statutory performance indicators]

- Average (weeks) processing time for major planning applications
- Average (weeks) processing time for local planning applications
- Percentage of enforcement cases processed within 39 weeks.

3.6 Next steps

- Subject to SP&R approval, officers will present the revised KPIs to DfC and NIAO for final agreement.
- Subject to approval by DfC and NIAO, officers will publish the revised Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 on our website and will submit a combined Q3 and Q4 update to the SP&R Committee in June 2024. This combined Q3 and Q4 and all future reports will be based on the revised KPIs.

3.7 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no finance or resource implications contained within this report.

3.8 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality implications contained in this report.”

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During discussion, several Members expressed the view, that whilst there was a need to have wider and more ambitious KPIs, there was also a need to retain some of the existing ones and expand on some of the newer ones and the undernoted points were made:

- Under objective 1: Our services and facilities – the following KPIs should be retained:
 - percentage of residents who agree that it is easy to contact the council or access council services; and
 - percentage of residents who agree their local area is clean and attractive.
- Improvement objective 2: our communities – there was a need to incorporate, in some form, the KPI on the percentage of residents who are satisfied with their local area as a place to live.
- Under Improvement objective 1 – the need to capture the throughput/footfall – number of users of other Council owned leisure/health/community sites.

The Committee:

- agreed to the recommended changes to the performance indicators to be included in the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24, subject to the retention of suitable alternative measures for the following KPIs under Improvement Objective 1:
 - percentage of residents who agree that it is easy to contact the council or access council services;
 - percentage of residents who agree their local area is clean and attractive;
- noted that the Director would look at how to include other comments in relation to value for money; residents' satisfaction with their local area and footfall/throughput of people using other council-owned leisure/health/community sites; and
- granted approval for officers to update and re-publish the Performance Improvement Plan 2023-24 following final agreement with the Department for Communities and the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

Draft Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-25

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the draft Council performance improvement objectives for 2024- 25 and to seek Committee approval to issue these for public consultation, in line with our statutory performance duty obligations.**

2.0 **Recommendations**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to agree the draft performance improvement objectives for 2024-25 and, subject to any amendments, approve their issue for public consultation in line with statutory guidance. The proposed improvement objectives for 2024-25 are as follows:

Our Services
We will continue to adapt and improve our services to better meet the needs of our residents and stakeholders.
Our people and communities
We will enhance the quality of life for our residents and support them to become healthier, engaged and more resilient.
Our place
We will create a more vibrant city centre and improve our neighbourhoods.
Our planet
We will champion climate action; protect the environment and improve the sustainability of Belfast.
Our economy
We will help business start-up and growth and create opportunities for more and better jobs and employment
Compassionate city
We will support our residents through the cost-of-living crisis.

3.0 **Main report**

Background

- 3.1 Members will be aware that the Council has a statutory duty to agree performance improvement objectives and develop an annual performance improvement plan, which must be published by the 30 June each year. The performance improvement plan doesn't represent everything that the council plans to do but focuses on a small set of key improvement priorities, as informed by the evidence base and engagement feedback.
- 3.2 The new performance improvement objectives are aligned to the key themes and priorities identified within the new refresh of the Belfast Agenda and Corporate Plan. This provides a balanced approach to identifying improvement objectives that contribute to improving services, council functions and the

quality of life for residents/ communities. Members should also note that the council’s strategic and collective partnership commitments to deliver shared city outcomes for the citizens of Belfast and the continuous improvement of internal organisational priorities will continue to be delivered and enhanced as part of the Corporate Plan and the Belfast Agenda.

- 3.3 We will formally consult on the performance improvement objectives using the online YourSay Belfast platform for a period of 8 weeks and will use a range of other communication methods to raise awareness and encourage participation/ reach e.g., posters located within community centres, leisure centres and libraries, social media related activity, signposting via established networks, for example Community Planning Partners (CPP) and other Council networks.
- 3.4 A copy of the draft improvement objectives and indicative actions that we propose to deliver during the coming year, have been included in Appendix 1, for illustration purposes.

Next Steps

- 3.5 Councils are legally required to consult on their improvement objectives and to publish a Council Improvement Plan by 30 June each year. Subject to approval, we will issue the performance improvement objectives for public consultation for a period of 8 weeks. We will continue to work with Departments to firm up the actions, milestones, KPIs and targets, that sit below the improvement objectives. Improvement activity will be reflected within the Corporate Plan, Committee plans, business plans and strategic programmes, where relevant, ensuring that improvement is embedded within our planning and delivery processes. A final report and draft Council Performance Improvement Plan 2024-25 will be brought to the SP&R Committee for ratification and publication in June 2024.

WHAT	WHEN
SP&R Agree draft Improvement Objectives 2024-25	22 March 2024
Carry out 8-week consultation process	April – May 2024
Refine improvement actions, milestones, KPIs and targets	April – May 2024
SP&R approves Council Improvement Plan for publication	June 2024

Council Performance Improvement Plan published	By 30 June 2024
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3.6 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no Financial or Human Resource implications arising directly from this report. Improvement actions are part of business planning processes.

3.7 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality/ good relations or rural needs implications arising directly from this report.”

During discussion a Member pointed out there were a number of programmes in which the Council was leading the way, particularly in relation to the our people and communities and the our planet improvement objectives and that there were some initiatives, such as the school streets project and the playful streets initiative, which could be included as indicative action under these objectives.

In response, the Strategic Director indicated that he would look at a means to including these.

The Committee agreed the draft performance improvement objectives for 2024-25 and, subject to the inclusion of those initiatives regarding school streets and playful streets as indicative actions and approved their issue for public consultation in line with statutory guidance.

Customer Focus Programme Update

The Strategic Director of City and Organisational Strategy submitted the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To update Elected Members on the Customer Focus Programme and the Customer Hub.

1.2 For Elected Members to note the intention to use bulk text message as a communication channel for upcoming changes to waste collections over the Easter Bank Holidays.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Note the update and the intention to use bulk text messaging as a communication channel for changes to waste collections.**

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Customer Focus Programme and Customer Hub

The Customer Hub was set up as part of the Customer Focus Programme and went live in April 2021 during COVID lockdowns. Whilst the Hub has been in place for almost three years, staffing establishment levels remain the same as April 2021, despite significant increases in customer contact across all contact channels.

3.2 The Customer Hub has been able to provide improved service despite increasing volumes through the promotion and improvement of our digital channels and making these automated. This is across channels such as web forms and email, whilst delivering service levels via phone calls and in person visits. The Customer Hub handles around 70% of all calls to the Council and around 60% of all customer contacts including email and web forms.

3.3 The Customer Hub experiences significant service issues with massive increases in volumes when there is major disruption to operational services such as waste collections.

3.4 At present the range of services that have been onboarded to the Customer Hub are:

- Resources and Fleet Waste Collections
- Resources and Fleet Waste Management
- Open Spaces and Street Scene
- Complaints
- General Enquires
- Switchboard

3.5 Customer Hub Contact Volumes

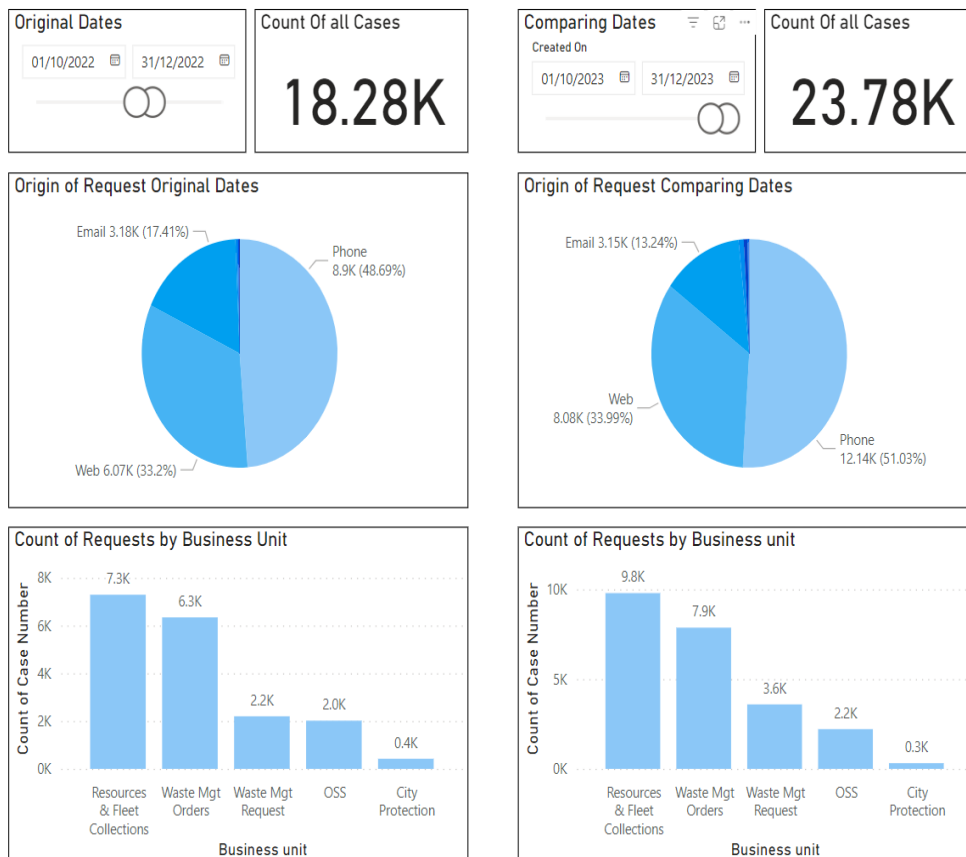
The Customer Hub on average deals with of 550 phone calls per day. The Hub also processes emails and webforms of around the similar volume and would regularly handle around 1,000 – 1,200 customer contact per day. During high periods of demand, such as significant service disruption (Inclement weather, Bank Holidays etc) the Customer Hub can experience significantly more calls, which can be challenging.

3.6 Customer Hub volumes and channels of contact is provided below for Q3 2022 and Q3 2023. As you will note there is a significant increase in the volume of customer contact processed at the Customer Hub in comparison to the same

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quarter last year, an increase of around 5,000 more contacts which is a 30% increase, this is across all contact channels, phone, web form, and in person visits to the Cecil Ward Building.

3.7 The graphic below depicts the increase in customer contacts from Q3 2022 to Q3 2024, a breakdown of the contact channel in the pie chart and a breakdown of the services in the bar chart.



3.8 It should be noted that telephone contact has also increased significantly from 9,000 contacts in Q3 2022 to 12,000 contacts in Q3 2023. The capability to answer such an increase in calls has been achieved through the targeted introduction of automations to web forms. This has enabled Assistants within the Hub to spend less time doing low valuable data entry to provide more valuable direct interaction with customers calling the Hub.

3.9 Cost saving and Process Efficiencies

The Customer Focus Programme actively tracks the benefits from the products produced and handed over to services as business as usual. These products have been co-created with the operational services, the programme office and with the support of services such as Digital Services or Continuous Improvement. This ensures a collective agreement on what is to be produced, when it is to be produced and that the service and producers sign the product off together. These are only signed off when ready to achieve the benefit they were created for.

It is important to note the benefits support the Belfast Agenda and that these products actively support efficiencies or cost avoidance. The introduction of automated Web forms has provided the capability for the Customer Hub to handle significantly more volume since its inception in April 2021. These improvements have allowed the staff within the Hub to focus on higher value work and more complex and time-consuming customer issues.

CURRENT PRODUCTS DELIVERED BY THE CUSTOMER FOCUS PROGRAMME

3.11 Elected Members app:

The Elected Members app was fully rolled out to all Elected Members in 2021 and to all new members on induction to Council. This is used by Elected Members to achieve the benefits of registering service requests, track these service requests, contact the officer in charge and to have visibility of the records and where requests are closed and a history of their requests.

3.12 The use of the app varies between Elected Members with some members making significant repeated use and others as and when required. This is to be expected as we are offering a 'digital first', not 'digital only' method of contacting the Hub for transactional issues.

3.13 Officers would like to explore how we could increase the uptake of the Elected Members app, since the benefits of this approach ensures that we can identify any patterns in service performance issues and improve our understanding of why service issues have arisen. Elected members are asked to note that the current average time for the Customer Hub to pass calls to services is within one hour of being received with the

majority of these passed on within 30 mins or faster. Though there will of course be occasions when this is done more quickly for high priority or urgent cases.

3.14 Report it app:

A significant proportion of the work in Phase Two of the Customer Focus Programme has been supporting service delivery within Resources and Fleet Collections. This has included the design, development and deployment and operational use of a staff Report It App. This has allowed collections teams to report on the issues live 'on the ground' affecting collection, for example, no access due to parked cars.

3.15 This has been particularly beneficial for the Customer Hub and collections managers who can view the live reporting to support decision making and provide customers with live updates on collection issues at the point of contact. This allows customers to clearly understand issues that are beyond the collection team's controls such as parked vehicles or contaminated or overfilled and damaged bins and is of major added value to the customer at the point of contact.

3.16 Previously this work would have done using manual processes, creating a considerable time lag for customer information meaning that this was of little use. Often, prior to the development of the Report It App, there would have been work that should have not been carried out for example a recollection of a contaminated bin etc.

3.17 The Next Phase of the Customer Focus Programme






The programme is taking onboard views of Chief Officers as part of the planning of its next phase, in the form of a planning workshop. This will include participants from the Customer Focus Oversight and Delivery boards along with a wider group of stakeholders. The pillars/themes of the new phase have already been agreed by the Oversight board and are displayed below for Elected Members to note.

3.18 New product ready for implementation – Bulk Text Messaging

A key infrastructure product within the Customer Hub has been to integrate the telephony system with the Corporate Dynamics CRM. As part of this, the ability to send text messages to customers was developed. This is available on a 1 to 1 basis for sending only, for example sending the link of an online form to a customer.

3.19 The functionality that supports this also supports the sending large volumes of text messages through the Notify Service via notify.gov.uk. Elected Members may have received text messages from this service, for example the Driver & Vehicle Agency send appointment reminders text message for MOT Services.

High Level Customer Focus Programme Phase 3

 Automation & Channel Shift	 Data Analytics	 Onboarding of Services	 Organisation Customer Experience	 Omni Channel
<p>Creation of a Strategy and design principles for provision and promotion of automated Digital Channels</p> <p>By Q4 2023:</p> <p>Bulky Waste Exemplar</p> <p>1st service to have no online presence, fully call based with channel shift of +40%</p> <p>Improvement in Cost to Serve</p> <p>Potential to Automate over 10,000 calls per Ann and deflect many more</p> <p>Releases Capacity for transition of other services</p> <p>Informs development of Channel Shift Strategy.</p>	<p>Development of Performance Metrics for CMT, DMT's and Operational Service</p> <p>By Q4 2023:</p> <p>Visualising service provision</p> <p>Developing potential efficiency indicators</p> <p>Utilising Information to bring insight into Service Failure</p> <p>CMT Reporting - Customer Service Performance Measurement</p> <p>In 2024:</p> <p>Data Analytics Training for services to self-serve on Analytics</p>	<p>Development and Implementation of Transition and Transformation Toolkit</p> <p>By Q2 2024:</p> <p>Cost to Serve Baseline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Channel Assessment reduction of cost to serve •SLA and Standards assessment and agreement •Assessment of Risks and Issues for Services to onboard •Integration of LOB Systems replacement and integration with Customer Hub/Dynamics 	<p>Implementation and embedding of all Customer Standards at a corporate level</p> <p>In 2024</p> <p>Service Level Agreements</p> <p>Front line Customer Service Training</p> <p>Customer Satisfaction Measurement</p> <p>Introduction of Service Level Customer Satisfaction baseline monitoring</p> <p>User Experience Training</p> <p>In 2024/5:</p> <p>Customer Experience CX Maturity Model assessment</p>	<p>Development of an approach to have a Single view of Customer across all channels</p> <p>In 2024:</p> <p>This will be progressed through assessment of the following means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Customer Account/Portal, Business case, design principles and implementation pathway •Proof Of concept Webchat & Chat Bot Virtual agents internal •Provision of Service Information – deflection •Bulk Text Messaging •Creation of a business case for Transactional Social Media integration to Dynamics

3.20 Elected Members currently receive text messages from the Emergency Coordination team that are sent on a bulk basis, to all Elected members and senior officers, for communication and updates regarding an emergency response or weather warnings etc.

3.21 The Customer Hub now has the capability to send bulk text messaging - to send service disruption or service change information directly to customers' mobile phones. This functionality adds to our existing communications channels, such as our website or social media.

3.22 The Customer Hub proposes to deploy this capability for communicating changes to bin collection schedules that will occur over Easter as part of the wider communications campaign. This process will be developed and fully agreed with the Director of City Services Resources and Fleet and the Director for External Affairs, Communications and Marketing and the Customer Hub prior to being implemented. This capability has also been reviewed with the Information

Governance Unit to ensure compatibility and compliance with all Data Protection Legislation and Policies.

3.23 Elected Members will also receive an email briefing via democratic services ahead of the usual communications and text messaging being sent. All usual channels will be used for customer communications confirming the arrangements for Easter with the addition of the use of text messaging service.

3.24 Financial and Resource Implications

None

3.25 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

None.”

In response to a Member’s question, the Strategic Director that the text messages would be used alongside existing channels such as city matters and social media. He indicated also that he was intending to explore the use of the Elected Member app and what improvements might be introduced in terms of support for Members.

The Committee noted;

- the update and the intention to use bulk text messaging as a communication channel for changes to waste collections; and
- that the Director would explore the use of the Elected Member app and what improvements might be introduced in terms of support for Members.

Physical Programme and Asset Management

Physical Programme Update

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The Council’s Physical Programme currently includes over 200 capital projects with investment of £150m+ via a range of internal and external funding streams, together with projects which the Council delivers on behalf of external agencies. The Council’s Capital Programme forms part of the Physical Programme and is a rolling programme of investment which either improves existing Council facilities or provides new facilities. This report presents an update on the 2024/25 Capital Programme and associated capital financing, as well as

requests for stage movement approvals under the Capital Programme.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is requested to –

Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2024/25

- note the update on Capital Financing as outlined in 3.3 below and the update on the Capital Programme for 2024/25 at 3.5 below and in Appendix 1
- agree to hold Party Group Briefings to update Members on the status of projects along with the emerging implications for future capital investment decisions and in particular the potential impact on the future district rate in line with the development of the Medium Term Financial Plan to inform the future proposed workshop on capital priorities.
- Capital Programme Movements –
 - Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter project – agree to move the project to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
 - St George’s Market – New Stalls project – agree to move the project to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
 - Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme project – agree to move the project to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* under the Waste Plan to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.
 - Belfast Blitz Fire Service Permanent Acknowledgement project – note that this project has been moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

3.0 Main report

Key Issues

3.1 Capital 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. Members will recall that the detailed Physical Programme Half Year Update was presented last month and that the Property & Projects Department is happy to arrange a site visit to any projects that have been completed or are underway.

3.2 Capital Programme and Capital Financing 2024/25

The Council incurs both capital expenditure and capital financing costs in the delivery of its Capital Programme:

- Capital Expenditure is the expenditure incurred in the actual delivery of contracts e.g. the actual payments to the contractor for a construction contract (see Appendix 1)
- Capital Financing is the method the council uses to fund the capital expenditure. The capital financing costs include loan repayments (principal and interest); revenue contributions (cash payments to repay or avoid taking out loans); capital receipts and external funding.

Members need to be aware that each decision they take in relation to progressing a capital project or agreeing additional money towards any one project has a consequential impact on the level of financing that is available for other capital projects and each individual decision therefore subsequently limits the capacity of the Council to progress other capital projects thereby potentially necessitating some difficult decisions for Members in terms of prioritisation.

- 3.3 The SP&R Committee has approved a capital financing budget of £22,274,022 for 2024/25. Members will be aware however that the Council has already committed financing to a range of physical projects under the Capital Programme as outlined in Appendix 1 and a number of non-recurrent projects.

Existing Capital Financing Budget		£22,274,022
<u>Less:</u> Physical Programme Commitments (capital programme and non-recurrent projects)	£17,998,911	
Existing BCC Loans	£1,484,802	

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Lisburn/ Castlereagh Transferred Loans	£598,675	
<i>Balance Remaining</i>		<i>£2,191,634</i>

3.4 Members are asked to note that although the above shows that there is a financing budget balance remaining of approx. £2m it is recommended that no significant decisions are taken pending work on the new Capital Programme.

3.5 The current Capital Programme

Capital three-stage approval process

The Council has agreed a three-stage approval process which all Council Capital Programme and larger projects funded externally must go through. Each stage movement is subject to Council ratification before the project formally progresses to the next stage. Projects move through *Stage 1 – Emerging* where they are required to complete a Strategic Outline Case and then progress to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted*. Following production of an Outline Business Case, a project can move to *Stage 3 – Committed*. Following a procurement exercise, projects must then demonstrate that the project is within the affordability limits of the Council before proceeding. At each of these stages, the project is reviewed internally before coming to SP&R Committee for a decision and a committed budget. Associated revenue costs are considered at each stage. A number of years ago it was further agreed that a final investment decision and final budget would only be allocated to a project once the tender process is concluded and it was confirmed to be within the affordability limits of the Council. This process has proved to be extremely robust and central to ensuring that projects are delivered within the agreed budget envelope. A small number of schemes have historical budgets where a budget had been previously agreed/ring-fenced by Committee early in the development cycle. This is not the agreed process now under the three-stage approach where Committee is only asked to agree a budget following return of tender. This means that those pre-emptive budgets are not reflective of the current market or requirements. This does not affect many schemes and Members will be updated on a case-by-case basis as tenders are returned so these schemes are gradually being brought into line with the process.

Schemes at Stage 3 – Committed

The Capital Programme already comprises 30+ projects at Stage 3 – Committed, where procurement is underway or projects are already in contract, see Appendix 1. Stage 3 projects also include capital projects on Council assets which are fully funded by external bodies or developer contributions. Members are updated on these schemes via regular reports to Area Working Groups and SP&R Committee. Most of these schemes have confirmed budgets and associated financing, and a number are coming to a close over the next financial year.

Schemes at Stage 2 – Uncommitted or Stage 1 – Emerging

Members are asked to note that there are a range of physical projects which the Council must undertake from a health and safety, legislative and/or operational perspective in order to ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory duties and continues to run 'fit for purpose' services. These will all require capital financing. A number of these are already on the Capital Programme and include: Waste Plan – New citywide kerbside collection system and Waste Transfer Station projects, Relocation of Dunbar Link Cleansing Depot, New Cemetery and Roselawn Extensions, Cremated Remains Burial Plots, Playground Improvement Programme, Waterfront Hall Chiller Units and Smoke Curtains, HWRCs and Civic Amenity Sites Containers (Skips and Compactors), Fleet Programme and IT programme. Projects at these early stages do not have final budgets agreed however estimates have been used in order to calculate the impact of these on the capital financing budget and the availability of capital financing in the future.

In addition, there are several other major enhancement projects on the Capital Programme (Stage 1 or Stage 2) with developmental work underway including: LTP – Girdwood Indoor Sports Facility, Belfast Stories via Belfast Region City Deal, five greenway schemes and others, see Appendix 1. Many of these schemes will be attractive to external funders and schemes are developed with this in mind.

Next steps

- 3.6 Members will appreciate that the Council's capital and wider physical programme is one of the most important programmes delivered by the Council and due to the nature of capital projects it is also one of the most visible and easily recognisable signs of the Council's civic leadership role in the

city. Moving forward the Council will face a number of key challenges in respect of the capital programme. These are:

- The available capital financing budget will come under significant pressure if all current and emerging proposed projects are to be delivered.
- The need to ensure that Investment decisions are taken within the context of strategic alignment with the Belfast Agenda, Corporate Plan, Medium Term Financial Plan and in full consideration of what assets already exist in an area and how these are being used

3.7 Typically the Capital Programme has an expenditure horizon of around three years. CIPFA capital planning guidance recommends that local authorities take a longer-term view (8-10 years). This is intrinsically linked to the development of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan. To facilitate this it has been agreed to hold a series of workshops for Members regarding future capital priorities linked to the medium-term financial planning process. To prepare for this it is recommended that a series of Party Group Briefings are held in the first instance to update Members on the existing Capital Programme, ascertain future priorities to determine the level of financing required, as well as exploring the implications of any future investment decisions and the potential impact on the district rate.

The outcome of this work will likely mean a wave of new proposals being added simultaneously to the Capital Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* so that a suite of schemes can be brought forward for consideration, ensuring a flow that is manageable from a financing perspective. All projects will continue to follow the three-stage capital approvals process outlined above. This will require additional investment in early stage project development in 2024/25 onwards.

3.8 Capital Programme - Proposed Movements

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

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Project	Overview	Stage movement
Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter	The erection of dual language street signs en bloc within the Gaeltacht Quarter.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
St George’s Market – New Stalls	Replacement of market stalls in St George’s Market.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme	Part of the Waste Plan. The project involves the phased expansion of the kerbside glass collection scheme to households in the outer city/ blue bin area.	Move to Stage 2 – Uncommitted
Belfast Blitz Fire Service Permanent Acknowledgement	A permanent memorial to all of the Fire Services efforts during the Belfast Blitz	Moved to Stage 2 – Uncommitted

3.9 Dual Language Street Signs - Gaeltacht Quarter

In October 2023, SP&R Committee 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. 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 ‘Dual Language Street Signs– Gaeltacht Quarter’ be moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* on the Capital Programme to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

3.10 St George’s Market – New Stalls

In November 2023, SP&R Committee agreed that St George’s Market – New Stalls project would be taken forward. The project is for the replacement of the 180 market stalls in St Georges Market. The current stalls are more than 18 years old and many are in a poor state of repair, presenting a health and safety risk both for staff and for traders. 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 ‘St George’s Market – New Stalls’ be moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* on the Capital Programme to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

3.11 Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Collection Scheme

The Expansion of Glass Collection is brought forward under the existing Waste Plan Programme at *Stage 1 – Emerging* on the Capital Programme. The project involves the phased expansion of the kerbside glass collection scheme to households in the outer city/ blue bin area. An application has been lodged with DAERA for 50% match funding and a decision is awaited. 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 ‘Waste Plan – Expansion of Glass Recycling Scheme’ be moved to *Stage 2 – Uncommitted* on the Capital Programme as part of the Waste Plan to allow the options to be fully worked up, with further detail to be brought back to Committee in due course.

3.12 Fire Service Belfast Blitz

In March 2023, SP&R Committee agreed that the ‘Fire Service Belfast Blitz’ project be added to the Capital Programme as a *Stage 1 – Emerging* project. The project involves the installation of a permanent memorial to all of the Fire Services efforts during the Belfast Blitz. It was agreed by SP&R via the City Hall Working Group in October 2023 to move it to *Stage 2 - Uncommitted* on the Capital Programme. This will allow a more detailed brief to be worked up and to determine financial requirements for the scheme.

Discussions have previously taken place with representatives from Fire Brigade Unions, both Belfast and Dublin, and it has been suggested that a permanent piece in the form of a resin cast of a fire brigade helmet be procured and installed. It has been agreed that such acknowledgement include the Auxiliary Fire Services for their efforts during the Belfast Blitz. It has been agreed that the piece be located initially in the Rotunda of City Hall for a defined period of time and subsequently relocated to the City Hall exhibition. Officers will identify a suitable location on the Rotunda and suggest a number of options for relocation within the City Hall exhibition. There have been early conversations with NIWM (Northern Ireland War Memorials) in relation to advice and guidance. The City Hall Working Group will continue to receive updates on this project.

Members are asked to note that ‘Fire Service Belfast Blitz’ project has been 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.

3.13 Financial & Resource Implications

Financial – None

Resources – 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.

Assets Management

The Committee:

i) Blythefield Park - Licence Variation to NITHCo

- approved an extension to the Permitted Hours on lands at Blythefield Park held under licence by NITHCo.

ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence to Friends of the Field

- approved the grant of a Licence between the Council and Friends of the Field for use of portion of land at Botanic Gardens.

iii) St George’s Market Unit 2 – Lease Renewal

- approved the renewal of a Lease at Unit 2 St George’s Market.

Area Working Groups Update

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meetings of the South Area Working Group of 19th February, North Area Working Group of 27th February, West Area Working Group of 28th February and East Area Working Group of 28th February and 7th March 2024 and adopted the following recommendations:

North Area Working Group

- Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund - the North Belfast Area Working Group recommended to the Committee that the request from the Belfast Orange Hall to use the NRF allocation to progress with a reduced scope of works be approved.

West Area Working Group

- Belfast Investment Fund - the West Belfast Area Working Group recommended to the Committee that Glencairn Community Project be moved to *Stage 3 - Committed*.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

Medium Term Financial Plan Update 2024/25 – 2027/28

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is to present members with an update on the work underway to implement a robust approach to longer term financial planning in compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Committee is asked to note the work to be completed to agree priorities for 2025/26 to 2027/28.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 SP&R at its meeting on 19 January 2024 agreed to an update report on the development and implementation of a Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

3.2 Integrating and aligning strategies with resources is central to financial resilience and stability as the impact of actions or decisions on one or more of these strategies will have an impact on the others. The key planning processes in the Council are:

3.3 Financial Planning - Revenue Estimates – August to January

The striking of the district rate by 15th February each year is a statutory requirement set out in the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland)2011. The financial planning process each August with the issuing of High-Level Guidance to Chief Officers, after consultation with Members. After consideration of draft estimates, each Standing Committee considers their cash limit for the following financial year as recommended by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. Full Council must ratify the Council estimates before 15th February each year.

3.4 The revenue budgets for 2024/25 have been approved by Council in February and provide the cash limit available to each Chief Officer for delivering services. The Council's Financial Regulations require each Chief Officer to deliver a balanced budget by the year end. Should the need for unbudgeted expenditure arise during the year, the Director of

Finance will assess funding options for the proposal which should only proceed with his approval.

Corporate Planning

3.5 The four-year corporate planning cycle is timed around the electoral cycle so that a new plan is agreed for the April following the local government elections. This gives elected Members approximately nine months to work with Officers in establishing the priorities for the Council over the next four years. At its meeting on 18th August 2023, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee approved a report on the proposed approach and timeline for the development of the 2024 – 28 Corporate Plan and accompanying Committee and Departmental Plans for 2024-25 as follows:

- Party Group Leaders, Committee Chairs and Chief Officers Workshop – late September 2023
- Committee Planning Workshops – early October 2023
- Draft Corporate Plan/Committee Plans/Departmental Plans – (CMT 8th November 2023)
- All Member Workshop – November 2023
- Strategic Policy and Resources Committee – 24th November and 15th December
- Draft Corporate Plan and Committee Plans to Committee – January/February 2024
- Eight Week Public Consultation Period – February/March 2024
- Final Four Year Corporate and Committee Plans agreed – April – May 2024

3.6 The corporate planning process is ongoing and the revised timeline for the completion of the Corporate Plan and the accompanying Committee and Departmental Plans is:

- CMT consider the draft 2024-2028 Corporate Plan and 2024-2025 Delivery Plan and Performance Improvement Objectives 2024-2025 return suggested changes/additions to the Strategy, Policy and Partnerships Team by 20 March 2024.
- Draft performance improvement objectives presented to SP&R Committee on 20 March 2024. - CMT agree that DMTs be invited to the extended CMT workshop on 27 March 2024 and inform SPP if they would like any additional officers invited.

- Extended CMT discussion of draft corporate plan, delivery plan and performance objectives on 27 March 2024;
- Public consultation on the draft performance improvement objectives April-May 2024
- All Member workshop with a focus on resourced delivery in 2024-2025 (to inform annual delivery plan) and performance targets (April 2024, date TBC).
- Internal engagement with departments on the development of the Performance Improvement Plan (milestones, performance indicators and targets).
- Draft Corporate Plan 2024-2028. Annual Delivery plan and Performance Improvement Plan to CMT for final sign off – early May
- Draft Corporate Plan and draft Annual Delivery Plan to SP&R Committee for agreement, subject to public consultation (24 May 2024)
- Committee Plans agreed at P&C and CG&R Committee – May 2024.
- Performance Improvement Plan 2024-2025 agreed by SP&R Committee on 21 June 2024.
- Public Consultation - June 2024
- Launch of internal communications plan – June 2024

Financial Sustainability

- 3.7 The Council relies on rate income to fund almost 80% of its services. Rate base vulnerability has been and remains a financial risk to the Council. Having an integrated MTFP showing budgetary pressures will focus on progressing income generation and investment opportunities that will lessen the reliance on rate income. In the longer term, this approach will demonstrate the Council's financial resilience which in turn will attract more investors to help achieve the ambitious long-term plans set out in the Belfast Agenda.
- 3.8 Appendix 1 provides a draft Medium Term Financial Plan Format. This provides information on the background to what is include in a MTFP. Significant work is still to be undertaken in relation to the Forward Planning and Capital Programme areas with further work on the development of these to continue over the coming months.

Next Steps

- 3.9 A planning workshop will be held with Members in April to reaffirm Council priorities over the life of the Corporate Plan.

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Chief Officers will align budgets and reserves to these priorities going forward.

Chief Officers will outline new pressures where funding sources do not exist within departmental budgets.

An update on the development of the MTFP will be brought to Committee in June

Financial & Resource Implications

3.10 None

Equality or Good Relations Implications / Rural Needs Assessment

3.11 None.”

The Committee noted the work to be completed to agree priorities for 2025/26 to 2027/28.

CIPFA Prudential Code Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Indicators 2024-25

The Director of Finance reported that the Local Government Finance Act (NI) 2011 required the Council to adopt the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. In doing so, the Council was required to agree a minimum revenue provision policy annually and to set and monitor a series of Prudential Indicators, the key objectives of which were to ensure that, within a clear framework, the capital investment plans of the Council are affordable, prudent and sustainable.

At the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 9th December 2011, the Members approved the Council’s Treasury Management Policy which was based on the CIPFA Treasury Management Code of Practice. The Treasury Management Policy required that a Treasury Management Strategy be presented to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee on an annual basis and that it be supported by a mid-year and year-end treasury management report. Recent changes in the CIPFA Prudential Code recommends best practice that treasury management reports are submitted on a quarterly basis.

The Capital Strategy, incorporating the prudential indicators, was included as Appendix A to the report, while the Treasury Management Strategy and treasury management indicators have been included as Appendix B.

The comparison of “Gross Debt” to “Capital Financing Requirement” (CFR) was the main indicator of prudence when considering the proposed capital investment plans of

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the Council. Estimated gross debt should not exceed the CFR for the current year plus two years. The Council's estimated gross debt position was comfortably within the CFR in the medium term. The Director of Finance therefore considered the estimated levels of gross debt as being prudent.

He explained that Table 10 (Appendix A) showed the estimated financing costs for capital expenditure as a percentage of the estimated net revenue stream for the Council, based on the medium term. These illustrated that, in the medium term, capital financing costs would represent an average of 6.27% of the Council's net running costs. On this basis the Director of Finance was satisfied that the level of capital expenditure was affordable.

The Finance Act required the Council to set an affordable borrowing limit, relating to gross debt. The Prudential Code defines the affordable limit as the "Authorised Borrowing Limit" and gross borrowing must not exceed this limit. Table 8 (Appendix A) sets out the recommended "Authorised Borrowing Limit" for the Council as being £145m for 2024/25.

The Committee:

- noted the contents of the report and the prudential and treasury management indicators included within the appendices to the report.

And agreed:

- The Authorised Borrowing Limit for the Council of £145m for 2024/25 and The Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25, which had been included as Appendix B to the report.

Contracts Update

The Committee:

- approved the public advertisement of tenders as per Standing Order 37a detailed in appendix 1 (table 1);
- approved the award of STAs in line with Standing Order 55 exceptions as detailed in appendix 1 (table 2);
- approved the modification of the contract as per Standing Order 37a detailed in appendix 1 (table 3); and
- agreed that reports be submitted to a future meeting in relation to the contract on facilities management arrangements at the Mary Peters Track and the off street car parking enforcement:

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Table 1: Competitive Tenders

Title of Tender	Proposed Contract Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Short description of goods / services
Supply of waste collection sacks	Up to 4 years	£600,000	S Grimes	This is a recurring contract for the supply of recycled plastic and paper sacks to BCC stores to support operational teams/depts.
Supply of paints and sundries	Up to 4 years	£120,000	S Grimes	This is a recurring contract for the supply of paints and sundries to BCC stores to support operational teams/depts.
NIESS benchmarking tool	Up to 1 year	£40,000	J Greer	BCC is acting on behalf of the 11 NI councils to appoint a Contractor to deliver a benchmarking tool to support the new Entrepreneurship Support Service (NIESS) funded in part by the Department of Levelling Up and Housing and Communities' Shared Prosperity Fund.
Supply, fitting and maintenance of fire extinguishers	Up to 5 years	£150,000	S Grimes	Requirement to maintain existing fire extinguishers and provide and install any required new units, as required.
Small civil engineering works	Up to 4 years	£1,200,000	S Grimes	Contract to support Depts in maintaining assets including playgrounds.
Purchase of IT equipment	Up to 1 year	£500,000	S McNicholl	New devices to facilitate hybrid working and replacement devices as per regular business as usual replacement cycle

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Manufacture, supply and installation of signage.	Up to 3 years	£210,000	D Sales	To supply replacement signage across BCC sites.
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Table 2: Single Tender Actions

Title	Duration	Est. Max Contract Value	SRO	Description	Supplier	STA Reason Code
Support for Modern.gov IT System	Up to 3 years	£35,000	P Gribben	We own the Modern.gov licences and Civica who are the supplier are the only company who provide maintenance and support for modern.gov.	Civica UK Ltd	3
Oracle licences and technical support	Up to 3 years	£40,000	P Gribben	Licencing and technical support by Oracle for systems with over 1,000 users. Proprietary licences and support provide directly by Oracle only.	Oracle Digital PLC	3

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Table 3: Modification to Contract

Title of Contract	Original Contract Duration	Modification required	SRO	Description	Supplier
Bobbin Café Franchise	Up to 30 months	A further 6 months (Income based contract)	N Largey	After lengthy pre-market engagement, permission is sought for an extension up to 6 months to help facilitate the re-tender exercise and ensure the Franchise represents best VFM option for the Council whilst testing the market as a Reserved Contract to social enterprises	Now Group
Operator for Travel Hub at Cathedral Gardens	Up to 18 months	Additional 3 months and additional £7000 spend	C Reynolds	Extension of further 3 months to June 24 following additional external funding being made available to support.	Sustrans Limited
Facilities management service at Mary Peters Track.	Up to 6 years	Additional 6 months and £110k spend	D Sales	Contract extension required to allow sufficient time for Council to explore alternative management options for the site and time to re-tender, if required. Note – SP&R approved a 6-month extension in Oct 23. Total	Athletics NI

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				modification therefore 12 months beyond original expiry date.	
Provision of a medical referee service contract for the Cemeteries/ Crematorium	Up to 5 years	Additional 3 months and additional £7500 spend	D Sales	A 3-month extension is required to facilitate a re-tendering exercise. Tender documents are being finalised and should be advertised to market in April 24. Delays experienced due to resourcing issues in the Department and additional work required to review and re-draft tender documents.	Dr N B Smith
Supply, fitting and maintenance of fire extinguishers	Up to 3 years	Additional 4 months and additional £7000 spend	S Grimes	A 4-month extension is required to allow more time for the Council to review its requirements and include necessary equipment upgrades to Specification in line with emerging legislation/best practice. It is expected this review will be completed in March/April 24.	1 st Klass Fire Protection

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STA/ Direct Award Reasons

Reason Code	Reasons in line with Public Contact 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)

People and Communities - Funding requests

The Committee considered the following report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

The purpose of this report is to update Members on two proposals for funding which were agreed at the People and Communities Committee meeting held on 6th February 2024 relating to a request from the Belfast Advice Group and for summer schemes with children with additional needs.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- **Consider the request to fund the Citywide Tribunal Service as detailed below; and**

- Consider the request to provide funding for summer schemes for children with additional needs

3.0 Main Report

3.1 At the People and Communities Committee held on 6th February 2024, it was agreed that two requests for funding would be brought forward to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for approval. The requests are outlined below.

3.2 Belfast Advice Group

Following a presentation from the Belfast Advice Group and the noting of a report outlining a range of information attached at Appendix 1, it was agreed that the Group's request to fund the Citywide Tribunal Service to the sum of £269,063 for 2024/25 and to build in a recurring additional annual cost of living uplift of 3% to the award for generalist advice provision including 23/24 would be brought forward to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for its consideration. Given the balance in existing reserves the request for BCTS equals £78,410 for 24/25 and the uplift requires £30,000. This means a total request of £108,410 in 24/25.

3.3 Summer schemes for children with additional needs

Members also noted a report outlining a proposal for additional funding to procure specialist providers to facilitate four additional summer schemes for children with additional needs, with a view to delivering the schemes in summer 2024, one in each area of the city, with discussion to take place with the relevant Area Working Groups and the Belfast City Youth Council in advance of any locations being agreed. The proposed cost to facilitate the four schemes is £80,000.

3.4 Financial & Resource Implications

As detailed above, the request to Belfast Advice Group's request to fund the Citywide Tribunal Service to the sum of £269,063, and the request to fund summer schemes for children with additional needs is £80,000.

3.5 Members should note that for the 24/25 year there is no additional budget to enhance generalist advice service provision beyond the agreed level of £999,657. Therefore an additional £30,000 is required for 24/25.

- 3.6 The anticipated available budget for BCTS in 24/25 is £70,400 from DfC, but council is not yet in receipt of a Letter of Offer for 24/25. There is £120,253 in the Tribunal Service reserve, assuming that the £70,400 from DfC is allocated, an additional £78,410 is required from Council for 24/25 to fund the BCTS to the requested level.
- 3.7 The request for funding for the BCTS has been received annually since the service was established in 2012. The recently completed Review of Advice Services in Belfast presented to Members in December 2023, highlighted that a recurring award for the BCTS should be built into the budget. Officers will include a growth request as part of the 25/26 estimates process in relation to advice services to include a dedicated budget for BCTS and build in a recurring additional annual cost of living uplift to the award for generalist advice provision.
- 3.8 In relation to the request for generalist advice services, Members should also note that Council does not apply cost of living increases to other annual funding awards. The initial cost of living increase that was applied to generalist advice services by DfC in 21/22 was 7% and a 2% uplift was applied by DfC thereafter. DfC provided funding to enable maintenance of this uplifted salary payment in 22/23 and 23/24 and these awards have been/are being passed on to advice organisations. DfC have indicated that it is likely that this uplift will be maintained in the 24/25 CSP LoO, although there is no confirmation of this. However, members should note that no additional uplifts have been provided by DfC since 2021, funds are only available to maintain salaries at the 21/22 level.
- 3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Implications

Belfast City Council's agreement for the provision of this service will seek to ensure that the service is provided on an equal basis to all communities across the city, including section 75 groups and areas of rural need.

The Review of Advice Services identified the need to develop a new funding model that more effectively targets need. This model will be developed in 24/26 and will be screened for equality and rural needs implications.

Council does not have a policy on implementing annual inflationary increases to funding agreements. A decision to introduce an increase for one funding agreement is likely to set

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a precedent and have an impact on other funding programmes.”

The Committee:

- approved the request to fund the Citywide Tribunal Service as detailed in the report but deferred consideration of an additional annual cost-of-living uplift to allow officers to ascertain the financial impact of such an uplift on other funding programmes;
- agreed that a letter be forwarded to the Minister for the Department for Communities enquiring if he was giving consideration to including a cost-of-living uplift to the advice services as part of the current budgetary process; and
- approved the request to provide funding for summer schemes for children with additional needs.

**Audit and Risk Panel Report and Minutes
of Meeting of 5 March 2024**

The Committee noted the key issues arising at the meeting and approved and adopted the minutes of the Audit and Risk Panel of 5th March 2024.

World Athletics Road Race

The Committee was advised that a funding request had been received from the organisers of the Antrim half marathon for the staging of 5km race and a 1 mile race in Belfast. The event would be featuring an appearance by Joshua Cheptigi, the current Olympic 5000m champion. The event will also feature elite mile races for men and women.

It was currently being supported by the Ulster University and officers were aware that the organiser had made applications for funding support from Tourism NI, but that request was still being considered.

The event would be televised and was a paid for event, with the following entry prices for participants, Adults £22, and Students £15.

The organiser had requested a contribution of £80,000 from Belfast City Council towards the organisation of the event.

The event promoter had suggested the economic impact would be in the region of £2.7m. Although the Council did not have an independent verification or test of this proposed level of return.

The Director of Economic Development informed the Members that there was currently no budget or officer resource assigned to this activity.

He explained that, given the significant workload planned for the Events Team in delivering Belfast 2024, ongoing bidding and organising for Fleadh and Euro's 2028 as well as the Council's delivered events such as Christmas, Lord Mayor's Day, and the Maritime Festival, the addition of this event would place significant unplanned work pressure on staff. As a result of this and the fact that funding for the event had not been

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planned for within current departmental budgets, it was recommended that the Committee does not accede to the funding request.

The Committee adopted the recommendation.

Equality and Good Relations

**Minutes of Shared City Partnership
Meeting on 11th March 2024**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes and recommendations from the Shared City Partnership Meeting held on 11th March 2024, including:

Shared City Partnership Membership (Verbal Update)

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

The Executive Office Asylum Dispersal Funding Update

- The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that it approves that the remaining £70,000 of Asylum Dispersal Money be used to procure four further projects to support the localised community integration and inclusion of asylum seekers in Belfast.

Segregation and the Environment Research Report

- The Partnership agreed to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that, following full Council approval, the research report is launched, published and that the recommendations within the report are progressed.

Peace IV - Secretariat Update

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

PEACEPLUS – Theme 1.1 - Local Action Plan Update

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

Operational Issues

**Minutes of Party Group Leaders
Consultative Forum**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Party Group Leaders' Consultative Forum of 14th March.

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**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 8th March, as set out below:

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
2024 EVENTS						
Diverse Youth NI	5 May 2024	Graduation and cultural event with food, speeches, and performance to celebrate students completing the first project phase of the Diverse Youth NI led Hi-M8 Mental Health Awareness campaign. Numbers attending – 150	C & D	No charge as voluntary organisation	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer</i>
NI Indian Nurses Organisation supported by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	12 May 2024	International Nurses' Day Celebration – cultural event with food, speeches, and performance. Numbers attending – 200	C & D	No charge as voluntary organisation	Yes, Tea and Coffee Reception	Approve No Charge Tea and Coffee Reception <i>£500 given to their chosen caterer</i>
Now Group	4 June 2024	Now Graduation	D	No charge - Complimentary as Charity	No hospitality as	Approve No charge

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NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
		<p>Ceremony - annual celebration of the work of trainees supported by the Now Group and completion of the training programme.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 300 - 500</p>			annual event not one-off celebration	No hospitality
Belfast Exposed Photography Centre	6 June 2024	<p>Now and Then – 40 years of Belfast Exposed – an evening of celebration with dinner and photography display to showcase creative art and culture.</p> <p>Numbers attending – 200</p>	C & D	No charge as charity	Yes, Wine Reception as significant anniversary	<p>Approve No Charge Wine Reception</p> <p><i>£500 given to their chosen caterer for wine on arrival</i></p>
Ulster University School of Computing,	27 November 2024	<p>Reception for the 16th International Conference on Ubiquitous Computing and Ambient Intelligence for guests attending their 4-day conference</p>	A & B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd March, 2024**

NAME OF ORGANISATION	FUNCTION DATE	FUNCTION DESCRIPTION	CRITERIA MET	ROOM CHARGE	HOSPITALITY OFFERED	CIVIC HQ RECOMMEND
		taking place in Ulster University. Numbers attending – 150 - 175				
2025 EVENTS						
Irish Association of Dermatologists	9 May 2025	Reception and dinner for the 2024 EALTA Conference 2024. for guests attending their 3-day conference. Numbers attending - 100	A &B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality
Ulster University	12 June 2025	Gala Conference Dinner for University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD) for guests attending their 3-day conference taking place at Ulster University. Numbers attending - 250	A &B	No charge as charity and linked to Visit Belfast	No hospitality	Approve No Charge No hospitality

**Strategic Policy and Resources Committee,
Friday, 22nd March, 2024**

**Minutes of the All-Party Working Group
on the City Centre**

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the City Centre Working Group of 1st March.

Minutes of the Disability Working Group

The Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the meeting of the Disability Working Group of 13th March.

Chairperson

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People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 12th March, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

- Members present: Councillor Murray (Chairperson);
Councillors Bell, Black, R. Brooks, Bunting,
Canavan, Cobain, de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
R-M Donnelly, Flynn, Kelly, Magee, Maghie,
McAteer, Ó Néill and Verner.
- In attendance: Mrs. C. Matthews, Director of Resources and Fleet;
Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. D. Bone, City Services Manager;
Mr. S. Leornard, Neighbourhood Services Manager;
Ms. N. Lane Neighbourhood Services Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Bower.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 6th February were taken as read and signed as correct.

It was reported that the minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th March.

Declarations of Interest

The following Councillors declared an interest in item 3 (b) Community Support Programme as they either worked for or were associated with an organisation in receipt of funding from the Department for Communities (DfC) and left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.

- Councillor Canavan – Board of the Blackie River Community Group and Springfield Charitable Association;
- Councillor Ó Néill – in that he was an employee of the Cumann Culturtha Mhic Reachtain;
- Councillor Verner – in that she was an employee of the Greater Shankill Partnership (Spectrum Centre); and
- Councillor M. Donnelly – Upper Springfield Development Trust.

**People and Communities Committee,
Tuesday, 12th March, 2024**

Councillor Black declared an interest in agenda items 3 (b) Community Support Programme and 3 (g) Funding for Independently Managed Community Centres as an employee of the Grosvenor Community Centre and left the meeting during consideration of both items.

Last Meeting

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, wished the Director of Resources and Fleet well as this would be her last meeting of the People and Communities Committee prior to her leaving the Council at the end of March.

Several of the Members took the opportunity to thank the Director for her valuable contribution during her time at the Council.

Noted.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following two 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 two 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 advised that content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which takes place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Quarter 3 Finance Update

The Committee noted the contents of a report which summarised the Quarter 3 financial position for the People and Communities Committee, including a forecast of the year end outturn. It noted that the Quarter 3 position showed an under spend of £1.7m, including the utilities drawdown (2.2%), with the forecast year end position being an underspend of £1.4m (1.4%).

The Members were advised that the main reasons for the quarter 3 Committee underspend related to vacant posts across a number of services, posts under review across a number of services, the receipt of additional income and the timing of grants and programmes.

A Member referred to the recent unadopted alleyways workshop and expressed concern that the Council could possibly do more to assist residents in some instances, for example, pulling bins up and down unadopted alleyways.

The Committee noted the financial update.

**Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium
Working Group Update**

The City Services Manager drew the Members' attention to the minutes of the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Working Group, during which following matters had been considered:

- City Cemetery Visitor Centre Operating Model;
- Historic Graveyards Update; and
- Future Burial Land.

A Member referred to the recommendation to procure an operator for the management of the Visitor Centre at the City Cemetery and stated that he would like this matter to be further considered by the Working Group, he also suggested that a site visit to the Visitor Centre would be useful.

Following a query from a Member regarding the ongoing restrictions to numbers attending services at the Chapel in Roselawn, the officer agreed to investigate the current capacity arrangements and to submit a report to a future meeting of the Working Group.

A Member stated that she would like to be furnished with a list of historic cemeteries within the Belfast City Council boundary and the City Services Manager undertook to liaise directly with her.

The Committee adopted the minutes of the Strategic Cemeteries and Crematorium Working Group of 27th February with the agreement that further report would be submitted to the Working Group in regard to the City Cemetery Visitor Centre Operating Model and that a site visit to the City Cemetery be arranged to which both the Members of the Working Group and People and Communities Committee would be invited

Committee/Strategic Issues

Pitch Partner Agreements

The Committee noted the quarterly progress report in relation to Partner Agreements at seven sites and that all Partners had been compliant on reporting matters and financial checks for October – December 2023.

The Committee was reminded that the Director had previously extended the current Partner Agreements for all the sites until 31st March 2024. As the Members were aware, the Council was in the process of developing a new policy regarding the management of assets within the community with a pilot currently being delivered across several sites. One of the sites included in the initial pilot was Ulidia Playing Fields and this site had been assessed using the pilot approach.

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The Committee was advised that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its October 2023 meeting, had agreed to transfer the existing Partner Agreement at Ulidia to a long-term lease. It was anticipated that, following a review of the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) pilot process, several of the other sites might also be made available for consideration under new management arrangements. Until that time, and to ensure continuity of service provision, it was proposed that the existing Partner Agreements would continue until any new arrangements had been implemented.

The Committee noted the progress to date at the Partner Agreement sites and agreed to extend the existing Partner Agreements until 31st March 2025, or until new arrangements had been agreed and implemented, following completion of the Community Asset Transfer Pilots.

Community Support Programme 2024/25

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The main purpose of this report is to:

- Advise members that the Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer for 24/25 has not yet been received by Council from DfC.
- Seek members approval to issue Letters of Offer for 24/25 for Capacity Building & Revenue Grants and Generalist Advice in the absence of a Letter of Offer from DfC.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Members are asked to;

- Consider the contents of the report and
- Grant approval for officers to progress funding agreements for the Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building grants and Generalist Advice for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. 50% payments will be issued in advance upon the return of required paperwork with a second payment made pending return of satisfactory interim monitoring report covering the period 1 April to 30 September 2024 and available budget.
- Note that Council does not have any budget to support activity that is 100% funded through the CSP and that none of this activity will progress until funding becomes available through the CSP. A further report on this element will be provided at a later date.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Background information

Members will be aware that the Department for Communities (DfC) provides an annual grant to Council through its Community Support Programme (CSP) Letter of Offer. This funding provides an element of the budget towards Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Building grants as well as Generalist Advice.

The CSP also provides 100% funding for other elements of activity such as Social Supermarkets and Welfare Reform Mitigations.

- 3.2** Council has yet to receive a CSP Letter of Offer for 2024/25 and therefore does not have the total budget available to provide the full grant allocation. Any reduction in the DfC allocation will impact on the overall level of the grant budget and potentially awards to the grant recipients. The CSP Letter of Offer is generally received in March - June each year, although members may recall that in 23/24, DfC funding was released on a gradual basis and the full allocation was not provided until 7 July.

3.3 Key Issues

Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Buildings Grants

Members may be aware that in March 2023, Council agreed to provide multi-annual funding covering 3 years 2023-2026 for the Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Building grants. Although the grants are multiannual, Funding Agreements are made on an annual basis.

Officers are seeking approval to make payments covering 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

The total cost of the grants allocation for 2024/25 is £3,278,109

- Capacity Building £1,845,311
- Revenue for Community Buildings £1,432,798

- 3.4** The list of organisations that receive funding is outlined in appendices 1 and 2.

Council's contribution to Capacity & Revenue Grant Programmes is 78% of the overall budget thus we can guarantee the first 50% payment.

3.5 Generalist Advice Funding

Members will be aware that Council provides funding for generalist advice provision to 5 Advice Consortia covering: Central, East, North, South and West Belfast. The funding is allocated to the consortia using a funding model based on population and multiple deprivation indicators (2015). The list of advice organisations and consortium funding allocation is contained in Appendix 3.

3.6 Members will recall that they received a presentation and a copy of the report on the recent Review of Belfast City Council funded Advice Services. Officers are currently working with the advice consortia on implementing the report recommendations. A further report will be presented to committee on progress in due course.

3.7 The Belfast Advice Group (BAG), the umbrella structure for the 5 advice consortia, made a presentation to committee in February seeking an 3% increase to the funding allocation. Committee agreed to progress the request for consideration by SP&R. Any decisions on additional allocations will be reflected in the award to each consortia and payments will be made in line with normal administration arrangements.

3.8 Council's contribution to Generalist Advice is 39% of the total allocation. Members are asked to consider if they are content to approve the issue of Letters of Offer and 50% payment.

3.9 A further report will be presented to committee when we receive the Community Support Programme Letter of Offer from DfC. Members are asked to note that Council does not have any budget to support activity that is 100% funded through the CSP and that none of this activity will progress until funding becomes available through the CSP.

3.10 Financial and Resource Implications

Members may wish to note that last year the allocation was as below. The council budget is the same for 24/25;

Grant	CSP funding (DfC)	BCC contribution	Total
Capacity	£436,028	£1,409,283	£1,845,311
Revenue	£298,329	£1,134,469	£1,432,798
Advice	£607,928	£391,729	£999,657
Total	£1,342,285	£2,935,481	£4,277,766

3.11 Members will note that Council has the available budget to make a 50% payment to recipients of all three elements (Capacity, Revenue and Advice), however, should there be a reduction in DfC funding this would impact on the overall budget available to cover costs.

3.12 In light of this, Funding Agreements for 2024/25 Capacity Building and Revenue for Community Buildings Grants and Generalist Advice will contain a condition that the second payment may vary due to the level of funding received from DfC.

3.13 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

Any reduction in the available budget has the potential to impact on service delivery which may have equality, good relations or rural needs implications for Belfast City Council.”

A Member highlighted the need to build capacity and requested that officers identify funding within existing budgets to progress a Community Infrastructure Pilot, particularly for the Balmoral area.

The Committee:

- granted approval for officers to progress funding agreements for the Capacity Building, Revenue for Community Building grants and Generalist Advice for the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, with agreement for 50% payments to be issued in advance upon the return of required paperwork and a second payment to be made pending return of satisfactory interim monitoring report covering the period 1st April to 30th September 2024 and the available budget;
- noted that the Council did not have any budget to support activity that was 100% funded through the CSP and that none of this activity would progress until funding became available through the CSP and that a further report on this element would be submitted in due course; and
- agreed that officers look to identify funding within existing budgets to progress a Community Infrastructure Pilot.

Boxing Strategy Update

The Neighbourhood Services Manager drew the Members' attention to the contents of a report which provided an update on the implementation of the Belfast Boxing Strategy, for the period up to the end of December 2023 (Quarter 3). The report noted that the Irish Athletic Boxing Association Ulster Branch (IABA) had advised that it anticipated that all the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would be achieved by the end of 2023/24.

The Committee was reminded that, pending the development of Council's Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy, the Committee had agreed at its March 2023 meeting to extend the current strategy and related work programme from 1st April 2023 until 31st March 2024. The IABA were now seeking the Council to extend the current strategy and

related level of annual support for a further 12-month period and in support of the request had had developed a new programme action plan relating to 2024/25.

The Committee noted the progress to date of the strategy annual work plan for the current year 2023/24 and agreed to extend the Belfast Boxing Strategy and delivery of the work programme for one year from 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025, pending the production of the new Physical Activity and Sports Development Strategy for Belfast.

Partnership Funding

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 advise members of the existing Partnership Agreements that are in place to deliver services aligned to Neighbourhood Services activity. Members are asked to approve future funding to continue these partnership agreements in 24/25.

This report also advises members of a request from Belfast Healthy Cities (BHC) that Belfast City Council (BCC) applies an inflationary award to the funding that it provides to Belfast Healthy Cities for the remaining term of their funding agreement, years 24/25 and 25/26.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that Committee;

- Agree to continue funding to each of the partners at the same level for the 24/25 financial year (£261,359)
- Note that council is not in a position to provide an inflationary award to Belfast Healthy Cities due to the precedent that this would set for other funding agreements and the lack of available budget.

3.0 Main report

Background

- 3.1 Members are aware that City & Neighbourhood Services work in partnership with a number of organisations that share common strategic objectives and that some of this work is supported through annual funding agreements to deliver against agreed outcomes.

- 3.2 In 2021/22, an extensive review of the first six Partnership Agreements listed below was completed; the review concluded that the agreements provided strategic alignment, added value to the Council/City and were value for money. In line with these findings, council agreed that these partnership funding arrangements should continue at the same level to deliver services in 22/23 and 23/24.

At the start of 2023, a desktop review of the last two agreements listed below, which were not part of the original review, was also carried out. It was agreed that these 2 funded programmes should be considered as part of the overall departmental partnership arrangements and have therefore been included in this paper for consideration.

<u>Project</u>	<u>Funding</u>
Belfast Hills Partnership	£36,900
Lagan Valley Regional Park	£88,000
Outdoor Recreation NI (promotion of mountain bike trails)	£5,250
Keep NI Beautiful (Live Here Love Here and Eco Schools Project)	£55,000
Mary Peters Trust	£5,000
Bryson Energy (previously Play Resource)*	£31,209
Belfast Mela	£20,000
Belfast International Arts Festival	£20,000
TOTAL	£261,359

* Note – Play Resource Warehouse has merged with Bryson Energy.

3.3 Request from Belfast Healthy Cities for inflationary award

Belfast's membership to the WHO European Healthy Cities Network is facilitated by Belfast Healthy Cities (BHC), an independent partnership organisation. In May 2021, the City of Belfast was successful in its application to re-designate as a WHO Healthy City and participate in the WHO European Healthy Cities Network until April 2026.

On 10th January 22024, BHC contacted council officers to request that they bring a request for an increased inflation cost to the People and Communities Committee.

The request outlines that Belfast City Council has funded Belfast Healthy Cities since its establishment in 1998 and that the Board of Directors are very grateful for this financial contribution.

BHC highlight that Belfast City Council reduced their funding to Belfast Healthy Cities at a special meeting in January 2017, from £89,586 to £81,294 per annum, to below the 2009/2010 funding level. Funding has remained at this level since 2017.

Belfast Healthy Cities view that this; *'is in essence an ongoing decrease in funding – given the ongoing challenges of inflation. It would be important to relay this to the Committee, given the number of new Committee members who may not be aware of this position.*

The request from BHC also advises that the three other core funders have increased their funding this year by over 3.5 % which 'takes into account the increase in National Living Wage of 10.3%, non-pay at 3%, and the reversal of the 2022/23 increase in Employers' National Insurance of 1.25%'.

- 3.4 Members should note that Council does not have a policy to provide annual increments to multi annual funding awards. C&NS and council generally have a number of multi annual funding agreements which do not include a mechanism to provide an annual enhancement. To provide an increment to one award would have implications for all funding awards and there is no available budget to resource this. In addition, the Partnership Agreements outlined in this paper do not receive an annual increment.

Financial implications

- 3.5 The total financial allocation to these partner funding arrangements is £261,359. These budgets have been agreed as part of rate setting for 24/25.
- 3.6 A 3.5% increase to the current Belfast Healthy Cities funding award would be £2,845. Council are one of four core funders to Belfast Healthy Cities, along with the Public Health Agency (PHA), Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) and Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). Annual funding amounts to over 300k of which BCC contributes £81,294 per annum until March 26. There is no current budget to provide this increment.

Members may wish to note that through the CSP council provides £4,277,766 in annual funding to support multi annual funding awards. Members will be aware that at last month's meeting the Belfast Advice Group asked Council to consider a 3% annual increment to their funding, which would cost approximately £30,000 p.a. Applying an annual increment of 3.5% to the other multi annual awards supported through the CSP (Capacity and Revenue) would require a budget of £114, 734 p.a. The Partnership

Agreements covered by this paper do not receive an annual increment. To apply a 3.5% uplift would cost £9,148 p.a

3.7 Equality or Good Relations Implications and Rural Needs Assessment

Council does not have a policy on implementing annual inflationary increases to funding agreements. A decision to introduce an increase for one funding agreement could set a precedent and have an impact on other funding awards.”

A Member sought clarification with regards to Lisburn and Castlereagh Borough Council and if it had confirmed its position on funding to the Lagan Valley Regional Park. Officers agreed to further investigate and to report back in due course.

The Committee adopted the recommendations as outlined at paragraph 2.0 of the report.

Consultation and Engagement Framework for Large Events

The Committee was reminded that officers had been working to create a successful model of engagement for large-scale events in the city that operated at Belfast Park venues.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager outlined that, as the Members were aware, there were many challenges to the delivery of a consistent approach to engagement due to the diverse nature of event types, participant numbers and venues. Depending on the specific venue, the Council could accommodate attendances of up to 42,000 people at a single concert, this, along with varied levels of input from neighbourhood and community development organisations in the areas immediately surrounding the venues, compounded the challenges of adopting a consistent approach.

The officer continued that, in addition to ad hoc requests, there were also events that occurred on an annual basis and the promoters responsible for these events usually applied to the Council for multiple year permissions to use the venues to enable them to secure headline acts.

The officer specifically referred to Ormeau Park. He reported that in 2022 the Parks Events and Outreach Manager in City and Neighbourhood Services, supported by colleagues in building control, had started a multi-agency approach to the pre-event resident and community engagement regarding the events being delivered in Ormeau Park.

He advised that the engagement forum included attendance from the following stakeholders:

- The event promoter and their event safety advisor;
- Community Provision;
- Building Control;
- Community Safety;

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- Regulatory Services;
- PSNI;
- Elected representatives from local DEA's;
- Resident and Community organisations operating in the local area;
- Local Businesses; and
- Youth Practitioner Organisations operating in the local area.

The officer advised that the community sector organisations, resident groups and businesses had welcomed this approach, as they felt that it was the most effective way for them to work with the range of relevant agencies, to have their concerns heard, to contribute ideas and solutions and ultimately to reduce negative impacts on their neighbourhood. Post evaluation sessions were conducted following events by the engagement forums to review the success and impact of the agreed mitigations, with a 'lessons learned approach'.

Regarding the Boucher Road Playing Fields, in 2023, officers, supported by the Elected Members, had endeavoured to replicate the Ormeau Park approach for the series of August and September festivals. The engagement had led to many improvements and had been deemed successful by the residents who had attended the pre-event session.

The Committee was advised that one of the key challenges at this venue was that there was a lower level of residents, community organisations and businesses to participate in engagement events, in comparison to the Ormeau and Ravenhill areas. The only way to currently engage was to leaflet drop all the residents to try to host a session with a high number of individuals rather than a strong collective voice. It was recognised that attempting to organise effective engagement with a promoter and a large group of dissatisfied individuals would be counterproductive rather than progressive at this stage. The officer detailed that, in order to try and support new initiatives, a series of meetings had taken place with Elected Representatives from the Balmoral DEA, which had resulted in a number of agreed actions for developing and growing the capacity of a stakeholder forum specific to large events at Boucher Road.

He then provided an overview of the main actions arising from this, as follows:

- Council officers and Elected Members to meet residents in March/April and draft a list of key issues and mitigations;
- Community Services area support team to work with residents and businesses to establish a representative forum which would attend future pre-event and post-event engagement meetings;
- Council officers and Elected Members to present the issues and mitigations to the promoter of the first concert in May, with the expectation to include the key actions within the site licence between the Council and the promoter; and
- A post event evaluation session to be arranged with residents following the event.

The officer concluded by advising that it was anticipated that the work, supported by community services, to establish a stakeholder engagement forum would continue throughout the summer months with the aim of being ready to engage with promoters and other agencies for the August and September festivals. Once a representative group had been established, the stakeholder engagement forum for events at Boucher Road would involve attendance by the same agencies as those described for the Ormeau Park approach.

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Several of the Members welcomed the progress made through engagement for both locations, in particular, the approach currently adopted at Ormeau Park and agreed that this approach, where possible, should be mirrored at Boucher Road.

A Member suggested that invitations to the proposed stakeholder engagement forum meetings in respect of events at Boucher should also be extended to Councillors representing the Black Mountain DEA as well as the Botanic DEA as there was often a ‘fall out’ from such events into those areas in close proximity and noted the need for stakeholder engagement sessions to be held both prior to and immediately following each event.

The Members also discussed other areas that could be further discussed at the stakeholder meetings which included the need to better publicise to residents when the events were being held, especially those occurring during the week. A Member also highlighted the need to have a better messaging campaign around events to promote awareness of consent and sexual assault and to highlight the support systems available for vulnerable young people and it was suggested that Events Tech staff should remain immediately following the events to help safely clear the area.

Following a suggestion from a Member, the officer agreed to investigate whether the provision of spike testing kits could be introduced at concerts by the promoters.

Several Members also sought clarity on the new Social Value Fund and how this would be administered and allocated and stressed that the money needed to benefit the local communities.

The Committee endorsed the approach currently adopted at Ormeau Park and agreed to support the continued development of the evolving approach at the Boucher Road Playing Fields, it also agreed that invitations to any stakeholder engagement forum meetings in respect of events at Boucher also be extended to Councillors representing the Black Mountain DEA and noted need for stakeholder engagement sessions to be held both prior to and immediately following each event.

**Response to TEO consultation on
Victims and Survivors**

The Committee was reminded that The Executive Office (TEO) was currently undertaking a public consultation on a new Strategy for Victims and Survivors. The Strategy had been developed through collaborative co-design and partnership working with the Commission for Victims and Survivors and the Victims and Survivors Service, as well as with victims’ and survivors’ representative groups.

Through this engagement, victims and survivors had been placed at the heart of the development of the Strategy. The Strategy proposed a new Vision of “A trauma informed society that addresses the needs of victims and survivors” and sets out high level outcomes and actions under three pillars – Past, Needs and the Future. It builds on the progress made to date to ensure the needs of victims and survivors continue to be met. As part of this consultation process, the Council had been invited to respond to a questionnaire, and he drew the Members’ attention to the draft response.

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The Committee endorsed the contents of the proposed response to the new Strategy for Victims and Survivors, subject to the following amendments:

- under question 3 – highlight the need to expand upon the reference to reconciliation and note that reconciliation includes receiving justice as stated in the Stormont Agreement; and
- under question 4 – note the content with reference to respect but remove the references to the Flags, Identity, and Culture Commission as there was no agreement on these recommendations; and
- agreed that the Strategy be submitted to the TEO in draft form by the closing date of 13th March 2024, subject to Council ratification, and that it be circulated to Members of the Committee via e-mail prior to the April Council meeting.

**Funding for Independently Managed
Community Centres (IMCC's)**

The Committee was reminded that the Council had long standing arrangements in place to provide financial support to seven Council community centres that were managed independently by the community sector as well as Service Level Agreements (SLA's).

The Members noted that the SLA with Dunmurry Community Association, for Fullerton Park, related to a previous decision by the Council to provide funding, this was a result of legacy commitments arising from the review of Local Government.

As part of the rate setting process for 2020/21, the Committee had agreed that the allocation to IMCC's would be subject annually to any CPI increase which would be applied on issue of Letter of Offer. In addition, the People and Communities Committee had, in September 2022, agreed CPI increases on all future awards to IMCC's. The Members noted that, as CPI details would not be available until April/May 2024, some CPI increases would be paid separately from the grant award. A clause would be included in all funding agreements to allow for the processing of the CPI increase payment when the details were available.

The officer drew the Members' attention to the 2024/25 individual allocations to IMCC's as follows:

Independently Managed Centres	Amount
Shaftesbury Recreation Centre	£69,943.75
Grosvenor Recreation Centre	£69,943.75
Ballymacarrett Recreation Centre	£63,046.00
Denmark Street Community Centre	£24,254.02
Carrick Hill Community Centre	£38,597.29
Sally Gardens	£69,943.75
Hanwood	£69,943.75
Total	£405,672.31

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Service Level Agreement	Amount
Dunmurry Community Association at Fullerton Park	Maximum Award: £6,500.00

At the request of a Member, it was also agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting detailing the proposed Terms of Reference for the appointment of an external consultant to undertake a consultation exercise on the funding of IMCCs in comparison with, for example, GLL.

Following an issue raised by a further Member, the Committee agreed that officers would investigate the amount of funding that the Denmark Centre received, given its position to the interface, and that consideration be given to adopting Dunmurry Community Association as a Community rather than a Sports facility given the role that it now undertook in the community, with an update report on these matters to be submitted in due course to Committee.

Following consideration of the remainder of the recommendations, the Committee agreed:

- to pay annual revenue awards for the 2024/25 funding period to seven IMCC's including the annual CPI increase, noting that award amounts would increase each year requiring Committee authorisation;
- to make separate payments of the CPI increase, where applicable, following confirmation of the increase in April/May 2024; and
- in compliance with the existing SLA, to pay up to the maximum award to Dunmurry Community Association at Fullerton Park on an annual basis.

Consultation Response - Reforming Producer Responsibility for Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment 2023

The Members were reminded that, at the February meeting of Committee, the DEFRA Consultation and Call for Evidence (launched on 28th December 2023) on reforming the producer responsibility system for waste electrical and electronic equipment had been submitted for consideration.

The Director of Resources and Fleet reminded the Members that, whilst producer responsibility and waste policy were devolved matters, there was a UK wide approach to WEEE Extended Producer Responsibility (WEEE EPR). Accordingly, this consultation had been undertaken jointly by all four administrations. In Northern Ireland, the outcome of the consultation would inform decisions of the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

She advised that, within the consultation, the policy proposal of particular interest to Belfast City Council, was the increasing collections of waste electrical and electronic equipment from households, where producers of electronic and electrical products were to be responsible for financing kerbside collections of small household WEEE, with an obligation

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placed on producers to fund separate household waste collections, potentially delivered by integration with existing kerbside collection services provided by local authorities.

The Members were advised that it was anticipated that the service might take the form of a regular collection round. Views on the frequency of such a round, in order to balance impact against efficiency, had been sought as well as whether a service could be delivered via an “on demand” approach, a regular collection round or potentially a mix of approaches in different areas. A response to this and other matters had been included in the consultation response.

The Committee endorsed the draft consultation document available [here](#) and agreed that it be submitted as the Council’s final response, with the draft response having been submitted for consideration and agreed at the March meeting of Committee.

Operational Issues

Requests for Events in Parks

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 The Committee is asked to note that Council has received several requests from event organisers to host events across several city park locations in 2024, including:

- **Paws for Cause – Ormeau Park**
- **Belfast Memory Walk – Ormeau Park**
- **Parkinson’s Walk – Botanic Gardens**
- **Ulster University 5km Run Festival – Cathedral Gardens**
- **ASG & Partners Concert – C.S. Lewis Square**
- **Finaghy Cultural Festival - Wedderburn**
- **EID Festival – Botanic Gardens**
- **Darkness into Light - Ormeau Park**

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked to grant authority to the applicant for the proposed event on the dates noted and to delegate authority to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to ensure the following:

- i. If appropriate, negotiate a fee which recognises the costs to Council, minimises negative impact on the immediate area and takes account of the potential wider benefit to the city economy, in conjunction with the Councils Commercial Manager.**
- ii. Negotiate satisfactory terms and conditions of use via an appropriate legal agreement prepared by the City Solicitor, including managing final booking confirmation dates and**

flexibility around 'set up' & take down' periods, and booking amendments, subject to:

- iii. The promoter resolving any operational issues to the Council's satisfaction.
- iv. The promoter carrying out appropriate resident & community engagement
- v. The promoter meeting all the statutory requirements of the Planning and Building Control Service including the terms and conditions of the Park's Entertainment Licence.

2.2 Please note that the above recommendations are taken as a pre-policy position in advance of the Council agreeing a more structured framework and policy for 'Events', which is currently being taken forward in conjunction with the Councils Commercial team.

3.0 Main Report

Key Issues

3.1 If agreed, the event organiser or promoters will be required in advance of the event to submit an event management plan for approval by the Council and all relevant statutory bodies. This will include an assessment of how the event will impact upon the surrounding area and measures to mitigate these impacts.

3.2 Street Soccer NI – Paws for Cause – Ormeau Park – Saturday 11 May 2024

Street Soccer NI have requested the use of Ormeau Park for their Charity Dog Walk called Paws for Cause. The event is to raise money for Street Soccer NI who are a registered charity. Their charity number is 104007.

Key dates for the event are:

Set Up -10.00am– Saturday 11 May

Main Event – 11am to 1pm

De-Rig – 1.15pm

3.3 The event organiser has requested that the council will allow them to have charity buckets on site to collect donations from the public throughout the event, They also wish to have traders and vendors on site to sell some merchandise along with supplying options for visitors to purchase food.

3.4 Belfast Memory Walk – Ormeau Saturday 12 October 2024

The Alzheimer's Society has requested the use of Ormeau Park for their Belfast Memory Walk charity event. Belfast Memory Walk is a family friendly fundraising walk, which will raise money to provide help and hope to everyone affected by dementia. Everyone is welcome to take part, and registration is free. Walkers can sign up on our website, and will receive a fundraising pack and t-shirt in the post.

Key dates for the event are:

Set up – 7am to 10am
Main Event – 10am to 3pm
De-Rig 4.30pm

3.6 On the day there will be an event site, where there will be a food and drink caterer, an information stand, a merchandise stand, our Memory Tree and our stage with a Zumba warm up. There will be a long and short route around the park, meaning there will be something to suit everyone.

3.7 Donations are welcome on the day and will be collected in buckets across the stands. Their charity number is 296645.

3.8 Parkinson's Walk – Botanic Gardens Saturday 6 July 2024

Gladiator events have requested the use of Botanic Gardens to host a charity walk to raise money for Parkinson's UK. The purpose of the event is to not only to raise funds for Parkinson's UK but also to educate people on Parkinson's along with connecting those who are affected by the disease. They have requested access to the site a day prior to set up the event village.

Key dates for the event are:

Set Up – 1pm to 6pm Friday 5 July
Main Event – 10am to 4pm
De Rig – 6pm

3.9 Walk for Parkinson's. A 2 or 6 mile walk for supporters of the charity, with all proceeds going to the charity. The two mile walk needs to be fully accessible, on paved footpaths or tracks, as it is designed to be suitable for those living with Parkinson's.

3.10 Ulster University Belfast 5km Festival – Cathedral Garden Sunday 9 June 2024

Ulster University is hosting the Belfast 5km & Mile event on Sunday 9 June and have requested the use of Cathedral Gardens as a hub for the event. The race portion of the event will feature world champion Joshua Cheptegei's and is expected to bring in over 5000 attendees.

- 3.11 The Cathedral Gardens portion of the event will feature as a Pre & Post event meet and great area and will feature live music being performed by local artists along with food and drink vendors to supply food to the attendees. They also request to have an art display on show that has been created by the Ulster University students.

Key dates for the event are:

Set Up – 6am
Main Event 9am to 2pm
De-Rig – 4pm

3.12 ASG Concert – C.S. Lewis Square Friday 19 July 2024

ASG & Partners have requested the use of C.S. Lewis square to host a concert featuring Sophie Ellis – Bextor. The Event organiser is hoping to orchestrate an intimate disco house setting featuring Sophie Ellis-Bextor as the headline artist and complemented by performances from local Northern Irish DJs.

Key dates for the event are:

Set Up – Friday 19 July – 9am
Main Event - 5pm to 11pm
De-Rig Saturday 20 July – 11am

- 3.13 The event organiser has already tied in with Eastside Partnership who are in favour of the event and have offered to support it.

3.14 Finaghy Cultural Festival – Wedderburn Friday 16 August 2024

Finaghy Cultural Festival is organised by a small group of local people from the community who started out through the first lockdown back in March 2020 as a foodbank helping the elderly and vulnerable through very difficult times. They then started up a residents group volunteering and organizing events for the community.

- 3.15 They will have a bar serving alcohol so a drinks license will be in place. The committee have had meetings with their local community, police and have been awarded funding to run the event. Activities throughout the day include – live music, food vendors, amusement & fairground rides. The group also plan on having a BBQ on site. This event has taken place in previous years with no issues.

Key dates for the event are:

Set Up – 12pm – Thursday 15 August

Main Event – 4pm to 6pm – Friday 16, Saturday 17 & Sunday 18 August 2024

De-Rig – 1.30pm Monday 19 August

3.16 EID Festival – Botanic Gardens Saturday 27 July 2024

- 3.1 Belfast City Council has received a request from Zoreena Ahmed to host an EID festival in Botanic Gardens on Saturday 27 July. The event is aimed at celebrating the Muslim Community in Northern Ireland but is open to the wider public to promote diversity and integration.

- 3.17 The event will have number of food stalls providing hot and cold options with an ethnic flavour attached. There will be no charge for the event, and it will be free to attend. All children's rides will be free to use. There will be a small cost if families wish to purchase food and other activities. The event is designed to help and support families who cannot afford days out with the events Motto being 'How We Gather, Is How We Live'!

Key dates for the event are:

Set Up – 7am

Main Event – 12am to 6pm

De-Rig – 8pm

3.18 Darkness into Light – Ormeau Park – Saturday 11 May 2024

Belfast City Council has received a request from PIPS Suicide prevention for the use of Ormeau Park to host their annual Darkness into Light Walk. Darkness into Light walk is a pre dawn walk around the 5 kilometre track in Ormeau Park. This event is in conjunction with a sister charity Pieta House based in ROI. Each year the walk provides an opportunity for people to connect with their local community and to bring hope to people who have been impacted by suicide. PIPS Charity the organiser and beneficiary of this walk are a local charity who provide support and counselling to people affected by mental unwellness, suicide and self-harm.

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Key dates for the event are:

Set-up – Friday 10 May 2024 – 9am

Main Event – Saturday 11 May – 4.15am to 9am

De-Rig – Saturday 11 May – 9am

3.19 The event is due to take place out of hours and will use the main paths around the park for the 5km walk. No money will be collected on site as registration is completed online prior to the event. It is anticipated that there will be between 500 and 1000 people attending.

3.20 Financial and Resource Implications

There are no known financial or resource implications with these requests.

3.21 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no known implications.”

A Member highlighted that the update report was still outstanding regarding the status of the ongoing review into the framework and policy for Events and asked officers to pursue this matter with the Council’s Commercial team.

The Committee adopted the recommendations at paragraph 2.0 of the report.

Shankill Juniors / Woodvale MUGA

The Committee was advised that, the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at its meeting held on 21st April 2023, had approved an application to the IFA DCMS Grass Roots Funding scheme for the upgrade of the polymeric MUGA at Woodvale Park to a 7-a-side artificial pitch. The application had been successful and £120,000 had been awarded, subject to the conditions of funding. The match funding element had also been agreed by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and would be met from a ringfenced amount already allocated by the Area Working Group from the Social Outcomes Fund for the improvement of the MUGA.

The Members were advised that the IFA DCMS funding conditions stated that where the applicant was not a soccer club, as was the case for the Council, the funding offer was conditional on the applicant demonstrating a partnership with an Irish FA affiliated local ‘partner’ football club. The SMART targets submitted as part of the application process were based on a development plan put forward by Shankill Juniors FC who satisfied the criteria.

The Committee was therefore asked to approve a formal relationship with the club as the sports development partner at the site, to secure the £120k funding. Once approved, Council officers would then work with the club to agree a development programme which the IFA would then periodically monitor to confirm outcomes. The Members noted that staff in

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Property and Projects had advised that the procurement of a contractor was underway, with the aim of completing the project by early summer.

Subject to agreement, it was noted that Council officers would work to identify and allocate roles and responsibilities associated with the management of the new pitch but advised that, as a minimum requirement, the club would be expected to take a keyholding role for changing facilities and to manage the bookings for the pitch.

The Committee agreed that Shankill Juniors FC become the IFA affiliated sports outcomes delivery partner for the new pitch at Woodvale Park.

**Blanchflower Stadium –
Preferential Use Agreement**

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 inform Members of this Committee that the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club for the use of the second synthetic pitch at Blanchflower Playing Fields, expired on 1 December 2023.**
- 1.2 Outside the timeslots allocated to Glentoran the facility is very popular and continues to be fully booked from 6pm to 10pm Monday to Thursday by a wide range of youth and senior teams.**
- 1.3 On Friday evenings along with Saturday mornings and on Sunday the pitch is booked by South Belfast Youth League**
- 1.4 Council have been approached by several local, community based clubs who are unable to gain access to the pitch.**
- 1.5 There are a number of options for Council to consider regarding the future booking arrangements for this pitch:**

Option 1

To renew the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club

Option 2

To process all pitch bookings at the site following normal Belfast City Council procedures which is first come, first served.

Option 3

To work with local community based football clubs to develop an allocation model so that they all get access to the pitch on Monday to Thursday evenings. An example of a potential allocation model involving 8 clubs and the South Belfast Youth League is included at appendix 1

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 The Members of the Committee are asked to note that the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club for Blanchflower Playing Fields has ended

2.2 From 1 April 2024 it is suggested that Council should progress with Option 3.

Council Officers will meet with local clubs to develop an allocation model so that they all get access to the pitch on Monday to Thursday evenings (see appendix 1)

3.0 Main report

Background

3.1 In March 2018 Strategic Policy and Resources Committee directed officers to undertake research into the provision of suitable and convenient pitch facilities for Glentoran FC including its Youth Academy. Committee further accepted the East Area Working Group recommendation that a proposed capital programme to install a 3G pitch with floodlighting at King George V playing fields be replaced on the capital programme with a 3G pitch at Blanchflower Playing Fields.

3.2 People and Communities Committee of March 2019 agreed to upgrade facilities at King George V Playing Fields and offer a preferential Use Agreement for 5 years to Glentoran Youth Academy.

3.3 King George V playing fields are subject to a Deed of Covenant with Fields of Trust. Local residents had written to Fields in Trust in opposition to the proposed development of the site and management of bookings. Local residents also approached council officers protesting against the proposal on a number of grounds.

- 3.4 In the meantime significant investment in football facilities had taken place in East Belfast and in particular at Blanchflower Playing Fields where Council has developed two full size floodlit synthetic football pitches at Blanchflower Playing Fields. One of the pitches being directly managed and booked by Harland and Wolff Welders Football Club and the other managed and booked by Council
- 3.5 By 2019 the decision regarding the upgrade works had not been fulfilled approved Preferential Use Agreement at King George V Glentoran FC wrote to Council seeking approval for the previously approved Preferential Use Agreement at King George V playing fields to be transferred to Blanchflower playing fields.
- 3.6 Officers negotiated with Glentoran Football Club and an agreed timetable of priority use for Glentoran Football Club was produced, indicated in the table below. The timetable of use and the teams/sections from within the club using the pitch at these times were to be reflective of Glentoran Football Clubs commitment to growing the game in an inclusive way with significant usage by groups under-represented in sports participation.

Day	Times of Use
Monday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Tuesday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Wednesday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Thursday	6:00pm-7:00pm 7:00pm -8:00pm
Friday	None
Saturday	None
Sunday	None

- 3.7 People and Communities Committee of 9 November 2021 agreed to offer a Preferential Use Agreement to Glentoran Football Club at Blanchflower Playing Fields for limited access to the site, as identified in the table above, for a period of two years. This agreement has now ended and there have been enquiries from a number of local youth teams with regards to being able to book this pitch for the slots currently allocated to Glentoran through this agreement.
- 3.8 Financial & Resource Implications

There are no additional resource implications associated with this report.

3.9 Equality Impact/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no equality or rural needs implications associated with this report.”

The Committee noted that the Preferential Use Agreement with Glentoran Football Club for Blanchflower Playing Fields had ended with effect from 1st April 2024 and agreed that the Council should progress with Option 3.

At the request of a Member, it was further agreed that officers would look to work with local community based football clubs to develop an allocation model which was fair and equitable for all users, to ensure that all clubs would get fair access to pitches throughout the week.

Upper Ardoyne Youth Club – Expression of Interest

The Committee was reminded that the Council had previously, in 2007, entered into an Agreement for Lease with the organisation Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre (UAYC) to facilitate the construction of a Community Centre and Community Garden on land owned by the Council.

The Company had constructed the youth centre using funding provided under Urban II through the former North Belfast Partnership. The facility comprised a single storey brick building laid out to provide a partitioned meeting room, office, youth room and ancillary facilities, together with external yard space and grassed area. It was located on the Southeast boundary of Ballysillan Park at Alliance Drive.

The Committee was reminded that the UAYC had been dissolved as a company in 2013, with the building having reverted to Council ownership in 2017. The North AWG had identified community and voluntary sector use as their preference for the building and officers from Estates and City and Neighbourhood Services had, since 2018, ran several exercises to secure a tenant, however, despite interest, the building had remained vacant.

The Neighbourhood Services Manager advised that a further opportunity had been publicised to the community and voluntary sector in December 2023, with two organisations having expressed an interest in the building, as follows:

- Wee Chicks, a provider of childcare for children aged 0 to 11. Currently operating in a building in Chichester Avenue providing places for 20 children. A move to the UAYC building would see capacity expand to 28 children; and
- Streetbeat Youth Project, a voluntary organisation working with young people aged 11- 25 in North Belfast, with a particular focus on the Greater Shankill and Ballysillan areas. The organisation currently delivered programmes in a variety of premises including a number of local schools.

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The officer advised that, as both applicants satisfied the essential criteria, it was felt that any decision should be supported by considering the nature of the services to be provided from the building and the potential community benefit and she then drew the Members' attention to the information from the respective submissions that had been summarised in the report.

The Members noted that officers were recommending that the Committee consider Streetbeat Youth Project as the preferred applicant, based on their potential to deliver a wider benefit for the local community and on their potential to utilise the adjacent Ballysillan Park to maximise on diversionary activities to reduce the negative impacts of ASB on the community.

At the request of a Member, officers agreed that they would signpost Wee Chicks to other premises, where available, given the current childcare pressures and the need to build capacity in this area.

The Committee agreed:

- to recommend to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee that Streetbeat Youth Project be appointed as the lessee for the vacant premises formerly known as Upper Ardoyne Youth Centre, with lease terms to be drawn up by estates officers and agreed through the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee; and
- officers to ensure that Streetbeat liaise with local youth providers, such as AYE, to ensure coordination, particularly around diversionary activities.

**Request from Probation Board NI –
Annadale Allotments**

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To seek permission from Committee to implement a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI) to provide a maintenance support service for allotment users.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 Committee is asked to approve the attached MOU and to give permission for its implementation.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 Open Spaces and Streetscene officers have held meetings with PBNI to explore the possibility of working in partnership to provide maintenance services for allotment users. The pilot initiative will focus on the Annadale site. The MoU attached at appendix A is the practical outworking of those discussions. The committee is asked

to approve the MoU, which would allow officers to begin its implementation.

- 3.2** The Council has a long-established partnership in place with the PBNI through the provision of its graffiti removal service. This partnership is facilitated under a similar MoU arrangement to the one proposed herein. We are keen to build on this relationship in order to provide support to both existing and new allotment users, with the focus initially on our Annadale site.
- 3.3** Primarily the support by PBNI will be aimed at supporting those plot holders who are unable, for a variety of reasons e.g. sickness, are unable to manage their own plots at the time being. The plots will be agreed with the allotment committee and holders in advance of any works being carried out.
- 3.4** Proposed works undertaken as part of this MoU by the PBNI team will include:
- Work to manage and maintain individual plots, where the plot holder is currently unable to manage the plot themselves due to temporary illness;
 - Work to manage and maintain those plots that have not been allocated for a long period of time due to being in a state of disrepair and therefore, unattractive to any new tenant.
 - Work to manage and maintain common areas and internal hedges (this would normally be the responsibility of the allotment holders).
- 3.5** Work will be carried out one day per week during normal working hours. The PBNI team will be supervised by their own staff at all times when on site. It is anticipated that the programme of work will begin from 1st April 2024 and will last to September 2024. Work will be carried out one pre agreed day per week within normal working hours.
- 3.6** All existing allotment users will be communicated with in advance of the initiative beginning. This will be directly through our parks outreach team, and also through the Allotment committee which is fully supportive of the initiative, and will be involved in its implementation.
- 3.7** The MoU has been vetted by BCC Legal Services

3.8 Financial & Resource Implications

All costs associated with the operation of this MoU will be covered by the PBNI. This will include any equipment, PPE and / or fuel costs.

3.9 Equality or Good Relations Implications

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

Discussion ensued regarding the number of abandoned allotments at Annadale and the long waiting list of people looking allotments. Several of the Members highlighted the need for the Council to have better control and management of plots that were not being maintained or had been abandoned.

During discussion officers also agreed to investigate if larger allotments could be divided up, it was felt that this might help to assist with the waiting list issue and also might enable people to avail of smaller, more manageable plots as some of the current allotments were quite large.

The Members also were advised that a business case was currently being drawn up to establish terms of reference to appoint a consultant to review the Council's Allotments and Community Garden assets and it was agreed that, when appointed, the Consultants would also need to give consideration to Community Asset Transfers.

A Member also suggested that if the initiative with the PBNI was successful that officers would investigate if it would be possible to extend this arrangement to other Council Allotments.

The Committee:

- approved the implementation of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Probation Board of Northern Ireland (PBNI) to provide a maintenance support service for allotment users at the Annadale Allotments; and
- agreed to see if would be possible to extend this arrangement with the PBNI to other Council Allotments;

Donations to societies for contributions to Spring and Autumn Fairs

The Committee was reminded that the Council had previously authorised the payment of a £200.00 donation to Societies involved in the organisation of the Spring Fair and Autumn Fair.

The Committee approved a donation of £200.00 per annum to the following Societies:

- Northern Ireland Daffodil Group;
- Belfast and District Beekeepers' Association;

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- Belfast Winemakers' Circle;
- British Cactus and Succulent Society;
- Federation of Women's Institutes of Northern Ireland;
- Irish Fuchsia and Pelargonium Society;
- North of Ireland Dahlia Society;
- Northern Ireland Bonsai Society;
- Northern Ireland Group of Flower Arrangement Societies;
- Northern Ireland Vegetable Association; and
- The Rose Society of Northern Ireland.

Request to Facilitate ongoing Greylag Goose control at Victoria Park

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of the report is for Members to consider a request from George Best Belfast City Airport (GBBCA) to continue the ongoing greylag goose control programme at Victoria Park through a 3-year legal agreement.

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. Note the report from GBBCA on Greylag Geese Management at Victoria Park,**
- ii. Consider permissions requested to enter Victoria Park to facilitate the continuation of pricking of un-hatched greylag goose eggs under licence issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA); and**
- iii. Instruct officers to work with legal services to issue a relevant licence for a period of 3 years which will be subject to annual review in advance of renewal.**

3.0 Main report

3.1 Members are aware that control of birds in the flight path to the airport is a requirement of the airport's Civil Aviation Authority licence.

3.2 The GBBCA bird control programme has been underway for a number of years and is underpinned by scientific surveys and research. Council previously agreed a range of measures to control greylag goose numbers within Victoria Park including habitat modifications, dissuading members of the public from feeding the birds and annual egg pricking under licence.

Management interventions are monitored by GBBCA to assess their effectiveness.

- 3.3 A report provided by GBBCA (See Appendix 1) provides information on how the control programme, aimed at making the site less attractive to geese, has been effective with a steady decline in numbers. Egg control at Victoria Park over the last licences period averaged 68.3 eggs per year compared to 74.4 for the previous three year period (2018 – 2020), with a corresponding drop in monthly average count from 18.3 to 10.5. This continuing decline in numbers at the park is mirrored by a decline in runway observations Appendix 1 (Table 1 and Figure 2).
- 3.4 It reports that although there is an overall declining trend for greylag geese in the area, runway observations still record peaks during Spring and Autumn while at Victoria Park numbers have increased sharply over the last six months. The report also states that at a national level numbers of greylag geese are also increasing.
- 3.5 The report concludes that with greylag longevity c.20 years, seasonal peaks still evident from runway observations and a recent increase in greylag at Victoria Park, the recommendation to continue with egg control management is well-founded. The recent rise in numbers at Victoria Park however, introduces trend instability which along with a risk of displacement from other sites, would suggest any cessation of management effort in the short-term would be premature.
- 3.6 On this basis, GBBCA has approached council to request continued access to Victoria Park to facilitate the continuation of pricking of un-hatched greylag goose eggs under licence issued by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).
- 3.7 If members are content, officers will work with Legal Services to issue a relevant licence for a period of three years which will be subject to annual review in advance of renewal.
- 3.8 To support the review, GBBCA will be required to submit an annual report outlining their Wildlife Control Management Plan (WCMP) noting recommendations based on the risk assessment made in the annual Wildlife Hazard Assessment (WHA) and incorporating any new control methods as they become available.
- 3.9 Officers will review the submitted risk assessment and insurance certificates in line with procedure. The licence will include relevant conditions to ensure that health and safety measures are implemented, and that any other necessary arrangements are put in place.

- 3.10** Members will recall that at its January 2024 meeting, members agreed to a request from GBBCA agreed to the request from George Best Belfast City Airport to permit access under licence to Victoria Park to facilitate rookery management, in particular, the removal of old rook nests and nest site discouragement during January 2024. The Committee agreed that the Council write to George Belfast City Airport asking it to clarify if it was seeking to reduce and manage the number of rooks at Victoria Park or to ultimately eradicate them from the area.
- 3.11** GBBCA responded on 1 March 2024 (copy attached at Appendix 2) to advise that due to high strike posed to aircraft by rooks, that they have a legal responsibility to safeguard the airport and surrounding areas from flocks of birds which could pose such a risk. To attempt to prevent year on year expansion, they are using habit manipulation techniques to discourage rather than prevent breeding altogether in order that rooks and their young may in time naturally find an alternative location – these techniques are only progressed following consultation with subject matter experts and obtaining the necessary permissions, with work undertaken by qualified personnel.
- 3.12** GBBCA have offered to meet with members in Victoria Park for an overview, if interested.
- 3.13** **Financial & Resource Implications**
- GBBCA will be responsible for all costs associated with the request.
- 3.14** **Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment**
- None.”**

A Member highlighted that the Council had no legal powers to prevent this work due to the legal responsibilities of airports to ensure that they had a risk management programme to cover a 13km safety zone around the airport, the current measures were likely to be deemed necessary and would therefore be kept in place until they were no longer required. The Member welcomed the opportunity to visit the area to be provided with an overview of the wildlife management arrangements.

The Committee:

- noted the response from George Best Belfast City Airport (GBBCA), Airfield Operations Manager, to the Council regarding rook nest management at Victoria Park and in which he offered to convene a site visit with Elected Members in Victoria Park;
- agreed the request to enter Victoria Park to facilitate the continuation of pricking of un-hatched greylag goose eggs under licence issued by the Northern Ireland

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Environment Agency (NIEA), noting that the Council had no legal powers to prevent these works; and

- agreed that the relevant officers would liaise with legal services to issue a relevant licence for a period of 3 years, which would be subject to annual review in advance of renewal.

Proposal for Dual Language Street Signage

The Committee agreed to the erection of a second street nameplate in Irish at, Tullymore Walk, Innisfayle Park, Helens Wood, Brians Well Close, Hamill Grove, Holmdene Gardens, Divis, Road and Owenvarragh Park.

Naming of New Street in the City

The Committee approved the applications for the naming of two new streets in the city, Black Ridge Meadows and Black Ridge Manor and, at the request of Councillor R. M Donnelly, the Committee further granted delegated authority to the City Solicitor to approve the erection of second nameplates in Irish for the development.

Issues Raised in Advance by Members

**XL Bully Restrictions announced by
DAERA Minister**

At the request of Councillor Flynn, the Committee agreed that a report would be submitted to a future meeting which would consider any impact that the introduction of XL Bully Breed restrictions might have on the dog warden service.

**Request to Present – South Belfast
Youth League**

At the request of Councillor R. Brooks, the Committee agreed to receive a presentation from the South Belfast Youth League regarding the difficulties that Leagues were experiencing in securing pitches to play on in their locality.

**Request to Present –
to discuss Giants Park**

At the request of the Chairperson, the Committee agreed to extend an invitation to representatives from Lagan Valley Regional Park and the Historic Environment Division (DfC) to attend a future meeting to outline their concerns regarding the Giants Ring.

Chairperson

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 13th March, 2024

MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nic Bhranair (Chairperson);
The High Sheriff, Councillor S. Douglas;
Alderman Lawlor;
Councillors Bunting, Canavan, Duffy, Flynn,
Garrett, Maskey, F. McAteer, McCabe, McCormick,
McDowell, McDonough-Brown, McKay, I. McLaughlin,
Murray and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Mr. A. Ferguson, Senior Development Manager;
Ms. L. Toland, Senior Manager – Economy;
Ms. C. Cassin, Markets Development Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor McMullan.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the 31st January and 7th February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th March.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Douglas, Nic Bhranair and Walsh declared an interest in item 2.a) Visit Belfast Business Plan 2024-25, as they were on the Board of Visit Belfast but as this was a Council appointment, they did not leave the meeting whilst the item was being considered.

In relation to item 5.a) Draft response to ACNI strategy consultation, Councillor McDonough-Brown declared an interest in that his mother worked for the Arts Council Northern Ireland and left the meeting while the item was under consideration.

Presentations

Visit Belfast Business Plan 2024-25

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. G. Lennon, CEO Visit Belfast, and Ms. M. McGivern, Chair of Visit Belfast, to the Committee and they were admitted to the meeting.

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Wednesday, 13th March, 2024**

The representatives provided a summary of the Visit Belfast Business Plan 2024 - 25 which had been submitted in advance of the Committee for consideration. He summarised the tourism market in Belfast, together with community regeneration and strategic investment across the city. He explained the overall economic performance and highlighted that Belfast was ranked the 11th most sustainable destination in the world (GDS Index 2023), in the Top 5 destination to visit in the UK 2024 (Time Out), and Best conference destination in the world (C&IT Awards 2021, 2022, 2023)

He explained the consumer trends of the market included:

- Short shoulder season breaks;
- City breaks are back;
- Tech savvy and value driven consumers;
- Seeking digital simplicity;
- Escaping stress and monotony;
- Physical and mental wellbeing;
- Keen to meet the locals; and
- Conscious spenders expecting sustainability.

He described the positive growth outlook for tourism in Belfast and the three year growth targets. He pointed out that growth would not happen without investment; attracting business events, working with the cruise industry and driving off-peak demand. He advised that growth relied on an excellent visitor experience in order to maximise spend when visitors were in Belfast, and to drive repeat visits. He highlighted that growth should be managed responsibly, with minimal environmental impact.

He summarised their three year strategy 2024–2027 as follows: Grow - the value of tourism to the Belfast City region and its communities; Position - the Belfast City region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out; Experience - the experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast City region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer; Sustain - its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives and celebrating Belfast's story.

Mr. Lennon advised that the key strategic focus areas included:

- Neighbourhood tourism;
- New ways of measuring impact;
- Belfast 2024;
- Accelerating digital innovation;
- Data driven decision making;
- Enhancing perceptions of Belfast amongst visitors;
- Increased collaboration;
- Telling Belfast's sustainability story; and
- Enhancing the visitor experience and touchpoints.

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During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions in relation to neighbourhood tourism, local transport, Casement Park, staff training, social media, data capture, cruise ships and their sustainability, and the marketing of Orangefest.

The representatives noted the suggestions from the Committee to include Lagan Valley Regional Park in its marketing brochure, and the promotion of neighbourhood Parks.

During further discussion, the representatives advised that they would explore external marketing guides and follow-up on the suggestion to engage with the North Belfast Heritage Cluster.

After discussion, the Chairperson thanked the representatives for their attendance and they retired from the meeting.

The Committee then considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to present the request for funding from Visit Belfast for the 2024-2025 financial year and to set out the organisation’s strategic development and operational delivery, focused on supporting tourism growth.**

Members should note that Visit Belfast will be in attendance at the Committee to present the detail of its 2024-25 plan.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:**

- Note the draft Visit Belfast business plan 2024-25. The overall funding requirement for Visit Belfast in the coming financial year has been taken account of in the revenue estimates that have already been approved by Council.**
- Approve and agree a funding allocation of £2,076,424 for 2024-25, subject to the development of a funding agreement, priority areas of activity and agreed targets.**

3.0 Main report

- 3.1 Members will be aware that Visit Belfast was established by Council as the principal destination marketing and visitor servicing organisation for the city of Belfast. Visit Belfast leads on the tourism marketing activities and targets both the leisure and business tourism markets. It is a membership organisation with more than 460 partner businesses across**

the wider hospitality industry. Visit Belfast works on behalf of its funders and partners and with a range of public and private partners including Tourism NI, Tourism Ireland and Belfast Chamber to promote Belfast as a tourism destination.

- 3.2 Visit Belfast is a public / private partnership. It's current Chairperson is *Marie-Thérèse* McGivern and Belfast City Council has four Councillor representatives on the Board: Councillor Sammy Douglas, Councillor Eric Harvey, Councillor Clíodhna Nic Bhranair and Councillor Séanna Walsh. Also represented on the board are members from the private, public and community sectors.
- 3.3 The tourism and hospitality industry in Belfast had been going from strength to strength as Belfast continued to drive the regional tourism economy. In 2019, in the last - published Local Government District tourism statistics by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Belfast hosted 1.9m trips accounting for one third of all tourism trips to Northern Ireland and tourism spend amounted to £417m, 40% of Northern Ireland tourism spend. Council has worked with Visit Belfast over the past three years to rebuild city tourism which has resulted in Belfast's visitor economy re-emerging stronger and more competitive in a market context that has been challenging.
- 3.4 The inclusion of tourism as a key growth sector in the City Region Deal, acknowledged the fact that the sector is already a significant economic generator but recognises the need for significant additional investment in order to sustain growth. The Council's 10-year plan for tourism in the city: "*Make Yourself at Home*" sets out a vision for the future of tourism in the city that is centred on a people-based and sustainable model of development with a focus on: increasing the coherency of the Belfast experience; supporting quality authentic products; developing skills; and strengthening the city's position through marketing and communications.
- 3.5 Belfast's *Make Yourself at Home*, Tourism Plan recognises both the challenges to increase tourism and to maximise the positive impact that it can have on the city; whilst the updated Belfast Agenda has set a target to double the value of tourism from £400m to £800m per year by 2030. As the Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) for Belfast, Visit Belfast has an important role to play in realising the vision for tourism. It is in this context that Visit Belfast has developed its new three-year strategy (2024-2027) and 2024-25 business plan to support and promote tourism activity in the city region in a way that enriches the visitor experience, encourages

longer stays and achieves meaningful economic and social impact for local people. Plans to promote and encourage the exploration of Belfast's neighbourhoods by visitors, thereby adding to our city-wide destination proposition, is a primary aim of Visit Belfast's new strategy. Further details of activities that will be undertaken as part of this plan with associated targets will be set out in the presentation to the Committee and are included at Appendix A.

3.6 Visit Belfast's new three-year strategy (2024-2027) and one - year business plan (2024-2025) are aligned to the four themes of Belfast's Tourism Plan: *Make Yourself at Home*, focused on delivering for the city:

- **Grow the visitor economy in the Belfast city region in an inclusive and sustainable way**
- **Position the Belfast city region as a front of mind destination for leisure visits, business events and days out;**
- **Enhance the Experience for visitors by showcasing Belfast city region as a diverse and welcoming destination with a unique neighbourhood offer, and;**
- **Sustain its approach to championing sustainability, pioneering impactful initiatives, inspiring sustainable choices amongst visitors and clients and telling Belfast's sustainability story.**

3.7 Tourism Outlook – despite the outlook being far from certain, tourism can contribute to the economic and social wellbeing of the city with high potential to create jobs quickly and provide the economic impetus for the wider economy. The reporting of tourism statistics and meaningful visitor analysis at a local level continues to be impacted by the delayed resumption of surveys and statistics by NISRA. While tourism related surveys including passenger and household travel surveys have resumed, it remains unclear when we will see a full return of annual government tourism statistics particularly at a local level. However, a range of data analytics from a number of sources have provided valuable metrics illustrating recovery has been stronger than expected including for example:

3.8 The accommodation sector has seen strong performance, with hotel room occupancy between January and October 2023 at 79.2%. This represents 5.5% growth compared to 2022 and 5.1% growth compared to 2019. Furthermore, weekday occupancy during this period was 77% (seeing an increase of 7.1% on 2022 and +5.7% on 2019), while weekend occupancy

was 84.9% (+2.1% on 2022 and +3.8% in 2019), pointing to the recovery of the leisure market in the city.

- 3.9 With two airports, Belfast Harbour as well as road and rail links, the city is driving overall tourism growth in Northern Ireland. This, combined with its extensive leisure and business offer, is attracting visitors. 52% of all visitors to Northern Ireland came to Belfast. Overall, the city accounts for 32% of all overnight stays in NI and the city generates 40% of the region's tourism spend. Since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourist consumer spend within Belfast has increased by £82 million (88%).
- 3.10 During and since the pandemic, tourism on the island of Ireland has performed particularly strongly, helping to mitigate the shortfall of international visitors. This has been particularly noticeable among visitors from ROI to NI. In fact, residents from the Republic of Ireland took over 1.1 million overnight trips to Northern Ireland in 2022 (51% increase from 2019 levels), staying for 2.6 nights (42% increase) and spending £233 million (65% increase). This is significant for Belfast because 3 in 4 visitors from the Republic of Ireland state that a 'City Break' is their preference when travelling to Northern Ireland.
- 3.11 The city has charted a strong recovery, yet challenges such as staffing, higher costs of doing business within the tourism and hospitality sector and the knock-on impact on hospitality opening hours in the city remain.
- 3.12 Priorities outlined in Visit Belfast's business plan 2024-25 include:
- Directly deliver on the ambitions and priorities set out in *Make Yourself at Home* tourism plan for Belfast through key strategic focus areas of Neighbourhood tourism; new ways of measuring impact; Belfast 2024; Accelerating digital innovation; Data driven decision making; Enhancing perceptions of Belfast amongst visitors; Increased collaboration; Telling Belfast's sustainability story; and Enhancing the visitor experience and touchpoints.
- 3.13 Operational Targets for 2024-25: based on projected levels of growth in 2024-25, Visit Belfast is proposing the following targets for 2024-25 as agreed by their board:

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<u>Total Output</u>	<u>Target</u>
Leisure Tourism Bed nights	350,000 bed nights
Leisure Tourism Day trips	200,000 day trips
Business Tourism Bed nights	95,200 bed nights
Business Delegates	34,000 delegates
Cruise Visitors	296,000 pax & crew
Visitor Enquiries	766,000 enquiries

<u>Economic Impact</u>	<u>2024-25 Target</u>
Leisure Tourism	£60m
Business Tourism	£35m
Cruise Tourism	£20m
Visitor Servicing	£18m

<u>Visit Belfast Economic Impact</u>	<u>£133m</u>
Budget	£4.5m

3.14 A detailed business plan has been submitted and reviewed by officers. The targets outlined will form the basis of key performance indicators for Council's 2024-25 funding agreement with Visit Belfast. Regular monitoring against targets will be included and these key performance indicators will relate to the trajectory for growth and align with the implementation phases for Council's tourism plan. This provides a basis for more effective monitoring of performance.

3.15 Financial & Resource Implications

In the current financial year, Belfast City Council's funding arrangement with Visit Belfast is £2,035,710. The City Growth and Regeneration Committee, at its meeting on 9 March 2022, approved a multi-annual funding agreement for the 3 years from 2022-25 and an inflationary increase of 2% in Year 3 of the Business Plan which results in a funding allocation of £2,076,424 to Visit Belfast in 2024 / 2025

3.16 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

No specific equality or good relations implications. Visit Belfast also works with councils outside of Belfast, as part of the Regional Tourism Partnership."

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The Committee adopted the recommendations as set out in the report.

Request to Present - Translink: Belfast Grand Central Station

The Committee agreed to receive a presentation from Translink on the Belfast Grand Central Station at its meeting on 10th April to which all Members be invited to attend.

Restricted Items

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

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

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 Update

The Committee considered a report on the Quarter 3 financial position for the City Growth and Regeneration Committee including a forecast of the year end outturn.

The Committee noted the report and the associated financial reporting pack.

Belfast Zoo - Quarter 3 Update

The Director of Economic Development summarised the Zoo performance during Q3 (October to December) of the 2023-24 financial year.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development advised that further details in relation to the copybara animal collection and the analysis of Social Media figures would be provided to the Committee.

After discussion, the Committee:

- Noted the Zoo performance update report for the period October to December 2023; and
- Approved the inspection visit associated with the elephants’ transfer.

Belfast Bikes - Quarter 3 Update

The Director of Economic Development provided an update on the performance of the Belfast Bikes scheme in quarter three (1st October, 2023 – 31st December, 2023) of year 8 of operation.

During discussion, the Director of Economic Development answered a range of questions on relation to vandalism, bike replenishment in busy areas and local distance marketing. He noted that further information would be provided on the new sponsor in due course.

One Member suggested that a list of current and planned docking stations in each area would be helpful.

The Committee noted:

- the update of the Belfast Bikes performance for Year 8 Quarter 3 (October - December) of the financial year;
- the progress regarding phase one and phase two expansion;
- the update that the tender would be prepared for a procurement of a new Public Bike Hire Scheme;
- the current status of appointing a new sponsor for the Public Bike Hire Scheme; and
- that a list of current and planned docking stations in each area would be collated and shared with the Committee.

**A City Imagining Investment Programme:
Cultural multi-annual grants Amendment**

It was reported that a correction was required to the appendices which had been presented to the Committee on 10th January, 2024 relating to the award of cultural multi-annual grants funding.

The Committee noted the correction to Appendix 3 of the original report and approved the updated version.

Markets Update and St. George's Market business plan

The Senior Manager – Economy provided the Committee with an overview of the high-level annual business plan for St. George's Market for the coming year, together with the quarterly performance and financial update for the period to end December 2023, and information on the operation of the Christmas Market at the City Hall.

The Committee:

- Noted the update on city markets and note the progress against target on the St George's Market Business plan agreed at June 2023 Committee; and
- Approved the St George's Market business plan for 2024/25.

Euros update - official observer programme

The Committee noted the contents of report and approved the travel arrangements for the UEFA Official Observer Programme and the Champions League - Host City Activation as outlined within the report.

Regenerating Places and Improving Infrastructure

Housing Led Regeneration All Party Roundtable

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

“1.0 Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues

1.1 To seek approval in convening All Party Round Table meetings, across Members, on various strands of the Housing Led Regeneration programme.

2.0 Recommendation

2.1 The Committee is asked:

- i) to approve convening an All-Party Round Table regarding Housing Led Regeneration work strands across the city that will provide an opportunity for Members to have a focused and informed discussion around this strategic priority, with representation from Party Group Leaders or their nominees.**
- ii) Note the updates below in relation to the Inner North West Development Brief; the procurement of a Development Partner / Institutional Investor for the delivery of £630m GDV housing led placemaking regeneration at scale in the city; city wide strategic site assessments and the City Centre Living Vision.**

4.0 Main Report

4.1 All Party Round Table discussions

Members will be aware that Housing Led Regeneration is a strategic priority of this Committee as set out in the Committee Plan under ‘Maximising Housing Development and Regeneration Opportunities’, which aligns into the Strategic Priority of ‘Maximising Housing Development and Regeneration Opportunities’ as set out in the Corporate Plan. Of relevance to highlight is the further synergy to the refreshed Belfast Agenda and the priority theme of ‘Housing Led Regeneration’ under the area of ‘Our Place’. This strategic

priority involves the commitment and input from a diverse array of stakeholders, including Council, DfC, other Government departments, NIHE and importantly communities. This includes the work being taken forward by the Community Planning structures via the Housing Led Regeneration Group as part of the Belfast Agenda and via the City Development Board.

4.2 Following recent discussions between officers and Elected Members regarding various matters associated with housing led regeneration including city centre living and given how it cuts across various Committees and via the Community Planning process, it has been proposed that it may be helpful for Members to convene an All-Party Round Table meeting (with PGL or their nominees) to ensure they can see all this work holistically, which is not always possible via the current structures. It will provide an overview of the various streams of work underway including the work of the Housing Led Regeneration Group; NIHE, Housing Association, developer and investor discussions; planning; funding issues etc and where they feed into Council's strategic priorities and governance structures.

4.3 Members will be aware of various updates brought to Committee in relation to housing led regeneration activities and by way of very brief update on some of these, the following is highlighted:

- As reported to this Committee in September 2023 (subsequently SP&R Committee 2023) the Inner North West Development Brief for lands at Little Donegall St/Library St /Kent St was being reissued following input from DfC (as landowner of part of the lands) and NIHE. Members will recall that this Development Brief process had previously been paused at the request of Members. In line with the Committee decisions of September '23 the reframed Brief has now been issued to all 15 developing Housing Associations, with a deadline for return in June 2024.
- Development Partner / Institutional Investor: Following the Housing Led Regeneration Programme update to this Committee and agreement at SP&R Committee in September 2023, Council launched the process which seeks procurement for a long term partner for the delivery of £630m GDV housing led placemaking regeneration in October 2023. As Members will recall this includes the inclusion of significant identified Council lands in the city centre, as part of a multi-site

residential-led mixed-use regeneration development opportunity, with the potential for further sites across the city to be identified over the course of the partnership. Through this process Council are seeking a long-term partner to fund, develop and where appropriate to own and manage assets delivered through the partnership as part of a comprehensive regeneration scheme. The process is in line with the scheduled procurement programme. The Selection Questionnaire and de-selection stages have recently concluded, with 3 bidders now progressing through to the imminent Competitive Dialogue stage. The process is continuing in line with the procurement programme and is currently on schedule, with recommendations to be brought back to Members later in the year and with prior updates as this progresses.

- **City Wide Strategic Site Assessments (SSA Phase 2):** feasibility assessment including planning appraisals are currently being undertaken and as previously agreed by Members these will be brought to Area Working Groups, with updates to Area Working Groups from May onwards. It is worth noting that this forms part of wider work with the Housing Led Regeneration Group which is also assessing other public sector lands inc NIHE and DfC lands and this wider assessment work will also be brought to Members aligned to the governance mechanisms for the other public sector bodies.
- **City Centre Living Vision:** As reported to this Committee and referenced also to the Committee Workshop in January 2023 on City Centre Living, the City Centre Living Vision work has now completed. This is supporting an evidenced based approach to building a sustainable city centre residential vision; producing clear recommendations acknowledging the role of Council and its partners in delivering this vision; recognising the current and emerging social, demographic, economic and political landscape of the city and region; considering demand, supply, community and social infrastructure, urban design, viability and case studies from elsewhere. The summary findings and recommendations on this City Centre Living Vision will be brought to the proposed All Party Round Table.
- It is worth highlighting that there are a significant number of consented residential units / schemes that have come through the planning system in the city centre particularly, and that these have not progressed

- for various reasons including issues around policy, viability, infrastructure etc, many of which are out with Council's responsibility, however the proposed roundtable will provide an opportunity to discuss these matters with Members.

4.4 There are internal and external plans that aim to drive forward housing led regeneration in the city and the Belfast Agenda is key to focusing on these priorities and setting out measurable actions that will be delivered by Community Planning partners. As Members are aware the refreshed Belfast Agenda and supporting action plans were endorsed recently by Council at the beginning of March 2024, and that under the auspices of Community Planning a Housing Led Regeneration Group was established with the purpose of; *Supporting integrated planning and greater collaboration across partners in relation to the assessment and identification of city-wide public-sector lands to facilitate housing led regeneration, as well as identifying potential strategic private sector land opportunities, either on their own or in conjunction with adjoining public sector owned lands, as well as;*

Exploring mechanisms to establish partnerships for development of homes and ways of investing in housing throughout the city, as well as identifying barriers to delivery and potential solutions and to assign route map and parties to help overcome these identified barriers.

4.5 This Group currently includes representatives from BCC, NIHE, SIB, DfC and LPS and is chaired by the Chief Executive of the NIHE. The proposed Roundtable will provide an opportunity to update on the work of this HLRG and including barriers to delivery and potential solutions.

4.6 Key to the successful delivery of the of the priorities for Housing Led Regeneration as set out in the Belfast Agenda and Council's Corporate Plan is the ability of Council to collaboratively work with external public and private sector partners in relation to strategic opportunities and overcoming challenges. It is important to note that whilst housing led regeneration is a strategic priority of this Committee and of Council, the powers and responsibility for a significant amount of delivery lie with DfC, including for example, housing, urban regeneration, community and voluntary sector development, social legislation.

4.7 Subject to Members approval, it is proposed to convene an All Party Round Table meeting focused on housing led regeneration, which will provide an opportunity for Members to have a focused informed discussion and to consider ongoing activity, potential opportunities and the work of the Community Planning, Housing Led Regeneration Group. This will build on the engagement of previous City Growth and Regeneration workshops on Housing Led Regeneration which took place in January 2022 and January 2023 and allow an opportunity for specific Committee Plan priority updates on for example City Centre Living, City Wide Strategic Site Assessments, City Centre Living Vision and Inner North West Development Brief etc, and wider issues around barriers and opportunities in respect to driving forward housing led regeneration.

5.0 Financial and Resource Implications

None

6.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment

There are no Equality, Good Relations or Rural Needs implications associated with this report.”

The Committee:

- i) Approved convening an All-Party Round Table regarding Housing Led Regeneration work strands across the city that would provide an opportunity for Members to have a focused and informed discussion around this strategic priority, with representation from Party Group Leaders or their nominees; and
- ii) Noted the updates in relation to the Inner North West Development Brief; the procurement of a Development Partner / Institutional Investor for the delivery of £630m GDV housing led placemaking regeneration at scale in the city; city wide strategic site assessments and the City Centre Living Vision.

Positioning Belfast to Compete

Draft response to the Arts Council Northern Ireland strategy consultation

The Committee was reminded that the Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) had opened a consultation on their [Draft 10 year Strategy for Northern Ireland](#), with the consultation period closing on the 5th April, 2024

**City Growth and Regeneration Committee,
Wednesday, 13th March, 2024**

It was reported that this was ACNI's first ten-year strategy and it had been developed over the course of 2023, including five months of extensive engagement with artists, arts organisations, key representatives across government, businesses and the wider public sector.

The Director of Economic Development advised that the strategy looked to address the challenges facing society and the sector. Some of the key issues facing the sector identified in the strategy included:

- Standstill funding;
- Return on investment;
- Short term funding cycles;
- Public value placed on arts and artists;
- Attendance and participation;
- Climate emergency;
- Representation and EDI;
- Employment in the arts; and
- Digital economies.

He advised that the draft Strategy outlined the ACNI's mission, visions and values aligned to delivery and the document had identified the key challenges and opportunities for growth with outcomes aligned to both the arts sector and society:

1. A more financially stable arts sector;
2. A sector that develops, looks after its people and is more inclusive;
3. A sector that is better supported to develop through experimentation and innovation;
4. A sector that contributes to social and economic benefits and cares about the environment;
5. More people from all backgrounds can enjoy arts experiences; and
6. A sector that is more valued across society and government.

The Director of Economic Development stated that ACNI now wanted all interested parties to consider the draft proposal and saw the consultation as an opportunity to help shape the final strategy and next steps.

He highlighted that a summary of the questions posed and draft responses to each of these was attached in [Appendix 1](#) for consideration. He pointed out that the strategic alignment between Belfast City Council and the Arts Council Northern Ireland was essential for realising our shared vision of a vibrant, inclusive, and culturally rich Belfast. As a result, the draft response recognised the Council's ambition to support continued innovation, collaboration and partnership in advancing our mutual goals for the arts sector. He advised that the Council welcomed the recognition within the strategy that took cognisance of cross cutting objectives and shared resources that focused efforts and facilitated effective delivery.

During discussion, Members raised the importance of collaboration across the sector. The Director of Economic Development advised that he would include this in the consultation response.

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After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of report and agreed to the submission of the draft response to the consultation as set out in Appendix 1, subject to the addition of the potential to foster collaborations with Arts Councils and cultural bodies across Ireland and the UK to increase participation in shared initiatives.

Chairperson

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Wednesday, 27th March, 2024

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CITY GROWTH AND REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Nic Bhranair (Chairperson);
Alderman Lawlor;
Councillors Duffy, Flynn, Lyons, F. McAteer, McCabe,
McCormick, McDowell, I. McLaughlin, McKay and
Murray.

In attendance: Mr. D. Martin, Strategic Director of Place and Economy;
Ms. S. Grimes, Director of Property and Projects;
Mr. S. Dolan, Senior Development Manager; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Canavan, McMullan and Walsh.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following item 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 item 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.

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Wednesday, 27th March, 2024**

**Presentation -
Living with Water Team**

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. S. Richardson, Director of Living with Water Programme, to the meeting.

Mr. Richardson provided an overview of the Living with Water Programme and the review process which was currently underway in relation to the Strategic Drainage Infrastructure Plan for Belfast.

During discussion, in response to Members questions in relation to local Wastewater Pumping Station upgrades, Mr. Richardson advised that updates could be provided by Northern Ireland Water in due course.

The Committee then considered the report and associated appendices in relation to the item.

During further discussion, the Director of Property and Projects advised that the Committee discussions would inform the Council's response to the review in line with the feedback timeline, however, the opportunity to provide a further response could be considered once budgets for the programme had been finalised.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Richardson for his attendance and he retired from the meeting.

After discussion, the Committee:

- noted the information which had been provided and that, where relevant, the LWW team would provide further information on the issues raised; and
- noted that a review of the LWW programme was currently underway and authorised officers to submit a written response to LWW on the interim review findings informed by the Committee discussions.

Chairperson

Licensing Committee

Wednesday, 20th March, 2024

MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM

Members present: Councillor McKeown (Chairperson);
Aldermen McCullough and Rodgers;
Councillors Anglin, P. Donnelly, Doran,
D. Douglas, Lyons, Murray,
F. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McKay,
McMullan, Ó Néill and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor/Director of Legal and
Civic Services;
Mr. S. Hewitt, Building Control Manager;
Mr. K. Bloomfield, HMO Manager;
Mr. C. McLaughlin, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning); and
Mrs. L. McLornan, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from Alderman McCoubrey and Councillors Bradley and Collins.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 21st February, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 4th March, 2024, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Smyth declared an interest in Item 2c, Update on the Renewal of an Entertainments Licence for Shaftesbury Bowling and Recreation Club, in that he had previously been approached by the complainant and had provided them with advice and he would therefore leave the meeting for the duration of the item.

Issue Raised in Advance by a Member

Airbnb Accommodation – Councillor McKeown to raise

Councillor McKeown advised the Committee that he had previously raised the issue of a lack of regulation of short-term lets, such as Airbnbs, but that there had been no Executive in place at that time.

**Licensing Committee,
Wednesday, 20th March, 2024**

At his request, the Committee agreed that a letter be sent to the newly reinstated NI Executive, asking it to consider taking action in establishing an appropriate regime for the management of short-term lets in Northern Ireland.

Delegated Matters

**THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN
PURSUANCE OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT UNDER
STANDING ORDER 37(d)**

Licences Issued Under Delegated Authority

The Committee noted a list of applications for licences which had, since its last meeting, been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

**Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licenses
Issued Under Delegated Authority**

The Committee noted a list of applications which had been approved under the Council's Scheme of Delegation during March 2024.

**Update on the Renewal of an Entertainments Licence
for Shaftesbury Bowling and Recreation Club**

(Councillor Smyth, having declared an interest, left the room for the duration
of this item)

The Building Control Manager reminded the Committee that, at its meeting on 21st June 2023, it had received representations from the applicant and objectors in relation to the application to renew the licence. At that meeting, the Committee had agreed to defer the application to enable further consideration by officers of the new evidence which had been raised by the objector and to allow the Council to support further mediation between the applicant and objector.

He outlined to the Committee that the additional evidence provided had since been reviewed by the Service and that further discussions had taken place with the applicant and objectors. As a result of communication between both parties, the Members were advised that the objectors were no longer pursuing their objection to the application.

No noise complaints had been received by the Council since the meeting in June, 2023. The Service carried out monitoring and a "during performance" inspection at the club on 13th February, 2024, and all management and technical matters were satisfactory. The Committee was reminded that, under the Scheme of Delegation, the Director of Planning and Building Control had responsibility for exercising all powers in relation to the issue of Permits and Licences except where adverse representations had been made. As the issues raised by the objectors had been resolved, the Entertainments Licence had since been issued under delegated authority.

**Licensing Committee,
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The Committee noted the update which had been provided.

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 2, 4 Donnybrook Street; and

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 1, 6 Ireton Street;

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 2, 6 Ireton Street;

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 3, 6 Ireton Street;

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 1, 23 Ireton Street;

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 2, 23 Ireton Street; and

Application for a New Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation for Flat 3, 23 Ireton Street.

Before the officer presented the report, a Member stated that they felt that the seven applications for new Licences to operate a House of Multiple Occupation should be deferred to a Special meeting to enable the Members to further consider the issue of the displacement of those currently residing in the seven properties.

The HMO Manager outlined to the Committee that a Temporary Exemption Notice (TEN) had been granted for Apartments 1 and 3, 6 Ireton Street, in October 2023, which had expired in January, 2024. He explained that the owner of an unlicensed HMO could apply to the Council for a TEN, having outlined what steps would be taken to stop the premises from being an HMO, such as reducing the number of residents to below three, or that sufficient basic amenities for exclusive use were installed so that occupants did not have to share them. He outlined that officers had not yet revisited the properties to determine whether such actions had been carried out.

A further Member queried whether the deferral of the applications would place a financial burden on the Council. In response, the HMO Manager confirmed that there would be a cost to the Council attached to each application to the Court, as well as the solicitors time which would be required to lodge the applications.

The HMO Manager highlighted that applications to the Court would have to be made in respect of each of the properties by 3rd April and 19th April respectively.

The City Solicitor advised the Committee that, due to upcoming staff leave, it would not be possible to hold a Special Meeting before 3rd April.

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The City Solicitor advised the Committee that, if it was to defer the applications, it was required to have the permission of the owner/landlord before applications could be made to the Court.

Mr. G. Treacy, the owner of the six apartments in Ireton Street, was in attendance. He stated that, while he was not familiar with the process of making applications to the Court, if it would mean that the Committee would give the licences further consideration, he was content for the applications to be made to the Magistrates Court.

The Committee was advised that the owner of Flat 2, 4 Donnybrook Street, was not in attendance.

The Committee, therefore, agreed to initially deal with Items 2e - 2j, namely, the applications for Flats 1, 2 and 3, 6 Ireton Street and Flats 1, 2 and 3, 23 Ireton Street.

Moved by Councillor McCabe,
Seconded by Councillor Doran,

That the six applications for a new Licence to operate a House of Multiple Occupation at Flats 1, 2 and 3, 6 Ireton Street and Flats 1, 2 and 3, 23 Ireton Street, be deferred to the next meeting, so that the Members can further consider the issue of displacement of those currently living in the properties.

On a vote by show of hands, thirteen Members voted for the proposal and three against and it was accordingly declared carried.

At the request of a Member, the HMO Manager left the meeting for a short period to advise the owner of Flat 2, 4 Donnybrook Street, regarding the Committee's proposal, however, contact could not be made.

(The Committee stood adjourned for a short period to allow the officers to determine the next steps.)

The City Solicitor advised the Committee that further information had come to light during the period of adjournment, whereby the owner of the properties would, in fact, be liable to pay significant financial penalties as a result of the Committee's decision to defer the six applications in Ireton Street.

She advised the Members, therefore, that the Committee might wish to revisit its earlier decision, given that the applicant and all the Members who had voted were still present. She highlighted that, as all the information had not been provided to the Members or the applicant at the time of the decision, it would therefore have been liable to a successful Call-in.

Subsequently, after the applicant had been informed, the Committee agreed to revoke its previous decision to defer the applications and agreed to consider the applications for Flats 1, 2 and 3, 6 Ireton Street and Flats 1, 2 and 3, 23 Ireton Street.

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The HMO Manager presented the details of the six applications together.

He explained that each of the properties had had the benefit of an HMO licence issued by the Housing Executive in the name of the applicant, which had expired in January 2021 for the flats in 6 Ireton Street, and September 2023 for the flats in 23 Ireton Street. Reminder letters had been issued to the applicant, informing him of the need to renew the HMO licences before the expiry of the existing licences.

The Committee was advised that Temporary Exemption Notices had also been issued in respect of the properties, and that new HMO applications were received for the six properties on 3rd January, 2024.

The HMO Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory;
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and –
 - i. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
 - ii. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

The Committee was advised that, as they were new applications, the Council's Planning Service was consulted. It had confirmed that full planning permission for use as an HMO had been granted on 30th June, 2006, in respect of 6 Ireton Street, and 7th January, 2008, in respect of 23 Ireton Street.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with the Environmental Protection Unit in relation to daytime and nighttime noise; the Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years.

The applicant had confirmed that they had not been convicted of any relevant offences under the 2016 Act.

For the purpose of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Area (HMA)

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“2/22 Botanic, Holylands, Rugby” as defined in the document Council’s Local Development Plan Strategy, which was formally adopted on 2nd May, 2023. It was reported that Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement in section 8 of the 2016 Act upon the Council to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision.

The officers had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and
- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that “Nurturing sustainable and balanced communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP’s housing policies.” In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

“Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA.”

The Committee was advised that, on the date of assessment, 15th February, 2024, 88% of all dwelling units in policy area HMA 2/22 were made up of HMOs and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit as set out in Policy HOU10. There were 1122 (45%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 4780 persons in that HMA.

It was outlined that there were a total of 2473 dwelling units in HMA 2/22. The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low income households and, more recently, migrant workers and asylum seekers.

The Committee was advised that, on 15th February, 2024, out of 92 premises available for rent within the BT7 area on PropertyNews.com there were 52 licensed HMOs which, from the information presented on the website, represented 229 bed spaces. The HMO Manager advised the Committee that anecdotal evidence from previous conversations with HMO managing agents suggested that there was currently a lack of HMO accommodation available in that locality.

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On 7th December, 2022, the Ulster University Director of Campus Life advised the Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee that there was an "increase in competition for HMOs particularly from NIHE, Immigration Services and statutory agencies and there were increasing accommodation issues across the housing sector which required a holistic view and should include the consideration of international students, families and graduates looking for professional accommodation."

However, the QUB Director of Student Plus had confirmed that the current trend indicated a significant move of students to purpose-built student accommodation blocks. She had advised the Members that there were 7,000 purpose built managed student accommodation (PBMSA) rooms in the city, the majority having been built since 2018, and approximately 5,000 in the city centre.

It was reported that November 2023 monitoring information produced by the Council's Planning Service for PBMSA indicated that 2055 bedspaces were currently under construction with an operational date of 2024.

Therefore, with the continued expansion of the PBMSA sector and students transitioning from private rentals to PBMSAs, it was too early to tell whether the increased competition from non-students for HMOs was a temporary problem which could be managed by the contraction in students residing in existing HMO accommodation within the locality, or evidence of an emerging long-term supply issue.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

The Committee was advised that no objections had been received in relation to the applications. It was also reported that each of the flats had been certified as complying with the physical standards for an HMO for five persons by a technical officer from the NIHMO service, on 1st February, 2024.

On 15th February, 2024, pursuant to Paragraph 9 of Schedule 2 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, officers had issued a Notice of Proposed Decision to the Applicant advising that it was proposing to refuse the six licences on the grounds of overprovision. On 7th March, representations were received in respect of the applications from the owner's legal representative.

The Chairperson invited Mr. G: Treacy, owner, to address the Committee.

Mr. Treacy thanked the Committee for allowing him to present his appeal. He outlined that:

- receiving the news that his six HMO properties were likely to be refused had caused him a great deal of worry and stress over the past few weeks;

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- he had worked hard in his career and taken financial risks in order to make the significant investments in the two properties;
- he had borrowed £450,000 over 25 years to invest in them;
- he would lose approximately £46,000 per annum if the HMO licences were to be refused, as the bedspaces would drop from 25 to 12;
- local estate agents had advised him that the properties would be worth 50% less if they were not licensed HMOs;
- he had never received complaints about any of his tenants and he had maintained them with pride;
- that, under the Human Rights Act, he had the right to the peaceful enjoyment of his property;
- the refusal of the six HMO licences was disproportionate to him having missed the renewal deadlines;
- he had missed the renewal date of one of his properties by five days;
- no officer had phoned him to remind him of the deadlines;
- he had been reassured by an officer in the HMO office, in September 2023, that there would be no issue with getting the licences sorted;
- he had subsequently received letters informing him that his licences were being proposed for refusal, with no warning whatsoever;
- he did not feel that the significance of the consequences of not renewing his licences on time had been explained to him;
- he queried why his applications were being considered as “new” instead of renewals;
- he had spoken with Mr. Polley, Director of Housing in the Department for Communities, in recent days regarding the HMO legislation and that he had confirmed that the purpose of it was not to reduce the number of existing HMOs, rather, it was to set limits going forward and to improve the quality of all HMOs across Northern Ireland, and that there would be severe Human Rights implications if landlords were to have their HMOs taken from them;
- he had not caused the issue of “overprovision” in the area;
- if overprovision of HMOs already existed in the area, then how could the granting of licences lead to overprovision and, similarly, if he had submitted his applications on 5th September, 2023, the applications would not have caused overprovision, yet, submitting them 24 hours later, they somehow were; and
- the Committee should take into account the potential displacement of those residing in the properties.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Treacy for his deputation. He confirmed that the Committee was not there to rubber-stamp any decision and that it would reach its decision after careful consideration.

Mr. Bloomfield advised the Committee that, in respect of 6 Ireton Street, the licence had expired on 12th January, 2021. A reminder letter had been sent in advance of its expiry. The application to renew the licence was received on 3rd January, 2024, so the property had been occupied as an unlicensed HMO for a period of up to three years, if it was so occupied. In relation to 23 Ireton Street, he confirmed to the Committee

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that the licence had expired on 4th September, 2023, and the application was received on 3rd January, 2024, and two reminders had been issued prior to the expiry of the application.

The applicant stated that he had spoken with the Senior Technical Officer in the HMO office. The HMO Manager explained that that had been in relation to Temporary Exemption Notices (TEN), which had been granted. He reminded the Members that TENs were for the purpose of allowing the applicant to remove the property from HMO usage. TENs were granted for a period of three months, and in exceptional circumstances could be extended for a further three months, which, when granted, allowed the properties to operate without a licence. He clarified that the TENs for five out of the six flats in question had since expired.

The HMO Manager reminded the Committee that it had to have regard to the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality and the need for housing accommodation within the locality, including the extent to which HMO accommodation was required in order to meet that need.

He outlined that the six applications before the Committee were new applications as the licences had expired. As such, the Members were obliged to take overprovision into consideration.

He added that the Members had to consider the number of licensed HMOs in the locality.

The City Solicitor acknowledged that the situation for the applicant was difficult. She reminded the Committee, however, that it was charged with applying the Licensing regime, and therefore it had to consider if the applications before it would result in overprovision. She reminded the Committee that it had previously received notification of difficult circumstances from other applicants and that some of those cases had been taken through the courts. She confirmed to the Committee that the judgements had confirmed that, while missing the expiry date of a licence was a small error, it was a significant error, and that it was not an error which was the responsibility of the Council. She confirmed that the legislation did not allow the Committee to take a different approach in the case of difficult circumstances of an applicant.

She further advised that, if Article 1, Protocol 1 of the Human Rights Act applied, it was important to note that it was not an absolute right, and that there were circumstances in which it was possible to interfere with those rights, including through the regulation of HMOs under the Act.

A Member thanked the officers for their advice in respect of the applications.

In response to a Member's query, the City Solicitor confirmed that the applications had to be dealt with as new applications as there was no such thing as a late renewal. She reported that the issue had been tested through the courts.

The Chairperson asked Mr. Treacy if he wished to confirm any factual inaccuracies. He advised the Committee that one of the reminder letters had been issued

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during peak Covid. He reiterated that the displacement of tenants should be a key consideration, given the high demand for housing in that area. He further stated that he was aware of other properties which had been brought through the HMO office which were late and had been approved and he questioned how that had happened.

In response, the City Solicitor advised that the only applications which she was aware of, which were dealt with in a different way, were seven applications which had been brought to Committee in 2020/2021. She highlighted that there had been an issue regarding a requirement for applying for planning permission and whether people had misunderstood the position. The HMO Manager added that, apart from those applications referred to the City Solicitor, no other valid applications had been treated differently.

Moved by Councillor McCann
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refuse the six applications as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it was satisfied that the granting of the six HMO licences would result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

Flat 2, 4 Donnybrook Street

The HMO Manager presented the key aspects of the report to the Committee. He outlined that the property had had the benefit of an HMO licence issued by the Housing Executive which had expired on 18th April, 2023. Reminder letters had been issued to the licence holder, informing him of the need to renew the HMO licences before the expiry of the existing licence.

A new HMO Licence application had been received from the applicant on 13th December, 2023.

The HMO Manager outlined that, pursuant to the 2016 Act, the Council could only grant a licence if it was satisfied that:

- a) the occupation of the living accommodation as an HMO would not constitute a breach of planning control;
- b) the owner, and any managing agent of it, were fit and proper persons;
- c) the proposed management arrangements were satisfactory;
- d) the granting of the licence would not result in overprovision of HMOs in the locality;
- e) the living accommodation was fit for human habitation and —

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- i. was suitable for occupation as an HMO by the number of persons to be specified in the licence, or
- ii. could be made so suitable by including conditions in the licence.

The Committee was advised that, as it was a new application, the Council's Planning Service was consulted. It had confirmed that a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use or Development (CLEUD) had been granted on 8th December, 2023.

It was reported that the NIHMO Unit had consulted with the Environmental Protection Unit in relation to daytime and nighttime noise; the Public Health and Housing Unit in relation to rubbish accumulation/filthy premises; and the Enforcement Unit in relation to litter and waste and all had confirmed that there had been no relevant enforcement action required in respect of any of the issues in the HMO in the last 5 years.

The applicant had confirmed that they had not been convicted of any relevant offences under the 2016 Act.

For the purpose of Section 12(2) of the 2016 Act, the Council had determined the locality of the accommodation as being Housing Management Area (HMA) "2/08 Edinburgh Street" as defined in the document Council's Local Development Plan Strategy, which was formally adopted on 2nd May, 2023. It was reported that Legal Services had advised that there was a clear requirement in section 8 of the 2016 Act upon the Council to be satisfied that the granting of a licence would not result in overprovision.

The officers had had regard to:

- a) the number and capacity of licensed HMOs in the locality; and
- b) the need for housing accommodation in the locality and the extent to which HMO accommodation was required to meet that need.

To inform the Council in its consideration of the above provisions, the Council had taken account of the 2023 Strategy given that "Nurturing sustainable and balanced communities was a fundamental aim of the LDP's housing policies." In particular, the Council had considered Policy HOU10, which stated:

"Within designated HMAs, planning permission will only be granted for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and/or flats/apartments where the total number of HMOs and flats/apartments combined would not as a result exceed 20% of all dwelling units within an HMA."

The Committee was advised that, on the date of assessment, 21st February, 2024, 46% of all dwelling units in policy area HMA 2/08 were made up of HMOs and flats/apartments, which in turn exceeded the 20% development limit as set out in Policy HOU10. There were 183 (30%) licensed HMOs with a capacity of 765 persons in that HMA.

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It was outlined that there were a total of 616 dwelling units in HMA 2/08. The Committee was advised that the fact that the use of the property as an HMO was permitted for planning purposes was a relevant consideration in determining whether the granting of the licence would result in overprovision.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager reminded the Committee that there was a need for intensive forms of housing and, to meet that demand, HMOs were an important component of the housing provision. HMOs, alongside other accommodation options within the private rented sector, played an important role in meeting the housing needs of people who were single, who had temporary employment, students, low income households and, more recently, migrant workers and asylum seekers.

The Committee was advised that, on 21st February, 2024, out of 68 premises available for rent within the BT9 area on PropertyNews.com there were 19 licensed HMOs which, from the information presented on the website, represented 85 bed spaces. The HMO Manager advised the Committee that anecdotal evidence from previous conversations with HMO managing agents suggested that there was currently a lack of HMO accommodation available in that locality.

On 7th December, 2022, the Ulster University Director of Campus Life advised the Council's City Growth and Regeneration Committee that there was an "increase in competition for HMOs particularly from NIHE, Immigration Services and statutory agencies and there were increasing accommodation issues across the housing sector which required a holistic view and should include the consideration of international students, families and graduates looking for professional accommodation."

However, the QUB Director of Student Plus had confirmed that the current trend indicated a significant move of students to purpose-built student accommodation blocks. She had advised the Members that there were 7,000 purpose built managed student accommodation (PBMSA) rooms in the city, the majority having been built since 2018, and approximately 5,000 in the city centre.

It was reported that November 2023 monitoring information produced by the Council's Planning Service for PBMSA indicated that 2055 bedspaces were currently under construction with an operational date of 2024.

Therefore, with the continued expansion of the PBMSA sector and students transitioning from private rentals to PBMSAs, it was too early to tell whether the increased competition from non-students for HMOs was a temporary problem which could be managed by the contraction in students residing in existing HMO accommodation within the locality, or evidence of an emerging long-term supply issue.

The Houses in Multiple Occupation Manager explained that, in assessing the number and capacity of licensed HMOs, as well as the need for HMO accommodation in the locality, officers could not be satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would not result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation for the purpose of section 8(2)(d) of the 2016 Act.

The Committee was advised that no objections had been received in relation to the applications. It was also advised that the flat had been certified as complying with

**Licensing Committee,
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the physical standards for an HMO for five persons by a technical officer from the NIHMO service, on 1st February, 2024.

The HMO Manager read out a statement from the owner, who was unable to attend the meeting. The owner had stated that:

- HMOs were essential in providing affordable shared accommodation for the City's key workers;
- without access to affordable HMOs, individuals were forced to compete for other rental properties, driving up rents and exacerbating the housing crisis;
- denying a licence for an HMO didn't solve a problem, rather, it only served to exacerbate it; and
- over the past 36 years, the property had not just been an HMO but a home to scores of young professionals from all over the world.

Moved by Councillor McKay
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – that the Committee agrees to refuse the application as, in accordance with Section 12 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016, it was satisfied that the granting of the HMO licence would result in overprovision of HMO accommodation in the locality of the accommodation, as determined under section 8(2)(d) of the Act.

Chairperson

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Planning Committee

Tuesday, 19th March, 2024

HYBRID MEETING OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Garrett (Chairperson);
Aldermen Lawlor, McCullough and Rodgers;
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bradley, T. Brooks,
Carson, Doherty, P. Donnelly, S. Douglas
Doran, Ferguson, Groogan, Hanvey, Maskey,
McCann, Nic Bhranair and Whyte.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory and Planning)
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager (Development Management);
Ms. C. Reville, Principal Planning Officer;
Ms. U. Caddell, Senior Planning Officer;
Ms. L. Walshe, Senior Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

No apologies for inability to attend were reported.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 13th February, 2024 were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council, at its meeting on 4th March, 2024, subject to the omission of those matters in respect of which the Council had delegated its powers to the Committee.

Declarations of Interest

Alderman Lawlor declared an interest in relation to item 7c on the agenda, LA04/2023/4021/F - Change of use from dwelling to 5 Bed House in Multiple Occupation (amended description) - 166 Upper Newtownards Road, in that his employer, Mr. G. Robinson MLA, had submitted a letter of objection to the application.

Councillor T. Brooks declared an interest in relation to item 8b on the agenda, under the heading LA04/2023/3778/F- Demolition of existing Russell Court buildings and re - development of existing surface car park to accommodate two new buildings (five storey and four storey) for the QUB Institute of Research Excellence for Advanced Clinical Healthcare (iREACH Health), including landscaping, parking, and servicing. - 38-52 Lisburn Road, in that she was employed by Queen's University.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest in relation to item 8b on the agenda, under the heading LA04/2023/3778/F- Demolition of existing Russell Court buildings and re development of existing surface car park to accommodate two new buildings (five storey and four storey)

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for the QUB Institute of Research Excellence for Advanced Clinical Healthcare (iREACH Health), including landscaping, parking, and servicing. - 38-52 Lisburn Road, in that he had previously worked with one of the agents to the application.

The City Solicitor declared an interest in relation to item 8g on the agenda, under the heading LA04/2024/0054/F - Change of use to conference centre facility with associated use as events/entertainment space - Former Print Hall, Ground Floor, 124-144 Royal Avenue, in that she was a Board Member of Beltel LLP.

Committee Site Visits

Note of Committee Site Visits

The Committee noted the Committee site visits.

Proposed pre-emptive Committee Site Visit for: LA04/2022/1046/F - Proposed demolition of existing building and construction of a residential development consisting of 14 No. units (9 No. apartments and 5 No. terraced dwellings) with associated landscaping and car parking (amended plans received). - 18 Annadale Avenue.

The Committee agreed to undertake a site visit.

Proposed pre-emptive Committee Site Visit for: LA04/2023/4366/F - Proposed 14 storey (plus basement) purpose-Built Grade A Office premises with retail/restaurant unit at ground floor, including external landscaped terrace areas, public realm works, and all associated site works.- 14 Dublin Road

The Committee agreed to undertake a site visit.

Proposed pre-emptive Committee Site Visit for: LA04/2023/4373/F - Erection of 17 storey Purpose Built Managed Student Accommodation (PBMSA) with additional use of accommodation outside term time comprising 459 no. units with communal facilities, internal and external communal amenity space and ancillary accommodation - 14 Dublin Road

The Committee agreed to undertake a site visit.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th March, 2024**

**Notifications of Provision/Removal of
Accessible Parking Bays**

The Committee noted the provision of accessible parking bays at the following locations:

- 38 Geary Road; and
- 219 Cregagh Road.

Planning Appeals Notified

The Committee noted the appeals decisions.

Planning Decisions Issued

The Committee noted the planning decisions issued in February, 2024

Miscellaneous Reports

**Delegation of Local Applications
with NI Water Objections**

The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control, those Local planning applications to which NI Water had objected to.

**DFI Consultation Paper - Potential update to
SPPS respect of Climate Change Policy**

The Committee noted the Council's draft response to the consultation.

**Advanced Notice of Listed Buildings - Colenso
Parade, Botanic Gardens and University
Road/Stranmillis Road**

The Committee agreed to support the proposed listing of:

- Gate Screen, at Colenso Parade, Botanic Gardens; and
- Gate Screen, at University Road / Stranmillis Road, Botanic Gardens.

Planning Applications Previously Considered

THE COMMITTEE DEALT WITH THE FOLLOWING ITEMS IN PURSUANCE OF THE POWERS DELEGATED TO IT BY THE COUNCIL UNDER STANDING ORDER 37(e)

LA04/2017/1991/F - Construction of a new 5 storey office development for science and I.T. based business and associated car parking and public realm works. - Land adjacent to Concourse Buildings, Queens Road

The Planning Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application and explained that it had previously been approved in April, 2020, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement, however, the Section 76 Planning agreement had yet to be completed and therefore the decision had not been issued.

He stated that the application was before the Committee for re-assessment against the Belfast Local Development Plan: Plan Strategy 2035.

He reported that, having regard to the Development Plan and material Considerations, the recommendation remained to approve the application, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement.

The Committee agreed to approve the application, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2020/2105/F - Residential development comprising 55no. apartments comprising 12 no social, and 43 no private apartments and associated site works. - 1-5 Gaffikin Street

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and explained that the application was before the Committee for re-assessment against the the Belfast Local Development Plan: Plan Strategy 2035 and that the proposal had been amended to include 12 social and 43 private apartments.

She highlighted the following key issues in the assessment of the proposal:

- Principle of use on the site;
- Demolition;
- Access, movement and parking;
- Impact on natural heritage;
- Impact on built heritage;
- Design and layout;
- Open space and landscaping;
- Flood risk; and
- Wastewater treatment.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th March, 2024**

She provided an update on the consultation responses and stated that all consultees had been satisfied, subject to conditions, and that 130 third party objections had been received, together with a petition and a letter of support.

She reported that it was recommended that the application be approved with conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and deal with any other matters that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

(Having declared an interest, Alderman Lawlor left the meeting
while the following item was discussed.)

LA04/2023/4021/F - Change of use from dwelling to 5 Bed House in Multiple Occupation (amended description). - 166 Upper Newtownards Road

The Planning Manager explained to the Committee that the application had been approved at its meeting in February, 2024, however, the recommendation contained a requirement of a Section 76 planning agreement, in error.

He requested that the Committee confirm that a Section 76 planning agreement was not required and recommended that the application be approved with conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and agreed that a Section 76 planning agreement was not required, and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions, and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

LA04/2022/1384/F - Residential development of 10 no. apartments within a single building, including demolition of existing structures, car parking and relocation of existing access, and all other associated siteworks. - Lands at 12 Inverary Avenue

The Principal Planning Officer explained that the application had been before the Committee at its meeting in February, 2024 and had been deferred to allow Members to undertake a site visit.

She reported that DfI Rivers had submitted a consultation response to the application which offered no objection, subject to an additional condition to safeguard against surface water flood risk.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
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She provided an overview of the application and stated that 11 objections had been received and considered, there had been no objections from consultees and the application was compliant with the Plan Strategy.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement being entered into to secure affordable housing.

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

**LA04/2023/3481/F - Change of use from
dwelling to 6 bed HMO (sui generis) –
272 Limestone Road**

The Senior Planning Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the application and explained the following key issues:

- The principle of an HMO at the location
- Impact on the character and appearance of the Alexandra Park area of townscape character (ATC);
- Impact on residential amenity;
- Traffic, parking and access; and
- Waste and refuse collection.

She stated that the site was outside a Housing Management Area where Policy HOU10 applied and that there were no existing HMO properties on the street where eight HMO properties could be accommodated within the 10% policy threshold.

She reported that the proposal complied with the relevant space standards and was situated in a highly accessible and sustainable location, close to the Antrim Road.

The Senior Planning Officer reported that DfI Roads had offered no objection and a parking survey had been provided, she added that adequate bin storage had been provided in the rear alleyway.

She reported that two additional representations had been received following the publication of the Committee report, one letter of support and one letter of objection. She outlined the reasons for support and objection and explained that those matters had been raised and considered in previously received objections.

She stated that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered acceptable and that it was recommended that planning permission was granted, subject to conditions.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. A. Olphert, Create Architecture NI, to the meeting, speaking in support of the application.

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Mr. Olphert acknowledged that there had been a number of objections to the application and stated that, given the negative press around HMO properties over the past years, that it was somewhat understandable, however, the vast majority of issues associated with intensive forms of housing are specific to policy areas and those issues had arisen due to the lack of controlled development in those areas, serving mostly the student population.

He highlighted that planning policy permits a 10% HMO property allowance on a given street and that the Council had confirmed that the application property was outside of a policy area and, of the 88 properties that were relevant to the address, there were currently no HMO properties. He stated that approving the application would take the percentage of HMO properties on the street to 1.14%, which was well below the permitted 10%.

He pointed out that many of the objections received had cited parking as a concern, however, DfI Roads had confirmed, in its initial consultation response, that under planning policy, parking was not a consideration and that the parking survey had indicated an availability of seven on-street parking spaces, despite an increase of only two bedrooms in the application.

Mr. Olphert stated that he believed HMO properties could help alleviate the pressures on local housing and explained how the property had been derelict and in poor condition when purchased and that bringing it up to HMO standard would be a benefit to the local housing stock.

He addressed concerns around noise, antisocial behaviour and waste management, stating that HMO owners must complete a fit and proper person evaluation as well as providing an antisocial behaviour policy.

He outlined the demand for HMO accommodation in the city and those individuals who would use and benefit from its availability.

He concluded by stating that he believed that a HMO property, when developed in a controlled manner and properly regulated through Planning and Licensing, was a vital part of the housing market in any city with an ambition for growth.

A number of Members raised concerns with regard to waste and refuse collection, access, increased parking and traffic and residential amenity.

The Planning Manager informed the Committee that the application would not increase the bin requirement of the property and highlighted that a parking survey had been carried out and DfI Roads had offered no objection to the application.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Maskey,
Seconded by Councillor McCann,

“That the Committee agrees to refuse planning permission on grounds of insufficient parking to support the proposed development and unsuitable

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provision for bin storage and delegates authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the refusal reasons.”

On a vote by show of hands, 16 Members voted for the proposal and three against and it was declared carried.

LA04/2023/3319/F - Change of use from dwelling to 6 Bed House in Multiple Occupation (amended description). – 27 Ponsonby Avenue

The Senior Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- The principle of an HMO at the location;
- Impact on the character and appearance of the Alexandra Park area of townscape character (ATC);
- Impact on residential amenity;
- Traffic, parking and access; and
- Waste and refuse collection.

She reported that 87 objections had been received and one letter of support and explained that the application was before the Committee following a request by a Member for the following reasons:

- The application might negatively affect parking and traffic in the street (and surrounding area) and;
- The application might have a negative impact on the character of the street (and surrounding area).

She stated that the scheme was compliant with Policy HOU10 in that the 10% threshold for HMO properties on Ponsonby Avenue had not yet been reached and that officers considered that the proposal would not be harmful in terms of traffic, parking, impact on amenity of the surrounding area or the Alexandra Park Area of Townscape Character.

She reported that DfI Roads had offered no objection to the application and, following the Committee site visit to the location, Members had sought clarity regarding bin storage and she confirmed that there was sufficient space to store the bins required by the supplementary planning guidance on waste infrastructure. She stated that a condition would be added in the case of approval to ensure bin storage space was retained.

The Senior Planning Officer stated that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered acceptable and it was recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. J. Duncan to the meeting who spoke in objection to the application.

Mr. Duncan explained that he was objecting to the application on the following five grounds:

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- Over occupation and space standard;
- Parking;
- Waste and refuse collection;
- Sewage and waste; and
- Number of HMO properties.

He outlined each of the grounds to the Committee and highlighted that one proposed bedroom in the application was marginally under 6.5m² and was located within the attic space, meaning that 4m² of the area was under 6 foot in height, therefore any occupant would not be able to stand upright in 60% of the bedroom.

He stated that, as an occupant of the street, parking was an ongoing issue and formed the basis of many of the objections to the application. He added, although the property was located close to a bus stop, that did not mean that the occupants would use public transport rather than a private vehicle.

He explained that the alleyway to the rear of the property was in too poor a state for householders to use to store bins and that the potential occupancy of the property would only increase bin usage. He stated that, currently, the property was being rented and that the recycling boxes were scattered and unused at the front of the property and that the landlord seemed unaware or unwilling to pay regard to his statutory requirement for the disposal of rubbish.

Mr. Duncan pointed out that the proposal included the addition of six ensuite bathrooms and asked the Committee to seek clarity on the impact that would have on sewage which he believed was operating at capacity.

He concluded by highlighting to the Committee that there were two HMO properties on Ponsonby Avenue and a third property, which had been rented as apartments, was seeking planning permission for a change of use to an Airbnb, he asked the Committee to be mindful of these grounds when considering the application.

During discussion, several Members stated that they had shared some of Mr. Duncan's concerns to the officers, in particular, concerns with regard to parking, waste and refuse collection.

A Member requested that the Director of Planning and Building Control seek an enforcement visit to the address as constituents had reported that the property was currently operating as an HMO property without planning permission or a licence.

Proposal

Moved by Councillor Maskey,
Seconded by Councillor Bradley,

Resolved - "That the Committee agrees to refuse planning permission on grounds of insufficient parking to support the proposed development and unsuitable provision for bin storage, and that the Committee delegates

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authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the refusal reasons.”

New Planning Applications

LA04/2020/2607/F - Residential development for the erection of 33 no dwellings (including 5 no affordable units) including public open space, equipped children's play area and associated development as enabling works to deliver the refurbishment of 3 no listed pavilions within the Belvoir Park Hospital complex (previously approved under Y/2014/0401/F and Y/2014/0390/LBC). [amended scheme] - Former Belvoir Park Hospital Site Hospital Road

The Senior Planning Officer provided the Committee with a summary of the application and outlined the following key issues regarding the principle of development:

- The site was outside the development limit to be balanced alongside case for enabling development, other benefits and any negative impacts;
- Benefit of the enabling development – reuse of the three remaining historic pavilions;
- Scrutiny of the financial argument for enabling development;
- Delivery of social housing;
- Delivery of an outdoor play area;
- Improved connectivity through the site to Ballylesson Road and adjacent woodland; and
- S76 Planning Agreement to ensure delivery of enabling development.

He provided the Committee with the Strategic Planning Policy Statement definition of enabling development and outlined its benefits and financial argument, with regard to the proposal.

He reported that no statutory or non-statutory consultees had offered any objection to the application, except for NI Water, which had objected on the grounds of a lack of wastewater capacity. He added that 17 third party representations had been received, that included one letter of support and he outlined the issues which had been raised and addressed within the officer’s report.

He stated that the principal of enabling development was considered, on balance, to be acceptable and that it was recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. C. Shanks, Clyde Shanks Ltd., speaking on behalf of the applicant, Mr. M. Doherty, Naylor Devlin, and Mr. B. McKervey, Historic Environment Division, DfC, to the meeting.

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Mr. Shanks explained that he had worked closely with the Planning officers and commended the comprehensive case officer report which balanced and weighed all material planning considerations and recommended approval of the application.

He stated that the application would deliver significant planning gain and outlined the following key considerations to the Committee:

- The new build development would generate vital funds that were essential to enable the restoration of the three remaining listed pavilions on site secured on a phased basis through a section 76 agreement;
- The application would enhance open space provision for all residents;
- Delivery of affordable housing units for active elderly at a level of provision (15%) that was accepted and supported by NIHE and endorsed through the viability report assessment by the Council's independent consultant;
- Enhanced connectivity for all residents through Phase 5 to the Ballylesson Road and through to the woodland to the north;
- Enhancement of the existing mature landscaped boundaries (with fifty-six new trees to be planted) that would reinforce the site's distinction with the open countryside beyond it;
- Incorporation of green travel measures, that would include travel cards and other incentivised measures secured through section 76; and
- The facilitation of an orderly and logical completion of development within the wider site whilst safeguarding the future of its significant and important heritage assets.

He concluded by stating that he commended the Planning officers' recommendation to the Committee.

In response to comments from several Members, Mr. McKervey clarified that the Historic Environment Division did not have authority to condemn a building and asked if Mr. Shanks could provide an understanding of his terminology.

Mr. Shanks explained that the third pavilion building his client had restored and converted was not a listed building and therefore did not have the same protection or requirement, nevertheless his client still did so in order to protect the group of buildings that were present on site.

Following a Member having expressed dissent to the application, the Chairperson put the officer recommendation, to grant planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement, and to delegate authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, and deal with any other issues that arise including from the final consultation responses from DfI Roads, provided that they were not substantive, to the Committee and on a vote by show of hands, seventeen Members voted for the recommendation and one against and it was declared carried.

(Councillors T. Brooks and Whyte, having declared an interest in the following item, left the meeting whilst it was under consideration.)

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th March, 2024**

**LA04/2023/3778/F - Demolition of existing
Russell Court buildings and re development of
existing surface car park to accommodate two
new buildings (five storey and four storey) for
the QUB Institute of Research Excellence for
Advanced Clinical Healthcare (iREACH Health),
including landscaping, parking, and servicing. -
38-52 Lisburn Road**

The Planning Manager provided the Committee with an overview of the application and outline the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of development;
- Demolition;
- Impact of the new buildings on the character of the Area of Townscape Character;
- Impact on amenity;
- Built heritage;
- Climate change;
- Health impacts;
- Access and parking;
- Natural heritage;
- Drainage and Waste-Water Infrastructure;
- Noise, odour and other environmental impacts;
- Trees and landscaping; and
- Employability and Skills.

He reported that the application had raised concern with regard to recommend condition two which required the buildings to meet BREEAM Excellent, or comparable standards, as required by Policy DES2 on the basis that the proposal was targeted for BREEAM Excellent, rather than being an outright commitment and that the condition would require evidence of BREEAM Excellent rating prior to occupation and that certification could take a significant time, based on final construction evidence. He stated that officers were advising that condition two could either be removed or amended, having regard to the wider considerable benefits of the scheme.

The Planning Manager explained that he applicant had also pointed out that the proposal did not incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) and had therefore requested that reference to the requirement for SuDS be removed from condition nine. He advised that officers were of the opinion that there would be limited opportunity for SuDS to be incorporated into the scheme and, therefore, having regard to the wider benefits of the proposal, the omission of SuDS was considered acceptable.

He concluded by stating that it was recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions.

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Tuesday, 19th March, 2024**

The Chairperson welcomed Ms. H. Harrison, Juno Planning, Mr. C. Maguire, QUB, and Mr. S. Gallagher, Todd Architects, to the meeting.

Mr. Maguire explained that the iREACH project was being delivered as part of the Belfast Regions City Deal and would be a major development for the Health Research sector in Northern Ireland, Queen's University and all of the key stakeholders and partners, that included Belfast City Council.

He stated that the project would create a joined-up pathway for research organisations, health services and research networks while providing state of the art, unified clinical trial and research space and bring together private and public sector research expertise.

He stated that, in collaboration with the integrated consultant team and the main contractor, the project would deliver social value opportunities with tangible benefits to the local community and create a number of economic benefits.

Mr. Gallagher explained that the project consisted of a park of buildings, positioned on either side of the Lisburn Road, designed to establish a coherent relationship with each other and to address the current lack of urban definition, that would provide continuity of the streetscape established by the nearby period and listed buildings.

He stated that the aim had been to create appropriately scaled and legible built form, enhanced by soft landscaping to provide defensible space at the buildings; interface with the footway, together with a generous south facing public plaza to one side of the road.

He pointed out that key views of the listed Wilmot Terrace, to the west side of the carriageway, were maintained and an additional level of articulation would be provided to the adjacent iREACH podium, to create a more appropriately scaled and respectful relationship with the existing terrace and adjoining public space.

Ms. Harrison stated that the pre-application community consultation (PACC) period had ran from 6th to 31st March, 2023, and had comprised an in-person event at the students' union, an online event, hand delivered letters to properties within 200 metres of the site and responses had been invited in person, by email and by letter. She reported that ten people had attended the consultation event and five feedback forms had been completed, all of which supported the development.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of conditions, and to deal with any other matters that might arise prior to issuing the decision, including the further consultation response from DfI Roads, provided that they were not substantive.

(Councillors T. Brooks and Whyte returned to the meeting.)

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th March, 2024**

LA04/2023/2890/F - Proposed demolition of existing buildings and erection of a housing development comprising of 43No. social housing units including dwellings and apartments (Cat 1), car parking, landscaping including an equipped children's play area, and all associated site and access works - Christ the Redeemer Parish Hall and lands immediately north and west of Christ the Redeemer Church, Lagmore Drive

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the application in order to undertake a site visit.

LA04/2023/3856/F - Short duration Geothermal Ground Source Heating Demonstration Project comprising shallow drilling, testing and completion of 5 no. exploratory boreholes, associated temporary access, compound areas and mobile public information kiosk. - Lands at Stormont Estate Upper Newtownards Road

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and highlighted the following key issues:

- Principle of development;
- Built heritage;
- Climate change;
- Natural heritage and landscape;
- Access;
- Drainage and Waste-Water Infrastructure; and
- Noise, odour and other environmental impacts.

She reported that consultees had been satisfied, subject to conditions and no representations had been received.

She stated that it was recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th March, 2024**

LA04/2023/4208/F - Change of use from Dwelling to HMO - 24 Orient Gardens

The Committee agreed to defer consideration of the application in order to undertake a site visit.

LA04/2023/3076/F - Single storey extension to the Gael-Ionad Mhic Goill building, to provide additional common room space and classroom facilities, reception area, a multi-purpose room and heritage cafe space, with associated toilets and ancillary spaces in addition. An external outdoor performance area and landscaped areas will be provided in addition to car parking areas and bin stores. - Glór na Móna, Gaelionad Mhic Goill 4 Whiterock Close

The Principal Planning Officer provided the Committee with an overview of the application and explained that, following the publication of the Committee report, Shared Environmental Services (SES) had returned a consultation response which advised that the project would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of any European site, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects.

She reported that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered, on balance, acceptable and it was recommended that planning permission be granted.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise, provided that they were not substantive.

(The City Solicitor, having declared an interest in the application, left the meeting whilst the item was under consideration.)

LA04/2024/0054/F - Change of use to conference centre facility with associated use as events/entertainment space - Former Print Hall, Ground Floor, 124-144 Royal Avenue

The Planning Manager outlined the application and highlighted the following items for consideration, to the Committee:

- Principle of development and use;
- Impact on amenity;
- Impact on the listed building; and
- Provision of parking and access.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
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He reported that the application had been neighbour notified and advertised in the local press, and that no third-party representations had been received.

He added that DfI Roads, Environmental Health and Historic Environment Division (HED) had all been consulted and had offered no objections to the proposal.

He stated that, having regard to the policy context and other material considerations, it was recommended that the application be approved, subject to conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

(The City Solicitor returned to the meeting.)

**LA04/2023/3758/F - New Pedestrian Footbridge
and replacement steps to comply with DDA
requirements. - Waterworks, 40m North of
260 Antrim Road**

The Principal Planning Officer outlined the application to the Committee and reported that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered acceptable, and it was recommended that planning permission was granted, subject to conditions.

The Committee granted planning permission, subject to conditions and delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

Restricted Items

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

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

Financial Reporting – Quarter 3 2023/24

The Director of Planning and Building Control outlined the Quarter 3 financial position for the Planning Committee.

The Committee noted the report.

**Meeting of Planning Committee,
Tuesday, 19th March, 2024**

**Local Development Plan – Call for Sites
Response Summary**

The Director of Planning and Building Control provided an overview of the submissions which had been received in response to the 'Call for Sites' (CfS) exercise undertaken between December, 2023 and March, 2024.

The Committee noted the content of the report that included the broad range of submissions which had been received in response to the 'Call for Sites' exercise and the next steps in relation to those submissions as part of the evidence base for the preparation of the Local Policies Plan (LPP).

The Committee agreed to recommend that presentations on LPP would be delivered to future meetings of the Area Working Groups.

Issue raised in advance by a Member

**Public Local Inquiry for the Dalradian
Gold Application - Councillor Groogan**

Councillor Groogan requested that the Committee intervene in the Public Local Inquiry for the Dalradian Gold application as there was a direct hydrological link to Lough Neagh from the Sperrin mountains which supplied Belfast's drinking water.

The Committee agreed to delegate authority to the City Solicitor to write to the Public Local Inquiry for the Dalradian Gold application, to enquire as to whether the Council could make submissions, given that the pre-inquiry submission deadline had lapsed and that a report would be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee on the matter.

Chairperson

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Planning Committee

Wednesday, 27th March, 2024

Members present: Councillor Garrett (Chairperson);
Councillors Anglin, Bradley, Carson, Doherty,
P. Donnelly, Doran, S. Douglas, Ferguson, Maskey,
McCann and Nic Bhranair.

In attendance: Ms. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor;
Mr. K. McDonnell, Solicitor (Regulatory And Planning);
Mr. E. Baker, Planning Manager;
Ms. B. Russell, Planning Officer; and
Ms. C. Donnelly, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported for Aldermen Lawlor, McCullough, Rodgers and Councillor Groogan.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Committee Site Visits

Note of Committee Site Visits - 26th March, 2024

The Committee noted the Committee site visits.

Planning Application

LA04/2023/2890/F: Proposed demolition of existing buildings and erection of a housing development comprising of 43No. social housing units including dwellings and apartments (Cat 1), car parking, landscaping including an equipped children's play area, and all associated site and access works - Christ the Redeemer Parish Hall and lands immediately north and west of Christ the Redeemer Church, Lagmore Drive

The Planning Manager explained that the application was before the Committee at its meeting on 19th March, however, consideration of the application was deferred in order that the Committee could undertake a site visit. He reported that a site visit had taken place on 26th March.

**Special Meeting of Planning Committee,
Wednesday, 27th March, 2024**

He outlined the application to the Committee and highlighted the following key issues for consideration:

- Principle of development;
- Protection of open space;
- Loss of community infrastructure;
- Housing density;
- Affordable housing;
- Housing mix;
- Adaptable and accessible accommodation;
- Design and placemaking;
- Impact on the heritage assets;
- Climate change;
- Residential quality and impact on amenity;
- Provision of new open space;
- Access and transport;
- Environmental protection;
- Flood risk and drainage;
- Waste-water infrastructure;
- Natural heritage; and
- Section 76 planning agreement.

He stated that there were no objections from statutory consultees and that, since the publication of the Committee report, eight new representations had been received that cited concerns with regard to the loss of a community facility for Girl Guides and childcare, impact on existing businesses and voluntary organisations which operated from the existing hall, traffic disruption, parking and over supply of housing in the area. The additional eight objections had brought the total number received to 106.

The Planning manager reported that an email had been received from an after school club which stated that the church had offered land to facilitate the Little Saints out of School Club, however, further financial aid would be required to enable the purchase of a mobile facility and they had proposed that the Financial Developer Contribution should be allocated to assist the organisation to relocate to the church land and continue to offer the service to the local community. He advised the Committee that this option, should the Committee be minded to agree, would require separate planning permission.

He informed the Committee that DfI Roads had confirmed the acceptability of the amended Private Streets Determination drawings and that the Section 76 planning agreement was being prepared without prejudice to the decision of the Planning Committee in view of time constraints.

He stated that, having regard to the development plan and other material considerations, the proposal was considered, on balance, acceptable and that it was recommended that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. M. Bell, a local resident speaking in objection to the application, to the meeting.

**Special Meeting of Planning Committee,
Wednesday, 27th March, 2024**

Mr. Bell stated that he had lived in the area for many years and had watched the area develop. He explained that he had concerns as to who would be occupying the proposed dwellings, citing concern that it would be located close to a primary school.

He stated that local residents recognised the need for social housing, but the provision of a playpark would not offset the loss of green space to Lagmore residents.

He explained that traffic and parking was already an issue in the area and residents had been advised by the PSNI to park in the church carpark rather than on the roads. He stated that residents concern with the loss of parking space and risk to children's lives had been ignored.

He concluded by urging the Committee to reject the application and put the safety of local residents and school children first.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr. P. Stinson and Ms. D. Lyle from Turley to the meeting.

Ms. Lyle stated that she welcomed the officer recommendation to approve the application and explained that she and her colleagues had worked proactively with Planning officers to provide a design and layout which would be acceptable and represented a quality residential environment.

She stated that the proposal had been informed by a detailed PAD process where the principle of housing on the site had been accepted. She reported that Newpark had sought the view of the Lagmore community early in the application process through a voluntary Pre-Application Community Consultation event, despite it not having been a statutory requirement, and that feedback from the event had been positive, with residents supportive of additional housing provision in the area.

She stated that the collaborative approach to the design and layout of this development with officers had resulted in improvements to the scheme which positively utilised the site's potential to deliver much needed affordable units.

She explained that the development would provide a mix of family homes and apartments, directly informed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive which supported the development as it would meet an acute and pressing need for affordable housing.

She concluded by stating that the development was supported by green travel measures, promoted within the travel plan submitted with the application, to reduce reliance on private cars and that DfI had no objections to the development.

A number of Members sought clarification on what mitigations would be in place to alleviate traffic, particularly around the school and the loss of facilities for local community groups.

Mr. Stinson explained that the community consultation was well attended and that residents had indicated they were supportive of the proposal.

**Special Meeting of Planning Committee,
Wednesday, 27th March, 2024**

The Committee agreed to grant planning permission, subject to conditions and a Section 76 planning agreement to secure the development as social housing, open space management, green travel measures and financial developer contribution which should be used to mitigate the impacts of the development and shall be flexible in terms of how it was used to mitigate the loss of community facility and/or loss of open space.

The Committee delegated authority to the Director of Planning and Building Control to finalise the wording of the conditions and Section 76 planning agreement, use of the financial developer contribution and to deal with any other issues that might arise provided that they were not substantive.

Chairperson

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 14th March, 2024

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOТЕLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks,
T. Brooks, Carson, Collins, M. Donnelly,
D. Douglas, McAteer, McCabe, McKeown,
Smyth and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the High Sheriff, Councillor S. Douglas and Councillors Doherty, Kelly and Long.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 8th February were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the reports associated with the following item 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 item 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.

**Climate and City Resilience Committee,
Thursday, 14th March, 2024**

Presentation by Living with Water Team

The Committee considered a report and associated presentation from the Living with Water Team in relation to a review process which was currently underway on the Strategic Drainage Infrastructure for Belfast and which was being undertaken due to affordability issues.

After discussion, the Committee noted the presentation regarding the review of the LWW programme which was currently underway.

Update on Heat Network

The Climate Commissioner provided the Members with an update on the market engagement to date on a potential heat network in Belfast. She referred to work undertaken with institutional investors, heat developers and other councils as part of that process.

The Members were informed that Belfast, with its density of buildings, was ideally suited to the introduction of a heat network which formed a key part of the local energy plan, alongside the retri-fit of buildings, as part of the Council's net-zero carbon ambitions.

The Climate Commissioner reported that a Heat Network Working Group had been established to inform the development of the Council's approach to incentivising the development of a heat network in Belfast, and that the Group would be encouraging public sector bodies, which owned buildings in the city with a high heat demand, to engage in discussions and market engagement as potential heat off-takers.

The Committee was informed that it was proposed to appoint a commercial and legal advisor to support the market engagement process, including the appointment of a technical advisor to support the market engagement and the provision of advice on technical requirements, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Climate Commissioner provided the Members with an overview of the key elements associated with a heat network. She outlined measures to increase the viability of heat networks, including the introduction of waste heat into the heat production process, and the installation of a direct wire to alternative off-grid sources of energy.

The Committee was informed of the importance attached to securing off-taker heat agreements to encourage investment in heat network schemes and provided the Members with a range of delivery models for heat networks, which could be incorporated as part of any future delivery scheme. It was reported that early market engagement with heat developers had suggested that there was strong private sector interest to invest in heat networks with the provision of lands for the development of an energy centre, provision of grant finance and an available source of waste heat energy, as being strong support structures as part of the heat network development process. The Climate Commissioner reported on some of the barriers in place currently to the creation of viable heat networks in Northern Ireland, namely, the fact that there was currently no financial support available for heat-network schemes and no regulatory system in place.

The Climate Commissioner reported that the £150,000 secured from the Innovate UK Project – Belfast Net-Zero Pathfinder project, was instrumental in securing business funding

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Thursday, 14th March, 2024**

analysis, including commercial and legal assistance to develop and secure commercial contractual arrangements in the absence of statutory regulation.

The Committee was informed that it was important to establish the heat demand requirements prior to the establishment of a series of round table discussions, with relevant parties invited to attend, including off-takers, investors and industry representatives.

In response to a request from a Member, the Climate Commissioner agreed to invite representatives from other authorities who had developed successful heat-network schemes, including off-takers, to present to a future meeting of the Committee. The Committee agreed also that representatives from Bradford City Council be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee in order to provide information on the development of their heat-network scheme.

A Member raised concerns in regard to the development of 15 year heat-network contracts and the viability of such contracts should changes occur in terms of occupancy levels and associated heat demand for those public sector buildings. The Member referred also to the problems associated with previous district network schemes which had been developed in certain parts of the city.

In response, the Climate Commissioner reported that contracts were required to be agreed which protected the consumer in terms of price, and that greater priced leverage could be achieved by collaboration with other stakeholders to ensure that customers got the best value on the unit costs of heat and energy.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed also to receive a presentation from representatives from neighbourhood district heating schemes which had been developed successfully, and which could provide a valuable insight into both, the technical and contractual frameworks to secure the best value for money in terms of the operation of long-term district heating energy contracts.

Innovate UK Project - Belfast Net Zero Pathfinder

The Climate Commissioner welcomed the securing of £150,000 from the Innovate UK Net-Zero Living Pathfinder competition which would help the delivery of two key priority projects, namely, the city's Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) and the decarbonisation plan for Queens Island (QIDP).

The Committee was informed that the strategic energy masterplans provided a whole energy system approach, including recommendations for decarbonisation pathway planning. The Climate Commissioner explained that the projects built on the outcomes of the Belfast phase 1 pathfinder feasibility study, and would support a whole systems approach to the transition of the city to net-zero.

The Members were informed that the project would focus on overcoming the non-technical barriers in regard to the delivery of the two decarbonisation projects identified in the LAEP and QIDP, and focussed specifically on the heat network and solar pv projects. The Climate Commissioner reported that by accelerating and de-risking the delivery of two decarbonisation projects identified in the LAEP and QIDP, the projects would assist the

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Council and its partners to reduce emissions from the City's built environment, which was the largest source of emissions within the city .

The Climate Commissioner agreed to bring an update to a future meeting of the Committee on the progress made on delivery of the projects, which was being undertaken in partnership with Energy Systems Catapult, with a scheduled project commencement date of 1st June 2024.

Noted.

Issue Raised In Advance

**Presentation on a vision for the
Connswater Community Greenway**

At the request from Councillor R. Brooks, the Committee agreed to receive at a future meeting a presentation from Eastside Greenways entitled Climate and Nature Action - A Vision for the Connswater Community Greenway.

Chairperson

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Monday, 11th March, 2024

MEETING OF THE MEMBERS OF THE BELFAST WATERFRONT AND ULSTER HALL LTD. SHAREHOLDERS' COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Duffy (Deputy Chairperson); and
Councillors R. Brooks, Ferguson, Flynn, Gormley,
Maghie, McCabe, McCann, McDowell, Nelson,
Ó Néill and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. J. Greer, Director of Economic Development;
Ms. J. Corkey, Chief Executive, ICC Belfast
(Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd.);
Mr. C. McCloskey, Director of Events and Customer
Experience; and
Ms. E. McGoldrick, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Chairperson, Councillor Bower, Alderman Copeland, and Councillors Canavan, Cobain, and McAteer.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd January, 2024, 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.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Items

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

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

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

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information' and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

Performance Report Quarter 3 2023/24

The Chief Executive, ICC Belfast (BWUH Ltd), provided the Committee with an overview of the Company's performance during Quarter 3 Year to Date of the financial year 2023/2024, 1st October to 31st December 2023, and an analysis of actual performance against the budget.

The Committee was reminded that it was the eighth year of operation for the company. She outlined that the third quarter of 2023/24 had been very busy as expected with a large number of events spanning conferences, meetings, entertainment and pantomime. She highlighted that, during this quarter, the ICC had hosted the UK Space Conference, British Ecological Society and the British Society for Immunology.

The Members were advised that Customer Satisfaction in post-event surveys had been extremely high, at 96% for entertainment and 98% for conferences.

Ms. Corkey provided a summary of the apprenticeships and placements and highlighted that one of the ICC's valued apprentices, Mr. D. Warke, had received a nomination for the Apprentice of the Year award. She also pointed out that the Team had welcomed a student from Mitchell House Special School for a one-week placement and had hosted another secondary school placement in the technical team.

She reported that the Green Team had met in August, October and December to review the Sustainability Action Register and support sustainability initiatives throughout the business. This had led to achieving the world-class Gold Award from Green Tourism in October.

During discussion, the representatives answered a range of questions in relation to expenditure, the recruitment of casual posts, targets agreed by the Board and the roll out of hydration stations.

After discussion, the Committee noted the contents of this report.

Capital and Maintenance Update

The Committee noted the update in relation to ongoing capital and maintenance works at the ICC Waterfront and Ulster Hall which included information on the replacement of smoke curtains and chiller units, and an update on the escalator replacement project.

Chairperson

Standards and Business Committee

Thursday, 28th March, 2024

MEETING OF THE STANDARDS AND BUSINESS COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOТЕLY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor McDonough-Brown (Chairperson);
Aldermen Lawlor and McCullough; and
Councillors Bradley, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly,
Duffy, Kelly, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, F. McAteer, G. McAteer,
McCormick, McDowell, R. McLaughlin and McMullan.

In attendance: Ms. D. Murtagh, Divisional Solicitor;
Mr. J. Hanna, Democratic Services and Governance
Manager, and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Groogan.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 22nd February were taken as read and signed as correct. It was reported that those minutes had been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 4th March.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Motions

The Committee considered the following three motions which had been received in advance of the Council meeting on 8th April:

Endorsement of Plant Based Treaty

Moved by Councillor M. Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy,

That the motion be adopted.

The Committee agreed to adopt the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Doherty and seconded by Councillor McKeown:

**Standards and Business Committee,
Thursday, 28th March, 2024**

“Belfast City Council endorses the Plant Based Treaty:

- Recognises the need to put food systems at the heart of combating the climate crisis and encourages a shift to healthier and sustainable plant-based diets, while simultaneously working to reverse the damage to ecosystems and biodiversity; and
- Agrees to write to the NI Assembly and call for a further endorsement of the Plant Based Treaty and for a greater commitment to further transitioning towards more sustainable plant-based food systems.”

Bilingual Signage at Weavers Cross

Moved by Councillor M. Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor Bradley,

That the motion be adopted.

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

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to adopt the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor R. M. Donnelly and seconded by Councillor Ó Néill:

“Belfast City Council acknowledges the significant progress made in promoting the Irish language within our jurisdiction, including the formulation of a Language Strategy in 2018, the revision of the dual language street signage policy in 2022, and the formulation of a draft Irish language policy in 2024.

To further this commitment, the Council fully supports the installation of bilingual internal and external signage at Cros na bhFíodóirí - Weavers Cross - Belfast's new Grand Central Station.

As a result, this Council will also write to Translink urging them to install bilingual signage at Weavers Cross and to ask what steps they are taking to fulfil their obligations under the European Charter for Regional & Minority Languages and ensuring shared public spaces are welcoming and cater to the bespoke needs of the Irish language community.”

International Dark Skies Week

Moved by Councillor Lyons,
Seconded by Councillor Maghie,

That the motion be adopted.

The Committee agreed to adopt the following motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Groogan and seconded by Councillor Smyth:

**Standards and Business Committee,
Thursday, 28th March, 2024**

“We call upon the Council to pledge support for Belfast to be part of ‘International Dark Skies Week’ from 2nd to 8th April 2024.

This will coincide with public events that are part of Belfast 2024 project ‘Right to the Night’ led by artist Aisling O’Beirn and art organisation Household, including 2 guided night walks in North Belfast (one on shared reading and one on sense of smell);

Include participation in the week, raising awareness of the impact of light pollution on climate, environmental species and biodiversity, human sleep patterns and access to seeing the stars. Also raising awareness of solutions to protect dark skies while enjoying good outdoor lighting;

Will include the issuing of a statement that signals Belfast’s participation in the week and support by the Council; and

Request that the City Hall Lights be switched off on a date during that week.”

The Democratic Services and Governance Manager advised that the date for the lights to be switched off would be agreed in conjunction with facilities to ensure that health and safety requirements were met.

Chairperson

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